

## AN OUTLAW'S THEOLOGY

**Francis X. Kroncke**

“As to Francis X. Kroncke, I sentence you to a maximum of five years imprisonment. Your time to be served in a federal penitentiary. . .”

**T**he Judge is a good man. He’s an appointee of the liberal senator from Minnesota, Hubert H. Humphrey, who served as Vice President to Lyndon B. Johnson. All good men. America’s top leaders. The best of the best. But to them, I, a raider of draft boards, destroyer of the files of war:

“You . . . are worse than the average criminal who attacks the taxpayer’s pocket book. You strike at the foundation of government itself.”

January 1971, Minneapolis, Minnesota. I am condemned. I’m not stunned. I expected the judgment. I’m not numb. Rather, I am baffled. I should be knee-knocking, pee-running-down-my-leg scared, but that comes later. I should slump down into my chair, nestle my head in my hands and wail, sob, and beg for mercy, but that comes later. I should scream like a madman and hurl angry and vile words, but that comes later. I am simply baffled.

*I am not a good man.* That’s what they want me to know, accept. Of everything of which they accuse me—of being a traitor (I was actually

indicted for “sabotage of the national defense”), being un-American, a “pinko,” a Communist, a fag, a coward, a heretic, a blathering idiot—nothing cuts my heart out but this: *I am not a good man.*

When I burgled draft boards, I was seeking to be faithful to the radical spirituality being championed by Vatican Council II. Pope John XXIII was opening the church’s tightly shuttered windows, letting in light of day from the outside world of other religions and secular societies. He issued “Pacem in Terris” (“Peace on Earth”), and the Council claimed, “The holy People of God shares also in Christ’s prophetic office.” They spoke about “building up the international community.” Issued warnings about the apocalyptic perils of “total war” and the need to work toward “the avoidance of war” and “curbing the savagery of war.” I was cowed by the Council’s challenging call for “the total banning of war, and international action for avoiding war.” Most of all, I pondered,

“It is our *clear duty*, then, to *strain every muscle* as we work for the time when all war can be completely outlawed by international consent.” (My italics.)

*I am not a good man.* How could I not believe them? A judge and a jury, what more is required? In the courtroom, I stand tall and forceful. Six-foot-three, two-fifteen, athletic, collar-curling dark brown hair, twenty-six years young. Bespectacled. I rise and speak with an Aeolian voice, quoting ancient scriptures, and making manifest the aching, weary desire of humans for simple peace on earth. My voice does not quaver. I do not yield. *I am not ashamed.* I testify to my deepest desire to be a good man. To be a son my father is proud of. To be a brother all the family admires. To bring tears of joy to my mother’s eyes, not bitter drips of salt down her cheeks.

An eight-day trial, thirteen witnesses: Vietnam vets, theologians, historians, ecologists, even Daniel Ellsberg. After I deliver my closing argument as attorney pro se, the judge directs the jury in *Instructions to the Jury, Number 15* that they cannot consider any evidence I submitted. He does not want them to hear anyone or anything, and so, sternly yet fatherly, he instructs, “I direct you that everything Mr. Kroncke has said here for the last week, all the testimony of his witnesses, everything is irrelevant and immaterial.” But something goes wrong.

A question never answered is: Did the clerk of the court, a seasoned professional, forget to remove my physical evidence after the judge's ruling? Or did she intentionally. . . ? Somehow Defense evidence #6: *The Documents of Vatican Two* and Pope John XXIII's "Peace on Earth" stayed in the evidence box and, despite the judge's ruling, the jurors were reading them. After two hours of deliberations, the foreman, a Korean War veteran, stands and asks for clarification, "Can we read the *Documents . . . ?*" The normally cool, even-tempered patrician judge—palms down, leaning forward, almost teetering off his chair—retorts, "No. You cannot read *The Documents of Vatican Two!*"

Twice condemned. Not just as a violent felon, but worse, as being *irrelevant and immaterial*. This is my depthless, heartfelt condemnation.

### **Voiceless**

I lose my voice! I lose it because my witness and story are not heard. All my life, it is my voice that conveys my story. Deep from within me, it is my distinct, personal, intimate power of expression. Upon it ride the images and imaginations of my spiritual beliefs, all my hopes and dreams, all facts and truths as I know them and as they live through me. I am baffled, because now I have no voice.

This is not hyperbole. I am not speaking allegorically. I intend no metaphor. One moment I turn to you, my juror, and weave my life story into and throughout yours. About the atrocities of the Vietnam War and the crimes of our government, I speak clearly. My voice is passionate. I expose the sufferings of innocents: skin burning alive with napalm. My voice is truthful: classmates, friends, cousin, and kin, my whole generation, lied to and betrayed by elected officials. My voice is hopeful: "Pacem in Terris," *Peace on earth* declares my spiritual leader, Pope John XXIII, and so I declare "Peace!" My voice is confessional: I am just one guy—reaching out in despair, frustration, anger, almost hopeless, but then not—with gritty hope I act as best I can. When the leaders no longer listen, then words are not enough. The draft raid is my way of speaking, "Peace!"

Baffled: I am left standing before this judge as if I am a man who has been speaking gibberish for over a week. Note: It isn't that I am heard and judged. It isn't that my story is discussed and debated by the jury, fellow humans. No. It is that I am *not* a human. I am irrelevant and

immaterial. Humans speak. I am not to speak. Humans are heard. I am not to be heard. *They will come with steel cuffs, lace iron chains through my pants, hobble my ankles. I will shuffle off to the inside darkness of prison.*

Paroled in July 1973, I spent ten years on a dark night's journey. In 1983, reflecting upon the fact that I had lost both my Church and country, I asked myself, Why didn't you kill yourself while in prison? My first effort at an answer was published here in *CrossCurrents*, "Prison, Bottoming Out, and the Mother." The last paragraph read, "At the Bottom, angels come to minister. The task ahead: to carve with a tongue unused to these alien categories, my sacrilegious words. God the Mother embracing God the Father made present through Child: each and everyone one of us . . . each and all present, here at the Bottom, my family: Holy." Now I engage that task, once again.

### **Phyllis Tribble's sad stories**

When Phyllis Tribble approached the biblical "texts of terror," she reflected on "telling sad stories."<sup>1</sup> These were ancient stories of "the slave used, abused, and rejected." Of "an unnamed woman, the concubine raped, murdered and dismembered."<sup>2</sup> Tribble was further inspired by the contemporary sad stories of the sufferings of streetwalkers and homeless women, and by attending a memorial service for nameless women. Finally, she mentioned her own "wrestling with the silence, absence and opposition of God."<sup>3</sup>

Although Tribble was a privileged, white female intellectual, through sympathy and empathy, she implicitly claimed that she understood and so could interpret the personal experiences of the women's sad stories.<sup>4</sup> The connection between their and her own implied sad story was an emotional bridge, one she described as anchored in her own personal wrestling. Significantly, Tribble's work was accessible to all because sympathy and empathy are general human traits. Similarly, men and women may also wrestle with the silence, absence, and opposition of God.<sup>5</sup>

### **Hagar, the Egyptian's sad story**

As stimulating as Tribble's approach to sad stories is, such as that of Hagar, the Egyptian slave (Genesis 16 and 21), how would sad stories assist in understanding and interpreting biblical texts if the slave, Hagar herself, had written Tribble's article? Suppose that Hagar used her own

personal, intimate sad story to analyze and interpret biblical texts and stories? Suppose Hagar heard her own story and then wrote an interpretation?

What if Hagar claimed that *her enslavement*—with a description of the emotions of abuse, submission, violence, debasement, shame, and loss—gave her a *privileged*, albeit peculiar, insight into the meaning of a biblical text? How would Hagar—as she lives her sad story—hear what is said by others about her, here her Hebrew captors? What would she say about the how and why of her captors telling her story as they do in Genesis? What if she claimed that her own sad story was merely a bit of literary misdirection, drawing hearers away from the sad story of her captors?

### **“Slave of the State”**

I engage in this hermeneutical fancy because I have been enslaved—consequently, Hagar’s story is not fanciful to me. Significantly, my enslavement resulted from acting upon my interpretation of biblical stories and so violating Caesar’s law and becoming classified as a violent felon. I understand how my scriptural and theological interpretations and actions resulted in my enslavement, but it has taken decades for me to discern how my enslavement sad story changed the way I now hear and interpret biblical texts.

As a privileged, white male intellectual, I underwent a *qualitative*, heartfelt human transformation as I became a “slave, used, abused, and rejected.” In 1971, after a trial where, as a lay Roman Catholic theologian, I interpreted the biblical tradition to explain my crime, I was convicted and sentenced to federal prison.<sup>6</sup> I became a “slave of the State.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Twice-bodied**

The experience I share with Hagar and other slaves, male and female, is that of being “twice-bodied.” I hold that the slave experience means that I have been transformed into a qualitatively different type of being. In truth, that my mind and heartbeat are subhuman. More, I am self-consciously subhuman. As a slave, I simultaneously experience myself as a human with all the same desires and wants of others; yet, twice-bodied, in the everyday world of my human captors, I am starkly present as a subhuman—of no value, disposable, at any instant my captor’s

trash. My slave body no longer senses in a normal human manner. I no longer function in normal time and space. I am “doing time” and am locked up “on the inside.” Once enslaved, from then on, every sensation stimulated by the human world is also felt subhumanly. Every touch is an act of violence. Every kiss, a betrayal and act of degradation. Every kind word, a call requiring an act of submission. Qualitatively, I am forever simultaneously a human and subhuman in body, mind, and soul.

I write because I am inspired by Tribble’s valuation of sad stories. Her work challenges me to risk speaking with Hagar’s voice in my ears—a voice I hear because it is subhumanly mine. Equally significant, I personally need to risk speaking with my own twice-bodied voice because in prison I encountered the darkly numinous presence of the Holy in a way that defied expression through all my learned categories of interpretation and explanation. In time, with twice-bodied slave senses, I heard a sad story in Genesis 2–3. More, when listening to it in conjunction with Chapter 1’s creation account, I discerned the presence of the several divinities Genesis revealed, among them the Mother goddess of the biblical Edenic tradition.

### **My sad story**

Initially indicted on “sabotage of the national defense” for destroying Selective Service draft files, I was convicted of a crime committed “by force, violence or otherwise.” Not only had I left my Roman Catholic theology and faith strewn on the federal courtroom floor, but my conviction as a violent felon brought forth the condemnation of the local archbishop. His Excellency felt compelled to complement Caesar’s judgment as he circulated a letter forbidding pastors from allowing me, “a criminal,” to ascend their pulpits. He concluded, “You have no right to preach in a Catholic Church, nor do you have my permission to do such. With cordial best wishes, sincerely yours. . .” Condemned felon and interdicted heretic, I was devastated by the loss of my church and my country.<sup>8</sup>

In June 1972, handcuffed and leg-chained, I became one of *them*—an inmate. The personal transformation that prison effected reembodyed me. I became a subordinated, subjected, dispossessed, expendable, disposable, *invisible* entity. In the eyes of the wardens, guards, and society, “Francis X. Kroncke” was no longer physically present. My name was replaced by a number, 8867-147. Here was my first subhuman sense: one

of disembodiment—they looked at me and saw *only* 8867-147. I was a numbered inventory of the State.

An initiatory ritual found me stark naked, bereft of personal possessions, washed, sprayed with disinfectant, and given a garb of invisibility as “Francis X. Kroncke” disappeared and a disposable piece of societal offal floated into the inmate population. At any time—and it happened often—I was made to halt what I was doing, strip, and expose my bodily parts for the inspector’s eyes. Like the streetwalker, my body was not mine. It belonged to my pimp: the Man.

Being a slave means having no privacy in any aspect. There is no space in which to experience one’s *person* in any normal sense of the term. There is no place to go for a nanosecond of solitude—the johns are doorless, every tick-and-tock you are watched, you live exposed like a lidless eyeball. What may be incommunicable is the devastating impact of living within an utter absence of privacy—doing time “Inside.” I lived and slept in dorms of up to seventy others. It is this absolute loss of privacy that is the key to mutating into a subhuman.

Truly, this enslavement was more than a social, mental, or physical experience. It was distinctly spiritual in that my human presence was altered. Horrified, I was no longer present to others as a human being. I looked in the mirror: 8867-147, a subhuman. Condemned to forever exist as an alien other—a twice-bodied presence, I became what prison so effectively creates: a slave of the State. My body was being sensately rewired. It became a slave’s body—*all my physical acts expressed my acceptance of domination*. When ordered to strip and be searched, I complied. Emotionally, I lost my middle-class sense of shame. My sense of personal honor. My dignity. I slavishly bent over and spread my buttock cheeks. My presence conveyed that now I was *the Man’s bitch*.

### **Loss of language and listening**

While I never felt guilty in any way, sitting in the barred cage I did ask myself, *Am I wrong?* Critical to grasping the particular character of my enslavement was the fact that I lost my language. Humorously, I had spoken “Roman Catholic” all my life. Now, I neither read nor wrote nor spoke in pre-prison tongue. Unable to do other than banter, I discouraged visits, except from my immediate family. As with Tribble, I began a fierce “wrestling with the silence, absence and opposition of God.”

This loss of language heightened my sensitivity to the sad stories of other inmates. If I had retained a patina of Catholic identity or a desire to reclaim myself as an American, I would have spent my time constructing a “glad” story that would serve to protect me from prison’s cruelties and numb my twice-bodied sensing. As I could not speak, I could not hear myself weave such a glad story. Rather, I could only listen. It was then that I heard the sad stories that opened to me the meaning of the sad story within Genesis 1–3.

As I listened, I realized that I was not supposed to be hearing these stories as a fellow subhuman. As a highly educated, white, middle-class male I was an odd and rare inmate, one, in a sense, who *chose* prison. Yet my class perspective and intellectual background did prove useful. As I was the odd man out for both my captors and fellow convicts, I was aware of my twice-bodiedness in a way that most inmates were not. It was psychologically and spiritually overwhelming to simultaneously live in two bodies. In time, most inmates surrendered to one-bodiedness by accepting being just a convict. They “adjusted” and did as advised: “Do your own time!”

In like manner, captors resisted the two-bodied awareness. That is why everything inside prison is reduced to harsh and cruel black-and-white conditions. The guards must distance themselves from inmates as humans to remain within one-body consciousness. They want the inmate to be other or alien, and they refuse to recognize themselves in the faces of the cons—with whom they share several salient social characteristics, such as being or coming from the working poor, the marginally educated, and as military veterans. When talking with me, the guards were initially attracted by but then rejected my social status as a potential teacher, minister, or fellow bureaucrat. Over time, I myself was fatigued by trying to be twice-bodied, and I slipped away from my family, all visitors, and contact with the “outside world.” I played a lot of basketball.

### **Biblical conversations**

Trible noted that “a black woman describe[d] herself as a daughter of Hagar outside the covenant . . . an abused woman on the streets of New York with a sign, *My name is Tamar.*”<sup>9</sup> Likewise, I found that in prison, twice-bodied consciousness was often biblically self-aware, and as such grounded in *deep cultural sad stories*. As I listened to inmates’ stories,



I was taken aback by the clarity with which they mirrored biblical stories. When listening to academic philosophers, theologians, or other intellectuals, I would not have paused if they framed their views and beliefs in a deep cultural story, such as in Western culture's biblical stories. I would have considered it a bit of literary artfulness for one of them to identify with a mythic character—say, compare themselves to Job or Odysseus or Jesus. Yet I was surprised to encounter this framework on the popular level.

I cannot overstate the importance of understanding this biblical framework of everyday conversation. These inmate conversations were properly mythic in that they were gut-checks and not airy intellectual fugues. They had meaning for inmates in a passionate way. So, inevitably, when the issue of violence versus nonviolence, or racism versus universal brotherhood, or sexism versus the equality of women arose, inmates would mention Cain and Abel, original sin, Adam's dominion in the Rib account, and/or God's wrath as just punishment.

More conversations than not were spiced with "Slap the bitch!" accounts, and if that was challenged, I'd hear about Eve and women as seducers—actually, *whores* was the favored image. You might not think that guys would say—but they did—"God took 'em from me," as a rib was tapped, and the simple theological point was made that, "Wimmen are meant to serve their man. That's what my preacher say!"

Then, a twice-bodied insight burst forth. Prison was all about "Slap the bitch!" and the bitch was me! Prison's relentless degradation was turning me into the stereotypical patriarchal woman who only found meaning through submission to her man. "Adam and Eve, man!" I was Eve. What most drew from the Garden story was that the phallus is supreme. It might be hard to believe but it was said, "Why was the guy first?" Meaning, Adam was created first and Eve from his body. This "fact" was uttered as if making a biological claim.<sup>10</sup>

This phallic claim was ritually acted out Inside. Prison reality was, during the first half hour after lights-out, that blankets were draped around bunks and phallic activities ensued. Certain inmates were addressed—even by the guards—with feminine names. I learned how "bitches" were bartered and traded, with cigarettes being currency. Triumphal violence meant sodomizing your enemy. Sodomy was the ultimate victory and defeat.

These popular biblical conversations taught me, first, that popular understanding came primarily from *preaching*. Inmates had heard their theology from the pulpit more than from Bible class. This was consonant with street life, which is primarily an oral culture. Second, popular stories were *melded stories*. For example, there was no awareness that the Bible was a literary text with accounts written at different times and by various authors. All was written by God or Moses or Jesus. So what happened in Genesis 1–3 was read as if it was all the same story. Third, with that, further *melding these ancient stories with an inmate's personal life, right now*, was unchallenged. God was acting—“Right here, man!” These three insights became increasingly significant as I struggled to determine how to interpret individual and group stories and understand how they expressed the deep cultural stories of a family. Most notably, this popular biblicism provided a justification for sexual violence. With twice-bodied sensing, coffee-time conversations revealed and occurred within a persistent biblical framework.

### **Mythic sad stories**

I found inmate stories to be primal and mythic. Every teller was an outlaw. With street smarts, not academic insights, they were aware that they were living outside the lawful social order and cultural story—that they had committed crimes, transgressed, violated taboos of Church and State.

As I listened, biblical stories came alive. The deep cultural mythic stories became current: Cain and Abel, Adam and Eve, the Garden of Eden. Brother against brother: As Cain, they rejoiced in bloodshed. The war of the sexes: As Adam, they boasted about dominating their women—“Slap the bitch!” Acts of abusive parents: thrown out of their homes (gardens of Eden) by condemning, often sexually abusive and rageful parents. All chapters in the family's biblically rooted sad story that could be aptly titled, “Sinners in the hands of an angry god.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Family stories**

Being on trial made me painfully aware of my own group story. For eight days, as attorney *pro se*, I explained to judge and jury why I committed

my crime of nonviolence. I could only be understood if the jurors grasped the character of my family, my faith community, my ethnic identity, and my class background (expressed in terms of my access to higher education). At trial's end as I was sentenced, I had a twice-bodied insight that baffled me because I was still in my one-bodied mind. I realized that *my family was going to send me to prison*. This was a curious statement, clearly. But I realized that in my family story, there was a belief in fairness, justice, and the moral obligation to take responsibility for one's actions. So my family heard the verdict and tacitly agreed, said, *Take him away!*

In the visiting room, I saw this same curious truth demonstrated by how families accepted their inmates' incarceration. The difference I discerned, however, was crucial to how I came to understand inmate sad stories. These families—unlike mine—were *consciously* twice-bodied. For example, many Afro-American families were aware that their inmate was captured committing a crime, tried by a jury, and lawfully sentenced. In that light, by accepting incarceration as did my family, they saw themselves as law-abiding Americans. Yet this was the era of the “Black Power”<sup>12</sup> movement, and they also knew that the System was racist, a form of modern slavery, fundamentally incapable of providing a black with a fair trial, run by white folk, and so forth. These families—again unlike mine—had “doing time” as a recurring theme through their generational family sad story.

The family's sad story mediated the individual's personal sad story and exposed how it expressed the deeper cultural and mythic sad story. An inmate's family sad story was framed by historical facts, cultural values, and spiritual visions. This provided a major clue as to how to listen to a sad story, that is, to hear it as a *family sad story first* and as an *individual inmate story second*. Equally, it was a clue to understanding that *the inmate's family sad story was an interpretive key for unlocking the captor's sad story*.

As I listened, it was not uncommon for an inmate to turn his sad story around and use it to tell me how screwed up my captor family story was. “Don't say, you believe in justice? You must be a whiteboy!” In this light, Hagar's sad story, I hold, exposes more about the Hebrew sad story than it does about her own plight as a captive Egyptian and sex slave. In like manner, I came to understand the sad story of my

captor class and my family even more deeply than I did those of other inmates.

I soon discerned that prison could have been part of my professional career path—I could have chosen employment as a captor. In a way that I would never have realized if not enslaved, I came from the captor class. My prison case manager, a former Catholic priest, was my alter ego, and initially, other inmates viewed me much like they did him. Tapping the educational and professional skills I shared with him, inmates sought my counsel and asked me to read letters from home and respond, write to the parole board, and discuss how, if ever, they could find community groups that would help them write a “glad chapter” in their life story. Fatefully, this opened the way, every day, to my hearing numerous inmate sad stories, making me acutely aware of my family’s captor story.

My twice-bodied consciousness, then, put me in an almost perverse situation. My group and my family had never told me a sad story, only the glad story of the captor. *Inside, I walked around as my own captor!* Eventually, this proved to be an unbearable burden of self-awareness. It became the straw that finally broke me, and near the end of my time Inside I slunk away from everyone and everything, bouncing a basketball as I started walking down a dark night’s road.

### **Mother of the twice-bodied**

Paroled in 1973, I entered upon a ten-year “dark night of the soul.” In 1983, I began writing my sad story. I asked myself, “Why didn’t you kill yourself while in prison?” The answer, I sensed, was in understanding my subhumanness—in listening to my own sad story.

As I began to write, it became clear that all my prior education and experiences would be of scant help in describing my subhuman experiences in prison. Little in all that I had studied offered stories or language that connected with or expressed my emotional, heartfelt condition. I felt totally odd as I struggled to find words and images to describe twice-bodiedness. Words like *subhuman*, *slave*, *the Man’s bitch*—these were not in the theological dictionary or the tomes of spiritual directors. Tellingly, a line of my sad story read, “I would leave (prison) as a pilgrim in search of fuller communion with the Mother.”<sup>13</sup>

I wrote this, but *I did not know what it meant*. I had read the early feminist theologians and nascent Goddess movement “theologians,”<sup>14</sup> but this wasn’t their Her. Rather, the word *Mother* came to my tongue because I just knew that it wasn’t the presence of the Father (at least as I knew Him at that time). The words *Mother* and *Father* were not as important to me as was my conveying the truth that in the cruel darkness, someone was present who held me and embraced me. Let me be crystal clear about this—this was *not* a comforting, sentimental presence. Not a “Good Mother” or mommy touch. It definitely was not one of protection. Rather, this *Mother was present to me as she accepted my enslavement*. She kept me alive and did not allow me to kill myself. Of note, She did not sever my chains. I hated Her.

I feared Her. She refused to let me escape into fantasy or denial—to write a glad story. She braced me with Her arms when I cringed and howled against the violence. I did not understand Her way of mothering because—although She was present as my knees buckled, my soul was raped, my body thrown on the garbage heap of psychic violence that was prison’s heartbeat—She did not relieve me of my suffering. She accepted that I was the Man’s bitch.

Who was She, who rocked me to sleep each night with soothing slave lullabies?

### **Twice-bodied listening**

When I went back to Genesis, I carried the presence of my prison Mother. Although I sensed that the Bible would offer little insight into who She was, I thought it would provide a negative starting point—that is, clarify who She was not. I was seeking a mythic and spiritual language that went beyond the biblical tradition, but before I started my theological imaginings of who She might be, I wanted to know how and why I had deviated from the traditional theological interpretations of biblical stories.

I went back to Genesis simply to clarify for myself what the biblical tradition said and identify those stories that I had misinterpreted so badly. I was twice-bodied and accepted that I was an outlaw—that my nonviolent disobedience violated Torah, canon, and American law. Notably, I accepted that I had to respect these stories if I was to fully and

finally understand why, where, and how I had erred and gone wrong—or had rightly rejected them.<sup>15</sup>

Although I thought this would be a quick and easy exercise, I found myself stuck in Genesis's first chapters, especially the Rib story. I thought I knew Genesis, but then I had to accept that I really didn't.<sup>16</sup> Of the two biblical stories of origin, I knew that the Rib story dominated the interpretation of Genesis in the mainstream Christian tradition<sup>17</sup>—due in great part to the influence of the early Church Father, Augustine of Hippo.

I soon realized that I resisted acknowledging Her presence—that my prison Mother was there in Genesis, once again bracing me, forcing me to stay, barring the exit. Here, again, this Mother who was always willing to watch me suffer. For some reason—so I sensed Her intention—I had to “do time” in the Garden of Eden.

“Doing Garden time” aptly describes the experience upon which all of my insights into the character of my enslavement, the purpose prison serves in the formation of sad stories, and how I learned to interpret and theologize are sourced and grounded. “Doing Garden time” is the wellspring for my hermeneutical insights and method.

Notably, my time in the Garden of Eden was like a return to prison's visiting room. There I had observed a key aspect of how inmates who told me their sad stories were interacting with their families. Often, the inmate moved into the dynamics of the lie. He would confess the errors of his ways in an attempt to remain within the family's good graces. He wanted the family to accept him upon release. So he promised and swore that he would change, go straight, fly right, and come home reformed by biblical, mainly Christian, virtues. In a sense, he was saying that he was going to act like a normal, decent human being. However, in the eyes and bodily movements of the families, I could read how untrue they knew this was. They knew that in the visiting room, almost everything was an act or word of misdirection. They were tuned into the inmate's subhuman voice. They felt the bloodlust in his subhuman heart. They knew that he wanted revenge and that instead of getting better their inmate family member was getting worse—more violent.

Their inmate's sad story required that he lie, that he misdirect the family. He knew that everyone wanted to hear, “I'm reformed!” or “I'm

saved!” At heart, the families did not want to acknowledge the twice-bodied sad story that predicted that a high percent of their present teenage/young adult generation would also end up “doing time.” They knew—without quoting recidivism statistics—that their inmate would more than likely offend again, end up back Inside. Truly, the families knew all the lies, knew that in the visiting room lying was required to shield everyone—captors and slaves, family and society—from the violent truth of their own twice-bodied subhumanness.

### **Methodology of the twice-bodied**

Gradually, the methodology of the twice-bodied took form. Its grounding was the experience a slave has of a peculiar sense of presence that emerges as he grasps that *what is reality for the slave is not so for the captor*. That what is visible is invisible, and *vice versa*. That what is directly stated is misdirection.

For example, a visitor to the prison yard saw neatly dressed, seemingly pacific, even mannerly men, but not the psychic pools of blood on the ground. Prison appeared quiet. Visitors did not hear the cacophony of a lifetime of violent whacks and thuds, the whimperings of the violently raped, the cracking of bone as arms were broken, skulls split, and ribs shattered by batons and bullets that ricocheted off prison walls.

Searching for hints of misdirection, I challenged the way I had heard Genesis before prison. I first heard Genesis 1–3 in catechism class, as a foundational religious story, and one that the nuns simultaneously translated into popular sociocultural messages and values. In graduate school, I listened to scholarly analyses and interpretations and came to value these over the nuns’ popularizations. Now, after detecting the biblical framework of inmate sad stories, I reevaluated my approach and decided to meld the popular with the scholarly. I would guide my analysis and interpretation using scholarship while simultaneously testing everything against the insights of the sad stories that came through the popular discourse. With the clues that scholarship offered, I would focus on the Genesis stories as if formed by contemporary popular culture and popular religion, *as if hearing these sad stories in prison’s visiting room*. As I began to listen to Genesis 1–3 as if back in prison, it presented itself as a story alive in contemporary imagination and spirituality.

Finally, I would add my own sad story to this melding and analyze and evaluate with my subhuman sensing, which meant listening to my prison Mother as she guided me. My interpretive matrix included (1) inmate popular biblical renditions, (2) scholarly insights, (3) my personal sad story experience as it interacted with my own captor's glad story, and (4) the guidance of my prison Mother.

### **Two biblical stories of origin**

As I did Garden time, I wondered, what is it that I am hearing? Is this a family story? Is there misdirection? What is invisible? What is not being said? Is there a lie in its truth? What does She, my prison Mother, want me to experience and understand?

The most striking characteristic of the biblical tradition was its two quite different stories of origin. In Genesis 1, a seemingly polytheistic voice proclaimed, "Let *us* make man in our image."<sup>18</sup> This was linked with an ostensibly quite clear statement about the simultaneous creation, and so implied equality, of the original humans, to wit, that "male and female created He them." So this creation account seemed to assert a primal equality between male and female and implied an "us," which did not rule out discerning the presence of a Mother goddess or goddesses. I mused, was my prison Mother one of the "us"?

In the "us" and "created He them" account, there was nothing which the hearer was asked to imagine that he or she had not already pondered. The first audience to Chapter 1's account knew about or were practitioners of polytheistic religions.<sup>19</sup> They knew the obvious facts of life, that it took a man and a woman to make a child. In brief, in Chapter 1, there was not much new in terms of facts or truths. What was visible seemed obvious and commonplace. Not so, however, with the second account.

In Chapter 2-3's Rib story, Adam was alone, talking with his god, who also was alone. There were no goddesses about. There were no women. When Adam felt his aloneness, his god formed a woman, Eve, from a rib that he excised from Adam when in a "deep sleep." The Rib account grounded ideas that were wildly imaginative. Almost every sentence and image begged the questions: What is not being said? What is invisible? Is this literal, symbolic, and/or mystical? This story began to baffle me as it activated my twice-bodied senses.



As I was aware of biblical research, notably the documentary hypothesis,<sup>20</sup> I wondered why the biblical people heard two creation stories. Why did the tradition keep both, especially in light of how obviously different they were? Certainly, they weren't originally placed there to confuse people. Questions arose: Do these stories stand alone? Is it merely trivial that there are two stories? Or were they meant to be heard together? Are they two parts of a greater whole? Do they somehow meld and form one grander family story? Is there a melded story that weaves visibly and invisibly through both stories? If so, how could I discern it?

I heard Chapter 1 to be a glad story. It was upbeat, poetic, inspiring, and appeared to give comfort to the hearer that all was well with the world because "God saw that it was good." It could easily be read literally. However, as in the visiting room, I realized that something was missing, namely the dark side of creation. Pain, suffering, death, and the like were not about. "Let us" was a glad story through and through; it did not present the reader with a sad story.

In stark contrast, the Rib story instilled fear, dread, even horror into the mind and soul. God was enraged. Life on earth was a profoundly sad story. "The Man" Yahweh was kicking human posteriors in and outside the Garden. It was a wildly imagined sad story. It could not be read literally as every aspect of the story seemed fantastic—a solitary human, no Mother goddess, a woman derived from a male rib, and so forth. More, this Garden of Eden was supposedly paradise. Was this an intentional act of misdirection? With twice-bodied senses: Was it a lie? For some reason, the biblical family needed to hear two stories of origin—I still was not exactly sure why.

In sum, I knew how scholars approached the text and I valued their insights, yet my twice-bodied sense indicated that something unusual was afoot with these two stories. I wondered, if the glad and sad, captor and captive stories were heard together with twice-bodied sensings, would a grander family story emerge?

#### **Who was the biblical storyteller?**

Scholars were in disagreement about the most basic history and characteristics of the biblical family, Israel. For them, Genesis 1–3 was written by a family either of conquerors, peaceful infiltrators, or peasant

revolutionaries.<sup>21</sup> For me, the significant characteristic was that the stories were set next to one another after a religious crisis that was grounded in the experience of exile.<sup>22</sup>

*Exile:* I listened with visiting room ears. Whoever they were or whenever they became consciously aware of themselves as “Israelites,” this family knew defeat, subjection, humiliation, abuse, enslavement, and homelessness, among other suffered violences. They were war refugees, displaced people, and aliens. In prison, I heard sad stories from veterans, immigrants, migrants, homeless men, and Native people. All had post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) memories. Often, I’d hear wild, strange, and perplexing stories. The one constant in inmate sad stories, however, was that of the unrelenting violence inflicted upon the storyteller. Critically, what surfaced was the key interpretive point that inmate sad storytellers imagined a *revenge story* that had them inflicting unrelenting violence on those who had oppressed them. Simply, the oppressed sought to become the oppressor—the captive, the captor.

Prisoner sad stories often concluded by positing a glad story as beginning at that moment when revenge was exacted upon whoever was the perceived enemy. Most often it was another person—at times, family members, although in general, each con also wanted to find a way to strike back at the Man. Yet the dynamic of note was that the prisoner consciously planned to “do unto others as they done to me!” It was a cycle of violence that guaranteed that an inmate’s sad story never ended.

Genesis 1–3, then, appeared as a two-part story of a family with collective traumatic memories of enslavement, brutalization, and exile. Here, like Hagar, the Hebrew family listened with the slave’s subhuman twice-bodied senses to the Rib story as the *captor’s story*. It was the story of origin brought back from exile, and it was placed next to the glad story of “let us” so that the bright and dark chapters in the family’s history would be forever remembered. Yet it was not remembrance in a passive sense; rather, it was remembering so that something could be, would be realized in the present moment. The stories were there not simply to explain but as a spiritual challenge—“Awake!” The exiled family was challenged to move beyond its glad and sad story memory by melding them. They were challenged to relive their exiled dark

night of the soul and break through to a vision of a grander family story.

These two stories of origin were necessary for the Hebrew family to cope with its traumatic experiences and memories. It seemed clear to me that these stories were therapeutic, that they were honored by the early Hebrews as stories that could lead to the healing of memories. Heard and interpreted as a melded story, a grander family vision of origin would emerge that would enable the family to break the cycle of violence and revenge that they knew only too well as twice-bodied slaves.

In sum, the storyteller of Genesis 1–3 was a family conflicted about its origins, both consciously and subconsciously. The family needed the two creation stories to express the range and depth of its traumatic experiences. The Rib story was their captor’s glad story, and their own sad story.

#### **Mythic families and Divine Couples: brooding the dark vapors**

To find that emergent grander family story, I had to start with the Rib story since it stirred my captor-captive twice-bodied senses in a most passionate way. As a twice-bodied slave, the stark loneliness of the Garden startled me. It had an unsettling air of familiarity. The Rib account had me visualizing Adam locked down in solitary, in a particularly nasty black hole, jerkily pacing back and forth, moaning a soliloquy of a convict serving hard time.

Adam was a lone male,<sup>23</sup> alone with his lone male god. This was like the single-parent home situation of many inmate sad stories. As most inmates came from marginal economic conditions, the single parent (most often a mother)—or even if there were two parents, all—worked multiple jobs. “Absent parents” was a common motif in inmate stories. Others were “State-raised convicts,” meaning in truth that they were parentless, brought up in a series of broken homes or foster homes—“parented” institutionally. *Alone and lonely*—prison had taken me there.

More significantly, the Garden mirrored the single-sex landscape of prison. *Alone and lonely males*: the literal, symbolic, and mystical insights this opened shocked me. I slapped myself upside my head, “No. That can’t be!” It was becoming obvious: They—Adam and his god—are *visibly alone, so they must be invisibly a family*. They are *males alone*, so the

women must be invisible. Visually, only one parent was present, the stern *Father god*—but mustn't there be a *Mother goddess*? She must be “invisible”—not seen, hidden, but where?

I considered that most origin myths have male–female creating creatures—a Divine Couple, whether animal or spiritual. Was the Hebrew mythic Rib account an exception? Did this exception define the biblical tradition's singularity and distinctiveness? Was it unique? Or was the Rib account a story of misdirection? Even, possibly, a bold-faced lie?

Here, Chapter 1 reminded the Hebrews that their glad story was polytheistic and that the visual monotheism of the Rib account was a lie—the cruelest of lies, the lie of the captor. The Rib story said, “You have no Mother! You are subhumans! Destined to be slaves, forever.”

Chapter 1's “let us” proved useful as an interpretive foil to the Rib account's misdirection. The presence of many gods/goddesses was indicated by “us,” and if the Rib story and “let us” were to be melded, the spiritual challenge was to find the Mother in the Rib account.

In many mythic stories, the goddess was often described using water symbology.<sup>24</sup> Genesis 1:2 in the *King James version* reads, “And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.”

*The Living Bible's* translation of this passage proved quite insightful.<sup>25</sup> It reads, “The earth was a shapeless, chaotic mass, with the Spirit of God brooding over the dark vapors.” The King James words *form*, *void*, and *darkness* evoked little emotion compared to the Living Bible's *shapeless*, *chaotic*, *brooding*, and *dark vapors*. *Brooding*: an emotional, intense, heartfelt presence. Where? In *water*, *the dark vapors*, behind a veil, in a shady part of the Garden.

The Garden Her, the biblical Mother Goddess, was present in Her shapeless, chaotic, brooding self. Although not graphically visible in the account, She was present as She hid in the dark vapors—in the vapory mist, off to the side or behind the scene. She was present as She brooded: a hen upon her eggs. She who was co-creator and fully present during the Garden events.

### **The lone male's Mother goddess**

There She was. The lone male's Mother goddess, hiding in the Garden's shade, “brooding over the dark vapors.” My prison Mother was

revealing that She, Herself, was there in “let us” and that another Mother was brooding in the dark vapors. I was not to leave the Garden. This lone male Mother goddess was presenting Herself much like prison’s Mother. Each presented the Dark Mother, although it made more sense to describe the Garden’s “brooding vapors” Her as Shade Mother.<sup>26</sup> The image of “Shade Mother” afforded a richer exploration and presentation of Her multiple, varied, and perplexing manifestations and presences.

*Awake!* Both prison and the Garden set before me the obvious fact to which my traditional theological education had blinded me—that is, to the necessary and universal principle of a male and female presence in a story of origin. If there was a Father God, there *must be* a Mother Goddess somewhere. If there was an Adam, in time the invisible Eve *must appear*—even if in such a wildly imagined way as from the male’s Rib.<sup>27</sup>

Despite what the biblical Rib origin story wanted to hide, when melded with “let us,” to my twice-bodied heart, it revealed the Garden’s Mother goddess. This is the message the exiled Hebrews preserved. The whole Rib account was itself a masterpiece of misdirection about polytheism. As the captor’s story, the Rib tale tricked everyone into thinking that it was only about the lone male, with the revelation that there was only one god, the monotheistic, patriarchal, and angry Father.

In summary, Chapter 1’s “let us” when melded with the Rib story revealed a Divine Couple. In stark contrast to how the Augustinian theological tradition handled the material and interpreted these stories of origin, Genesis 1–3 was a thoroughly polytheistic story. Indeed, the traditional monotheistic interpretation of the Rib account when melded with Chapter 1’s “let us” served to underscore, in negative counterpoint, the polytheism at the root of the biblical narrative. In this light, these two chapters when read with twice-bodied sensing unmasked a lie.

The apparent absence of the Shade Mother from Genesis was a visual trick and deception. A creation account (as the mythic story told by parents in a family) must have at least two divinities, male and female. Genesis 1–3, then, was a two-part story of origin with two goddesses, one inferred in Chapter’s 1 “let us” and the other’s presence sensed as She brooded inside the Rib’s dark vapors.

### An emerging story of origin

With twice-bodied sensing, when I evaluated the Rib story and “let us” as visiting room stories, it seemed reasonable to infer that somehow the two were to explain, inspire, and *together enable the listener to hear an emerging story of origin and discern its spiritual message*. Each was a part of a grander family story that would emerge from hearing the melded stories. Each story (one glad, one sad) was to stand on its own and its distinctiveness be understood through scholarly work; then the two were to be held in creative tension. In time, a story did emerge, that of the Mother goddess of the Garden. I was absolutely thunderstruck.

If what I was discerning was true, it turned everything I had previously learned as a theologian upside down. The biblical tradition was polytheistic, not monotheistic. The Rib account was the exiled Hebrews captor’s glad story—yet a mythically sad story. The origin stories abounded with the presences of a Mother goddess and goddesses—Genesis was clearly not simply and solely a lone male Father God’s story.

The challenges that I now faced were several. With twice-bodied sensing, what else would listening to the melded stories disclose? What rich and heartfelt story of origin would emerge from melding the two biblical stories—glad and sad? Where would She—in Her many manifestations and presences—lead me?

### Notes

1. Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 1.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*, 1–2.
4. *Ibid.*, 3. “It [feminism] recounts tales of terror *in memoriam* to offer sympathetic readings of abused women.”
5. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1985). Almost simultaneous with Trible’s publication, Fiorenza wrote, “Feminist praxis is rooted in the *religious experience* of contemporary women but does *not derive* its inspiration from the Christian past,” xviii (emphasis added). Also, “Feminist theologians. . . have observed a need to interpret the scriptures of their traditions from the standpoint provided by their own experience as women—thus offering new interpretations which they perceive to constitute a powerful tool with which to mount a critique of the theological traditions that had excluded them.”

Victoria S. Harrison, "Modern Women, Traditional Abrahamic Religions and Interpreting Sacred Texts," *Feminist Theology* 15 (2007): 145–159.

6. United States District Court, District of Minnesota, Fifth Division. United States of America, *Plaintiff v. Francis X. Kroncke and Michael D. Therriault*, Defendants, 5–70 Criminal 19. <http://www.minnesota8.net/transcripts.htm>

7. Some reject my claim. Their objections cluster around the fact that slavery does not legally exist in America anymore, and/or a claim that imprisonment is not enslavement. Some argue that a woman is always a slave in a patriarchy and that Hagar is categorically a different type of slave than I or any male could ever be. I am sensitive to the peculiarity of the experiential basis for the analysis and interpretive claims I make here. Nonetheless, moved by a sense of obligation, I write on behalf of the imprisoned Hagers, both male and female. My position is influenced by the "theology from the periphery" of liberation theologians. Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1987).

8. Francis X. Kroncke, "Resistance as Sacrament," *CrossCurrents* XXI, no. 4 (Fall 1971): 369–376. Walter M. Abbott, S.J., ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: America Press, 1966), were Defendant Exhibit 6. See trial transcripts: <http://www.minnesota8.net/transcripts.htm>. The judge thundered to the jury, "You cannot read *The Documents of Vatican Council Two!*"

9. Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 1–2.

10. Bartolo di Fredi's fresco *Creation of Eve*, 1356, represents this literal belief. [http://www.artchive.com/web\\_gallery/M/Manfredi-de-Battilor-Bartolo-Di-Fredi-Fredi/The-Creation-of-Eve-1356-67.html](http://www.artchive.com/web_gallery/M/Manfredi-de-Battilor-Bartolo-Di-Fredi-Fredi/The-Creation-of-Eve-1356-67.html).

11. Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1739–1742*, ed. Harry S. Stout; vol. 22 in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vols. 1–26 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957–2008).

12. "Black Power"—a cluster of ideologies prominent in the late 1960s and early 1970s—emphasized racial pride and the creation of black political and cultural institutions. Black Power fought against an elusive yet visible higher power known as "white supremacy." David Hilliard, ed., *The Black Panther Party: Service to the People Programs*, the Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008).

13. Francis X. Kroncke, "Prison, Bottoming Out, and the Mother," *CrossCurrents* 28:1 (Spring 1988): 53–63.

14. Among them, Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973 and 1985) and *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978 and 1990); Marija Gimbutas, *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe* (University of California Press, 1974); Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper, 1979).

15. "Despite the apparent contemporary irrelevance of the Old Testament, the Adam and Eve narrative in Genesis 2–3 is a deeply engrained element within Western cultural mythology." (160) 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): 160–174.

16. As to Genesis 1–3, “This text has been one of the most interpreted, reinterpreted and misinterpreted texts within the Old Testament.” Joseph Abraham, “Feminist Hermeneutics and Pentecostal Spirituality: the Creation Narrative of Genesis as Paradigm,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 6:1 (2003): 13.
17. The continued dominance of this interpretation in the Vatican’s “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World” and the exposure of “structures of primordial sin” is sharply presented by Ausra Pazeraite, “‘Zākhār and nēqêvāh He created them’: Sexual and Gender Identities in the Bible,” *Feminist Theology* 17:1 (2008): 92–110.
18. “‘Plurality in the Godhead’ is the least accepted current scholarly interpretation. The traditional attempts to clearly and accurately interpret whether the deity is singular or plural in Genesis remain highly confused.” 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): 131–146.
19. William G. Dever, “Folk Religion in Early Israel: Did Yahweh Have a Consort?” in *Aspects of Monotheism. Symposium at the Smithsonian Institution, October 19, 1996*. Hershel Shanks and Jack Meinhardt, eds. (Biblical Archaeology Society, 1997). “By far the most intriguing cultic artifacts that archeologists have recovered are more than 2,000 mold-made terra cotta female figures.” Most are of Asherah/Anat, the consort of the male deity in Canaan.
20. Arising from 18th and 19th century research, the documentary hypothesis holds that the writings of the Pentateuch derive from originally independent narratives, identified as J, E, D, and P. Genesis 1 is E, a prose poem with a metaphysical texture. The Rib story is J, written earlier and often considered to be allegorical.
21. “No clear consensus among scholars has evolved.” The conqueror tale was longstanding in biblical research. Albrecht Alt forwarded the “peaceful infiltration model.” Norman Gottwald favored the “peasant revolt” that was part of the “social revolution at the end of the late Bronze Age.” Hershel Shanks, William G. Dever, Baruch Halpern, and P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., “Defining the Problems: Where are we in the debate?” *The Rise of Ancient Israel. Symposium at the Smithsonian Institution, October 26, 1991*. (Biblical Archaeology Society, 1992).
22. At the least, there was general agreement that the Bible was edited in post-Exilic time (latter part of the sixth century B.C.E.) and “reflects the religious crisis of the Diaspora community of that time.” Dever, “Folk Religion in Early Israel” (see note 19).
23. “Lone male” describes Adam’s uniqueness, namely, a male created, not born from a sacred coupling.
24. Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of Creation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963). “When Apsu primeval, their begetter, Mummu, and Tiamat, she who gave birth to them all, still mingled their waters together.” Tablet 1: 3–5, p. 18. “Apsu was the primeval sweet-water ocean, and Tiamat the salt-water ocean, while Mummu probably represented the mist rising from the two bodies of water and hovering over them . . .” *Ibid.*, 3.
25. Kenneth N. Taylor, *The Living Bible, Paraphrased* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1971). In notes to Genesis 1:2, “The earth was, or ‘The earth became . . .’ a shapeless, chaotic mass or shapeless and void.” And, “Over the dark vapors, or over the cloud of dark-



ness, or over the darkness and water or even over the dark gaseous matter.” *Strongs Concordance*’s translation options include “to brood; by implication, to be relaxed: flutter, move, shake.”

26. “Shade Mother” conveys the subtle truth and reality that She is there, fully present inside the misty shade of “brooding vapors.”

27. Bartolo di Fredi’s fresco, *ibid.*