

Eve: A Weapon Against Women:

How the Christian Stories of Creation and the Original Sin Impacted Views and Treatment of  
Women.

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Eve, a woman created by God, became a weapon of destruction against other women. The story of her creation and bite of fruit in the Garden of Eden, whether in reality or fiction, caused a new world of treatment towards women to be let out of the flood gates. The stories of the earth's creation and the original sin in Genesis 1-3 of the Hebrew Bible, and the interpretations of them in *Eve and Adam*, by Kristen Kwam, Linda Schearing & Valerie Ziegler, outline the story of Eve's creation and original sin that set up a negative perception of women. This perception of women then greatly affects how they are treated, as seen in the journal article, "Sexism and Misogyny in the Christian Tradition: Liberating Alternatives," by Rosemary Radford Ruether, and the book, *From Eve to Dawn: A History of Women in the World Volume 1*, by Marilyn French. This paper argues that the Christian stories of creation and the original sin caused the perception and treatment of women as subordinates and as temptresses of lesser intelligence by early Christians.

Genesis 1 and 2 provide two stories of the earth's creation- which are often read as one- and these stories have heavily influenced how women were perceived among early Christians, as shown in 1 Timothy and cited in *Eve and Adam*; particularly how women are seen as needing to act subservient to men. Genesis 1 describes the first story of creation as God created the earth and all living things, then created humankind. "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."<sup>1</sup> This passage explains creation as God creating man and woman at the same time, and together, both in his image. It states "in the image of God he created them,"<sup>2</sup> the important part being the word "them," meaning God created both man and woman to be like him, not just man. It must be noted, that

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:27

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:27

this story is also accredited to supporting the notion that man was of better creation, due to the line that says, “created humankind in his image.” It being in “his” image, genders God as a man, who is perfect, implying that man is perfect. Additionally, the story in Genesis 2 tells the story of creation as man being created and then woman, as his helper. “And the rib that 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; this one shall be called Woman for out of Man this one was taken.’”<sup>3</sup> This passage depicts a creation story where Adam (man) was created first, and Eve (woman), second. It also paints an image that woman was created from man, as she was made out of his rib. This was done because Adam had requested a helper from God, and so God made Eve. This is important because not only was woman made second and from Adam, but she was made for him, becoming the root of the Christian thought that woman must be subservient to man as she was made for and from him. In *Eve and Adam*, “hierarchical texts” were defined as passages in the New Testament that were based off the notion that Eve was created after and from Adam causing the man to function “as the woman’s head.”<sup>4</sup> One of these hierarchical texts was 1 Timothy, “The passages from 2 Corinthians and 1 Timothy are notable for singling out Eve as the person responsible for the Fall.”<sup>5</sup> The reaction to this belief, in 1 Timothy, is, “Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve.”<sup>6</sup> This passage shows the result

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<sup>3</sup> Genesis 2:22-23

<sup>4</sup> Kristen E. Kvam, Linda S. Schearing, and Valarie H. Ziegler. *Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999) 116.

<sup>5</sup> Kvam et al., *Eve and Adam*, 117

<sup>6</sup> 1 Timothy 2:11-13

of the creation stories in regards to the Christian perspective of women, depicting that it led to the belief that women should be subservient to men.

The story of the “original sin” as described in Genesis 3 is essential to understanding why the Christian perception of women often views and treats women as the temptress, sinner, and therefore of lesser intellect. In Genesis 3, Eve is approached by a serpent in the Garden of Eden, who tells her that even though God told her not to, she should eat a fruit. Eve does this, and gives one to Adam, and thus the first sin- an act against God- is committed. God says to Adam, “‘Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?’ The man said, ‘The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate it.’”<sup>7</sup> This quote from the Hebrew Bible is important for several reasons. First, it clearly lays out that Adam felt that the woman was given to him, as he states, “you gave to me,” reiterating that Adam was gifted a woman, enforcing the idea that the woman was a property designed for him. The second being that it reiterates that Adam blamed eating the fruit on Eve, despite the fact that he ate it himself. This solidifies for many thinkers that it was Eve who acted as the temptress and the sinner. The book, *Eve and Adam*, showcases this by citing 2 Corinthians, which states, “But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.”<sup>8</sup> This passage makes it clear that Eve was the deceived one, and therefore was the one responsible. In doing so, it paints the idea that Eve was of lesser intellect, or greater gullibility, and this is used as justification to be subordinate to man<sup>9</sup>, as woman is the deceitful one. Not only were women deceitful, but their gullibility made them likely to stray from God and tempt men from doing the same. Just like in 1 Timothy, this was also labeled a

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<sup>7</sup> Genesis 3:11-13

<sup>8</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:3

<sup>9</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:4

hierarchical text in *Eve and Adam*, as it was a New Testament passage that supported the idea that Eve was at fault. As seen by the story of the original sin in Genesis 3, and the interpretations in 2 Corinthians as cited by *Eve and Adam*, Eve's act of eating the forbidden fruit and giving it to Adam caused women to be perceived as less intellectual and therefore temptresses for men to stray from God.

The creation stories are one of the roots of Christianity's perceptions of women as subordinates to men, as seen in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2, and the views of women in 1 Timothy as a result; so now, it can be examined how this affected the treatment of women in early Christianity. This can be seen through the journal article, "Sexism and Misogyny in the Christian Tradition: Liberating Alternatives," by Rosemary Redford Ruether, and the book, *From Eve to Dawn: A History of Women in the World Volume 1*, by Marilyn French. In "Sexism and Misogyny in the Christian Tradition: Liberating Alternatives," it is explained that the result of the story of creation centering that women were created second, sparked a large Christian movement that women being created second meant they were second to men, and therefore subservient, which acted as a foundation for men to prohibit women from being in positions of power.<sup>10</sup> "This Augustinian view of woman as second in nature, and not permitted to exercise public leadership in society or the church was inherited by the Magisterial Reformers Luther and Calvin in the sixteenth century."<sup>11</sup> This quote by authors Kwam, Scheraring, and Ziegler explains what began as an Augustinian view of women's roles due to the creation story spread and began being implemented in the way other leaders taught. The authors go on to say that this led to the subservient treatment of women not only in communities under these leaders, but spread to other

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<sup>10</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether. "Sexism and Misogyny in the Christian Tradition: Liberating Alternatives." *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 34 (2014): 83

<sup>11</sup> Ruether, "Sexism and Misogyny in the Christian Tradition: Liberating Alternatives," 86

communities, eventually being implemented in policy.<sup>12</sup> The treatment of women as submissive to men due to the creation story is also explained in *From Eve to Dawn: A History of Women in the World Volume 1*, by Marilyn French. French explained that when Charlemagne became emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, he “reformed” the church based on 2 Corinthians which stated that women should be silent and subservient.<sup>13</sup> “Women could no longer assist in mass or give the sacraments; nuns could not teach boys; and abbesses and all conventual affairs were placed under bishop’s authority.”<sup>14</sup> This shows the affect of the creation story on a different community than the first quote, however, the treatment of women as a result was the same: forced submission.

The story of the original sin in Genesis 3 caused a perception of women that they were less intelligent and acted as temptresses for sin, the treatment of women as a result of this perception can be understood through, “Sexism and Misogyny in the Christian Tradition: Liberating Alternatives,” and *From Eve to Dawn: A History of Women in the World Volume 1*. “Sexism and Misogyny in the Christian Tradition: Liberating Alternatives,” after the reformation of the church by Charlemagne, as stated in the previous paragraph, and the adaptation of the idea that women were not only second in nature but first in sin, women were deemed at fault for the original sin and therefore could not be trusted by men. “But due to the Fall a split has appeared between the private domain of the home and the public realm of the state, and women are coercively barred from the public realm.”<sup>15</sup> This quote explains that the

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<sup>12</sup> Ruether, “Sexism and Misogyny in the Christian Tradition: Liberating Alternatives,” 86

<sup>13</sup> Marilyn French, *From Eve to Dawn: A History of Women in the World*. (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2008): 249.

<sup>14</sup> French, *From Eve to Dawn: A History of Women in the World*, 250

<sup>15</sup> Ruether, “Sexism and Misogyny in the Christian Tradition: Liberating Alternatives,” 86

understanding of Eve as the original sinner, caused women to be pushed into the “private domain of the home,” meaning they were shut out positions of power, education, employment, or anything outside of their household- to which they operated under their husband or father. *From Eve to Dawn: A History of Women in the World Volume 1* also explains the treatment of women based on the perception of the original sin. “Priests and monks blamed their lust on women’s filth and corruption. Not just Eve, but Woman, is weak, frivolous, fallen.”<sup>16</sup> The author, Marilyn French, explains that due to the idea that it was Eve that tempted Adam to eat the forbidden fruit, she was acting as a temptress for sin.<sup>17</sup> This resulted in, as stated in the quote, priests and monks acting on sexual desires or having sexual thoughts and blaming it on women, because Eve, and all women, were temptresses for men.<sup>18</sup> This labeled women as sexually explicit, dirty, and too deceitful to act on their own, therefore, they needed to be controlled by men. French proceeds to say that these priests and monks labeling women as sexual temptresses quickly caused the forcing of more modesty in church communities and more separation of men and women in environments, as women could not be trusted to not sexually tempt a man and cause them to sin.

The stories of creation and the original sin caused the Christian perspective to see women as less than men, which resulted in the treatment of women as submissive to men, being viewed as of lesser intelligence and as a temptresses for sin. It is impossible to say that there would be no patriarchal nature in society if there was no story of Adam and Eve, but it is clear that within early Christianity the creation of Eve and her sin affected how women were treated for generations. With issues today of gender inequality towards women, it is possible that this perception of women because of Eve’s story, real or not real, has carried to today. While

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<sup>16</sup> French, *From Eve to Dawn: A History of Women in the World*, 250.

<sup>17</sup> French, *From Eve to Dawn: A History of Women in the World*, 249.

<sup>18</sup> French, *From Eve to Dawn: A History of Women in the World*, 249.

Christianity is not as prominent as it once was, it still remains a dominant religion in the world<sup>19</sup> and still holds many beliefs and enforces many policies of women being submissive to men. Eve's story was a vessel for sexism and misogyny in the early Christian church, and still is today.

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<sup>19</sup> Hackett, Conrad, and David McClendon. "Christians Remain World's Largest Religious Group, but They Are Declining in Europe." *Pew Research Center*. (Pew Research Center, 2020).



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