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Eve's Legacy

The image of Eve as temptress in the Bible has resulted in an extremely negative impact on women throughout the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

All women were believed to have inherited from their mother, the Biblical Eve, both her guilt and her guile. Consequently, they were all untrustworthy, morally inferior, and wicked. Menstruation, pregnancy, and childbearing were considered the just punishment for the eternal guilt of the cursed female sex.

In order to appreciate how negative the impact of the Biblical Eve was on all her female descendants we have to look at the writings of some of the most important Jews and Christians of all time. Let us start with the Old Testament and look at excerpts from what is called the Wisdom Literature in which we find:

"I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare....while I was still searching but not finding, I found one upright man among a thousand but not one upright woman among them all" (Ecclesiastes 7:26-28).

In another part of the Hebrew literature which is found in the Catholic Bible we read:

"No wickedness comes anywhere near the wickedness of a woman.....Sin began with a woman and thanks to her we all must die" (Ecclesiasticus 25: 19,24).

Jewish Rabbis listed nine curses inflicted on women as a result of the Fall:

"To the woman He gave nine curses and death: the burden of the blood of menstruation and the blood of virginity; the burden of pregnancy; the burden of childbirth; the burden of bringing up the children; her head is covered as one in mourning; she pierces her ear like a permanent slave or slave girl who serves her master; she is not to be believed as a witness; and after everything--death."¹

To the present day, orthodox Jewish men in their daily morning prayer recite "Blessed be God King of the universe that Thou has not made me a woman." The women, on the other hand, thank God every

morning for "making me according to Thy will."²

Another prayer found in many Jewish prayer books: "Praised be God that he has not created me a gentile. Praised be God that he has not created me a woman. Praised be God that he has not created me an ignoramus."³

The Biblical Eve has played a far bigger role in Christianity than in Judaism. Her sin has been pivotal to the whole Christian faith because the Christian conception of the reason for the mission of Jesus Christ on Earth stems from Eve's disobedience to God. She had sinned and then seduced Adam to follow her suit. Consequently, God expelled both of them from Heaven to Earth, which had been cursed because of them.

They bequeathed their sin, which had not been forgiven by God, to all their descendants and, thus, all humans are born in sin. In order to purify human beings from their 'original sin', God had to sacrifice Jesus, who is considered to be the Son of God, on the cross. Therefore, Eve is responsible for her own mistake, her husband's sin, the original sin of all humanity, and the death of the Son of God. In other words, one woman acting on her own caused the fall of humanity.⁴

What about her daughters? They are sinners like her and have to be treated as such. Listen to the severe tone of St. Paul in the New Testament:

"A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I don't permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner" (1 Timothy 2: 11–14).

St. Tertullian was even blunter than St. Paul, while he was talking to his 'best beloved sisters' in the faith, he said⁵:

"Do you not know that you are each an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the Devil's gateway: You are the unsealer of the forbidden tree: You are the first deserter of the divine law: You are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert even the Son of God had to die."

St. Augustine was faithful to the legacy of his predecessors, he wrote to a friend:

"What is the difference whether it is in a wife or a mother, it is still Eve the temptress that we must beware of in any woman.....I fail to see what use woman can be to man, if one excludes the function of bearing children."

Centuries later, St. Thomas Aquinas still considered women as defective:

"As regards the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman

comes from a defect in the active force or from some material indisposition, or even from some external influence."

Finally, the renowned reformer Martin Luther could not see any benefit from a woman but bringing into the world as many children as possible regardless of any side effects:

"If they become tired or even die, that does not matter. Let them die in childbirth, that's why they are there"

Again and again all women are denigrated because of the image of Eve the temptress, thanks to the Genesis account.

To sum up, the Judaeo-Christian conception of women has been poisoned by the belief in the sinful nature of Eve and her female offspring.

If we now turn our attention to what the Qur'an has to say about women, we will soon realize that the Islamic conception of women is radically different from the Judaeo-Christian one. Let the Qur'an speak for itself:

"For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast, for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah's praise -- For them all has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward." (33:35)

"The believers, men and women, are protectors, one of another: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil, they observe regular prayers, practise regular charity, and obey Allah and His Messenger. On them will Allah pour His Mercy: for Allah is Exalted in power, Wise." (9:71)

"And their Lord answered them: Truly I will never cause to be lost the work of any of you, be you a male or female, you are members one of another." (3:195)

"Whoever works evil will not be requited but by the like thereof, and whoever works a righteous deed - whether man or woman- and is a believer - such will enter the Garden of bliss." (40:40)

"Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has faith, verily to him/her we will give a new life that is good and pure, and we will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their actions." (16:97)

It is clear that the Qur'anic view of women is no different than that of men. They, both, are God's creatures whose sublime goal on earth is to worship their Lord, do righteous deeds, and avoid evil and they, both, will be assessed accordingly.

The Qur'an never mentions that the woman is the devil's gateway or that she is a deceiver by nature.

The Qur'an, also, never mentions that man is God's image; all men and all women are His creatures – that is all. According to the Qur'an, a woman's role on earth is not limited only to childbirth. She is required to do as many good deeds as any other man is required to do.

The Qur'an never says that no upright women have ever existed. To the contrary, the Qur'an has instructed all the believers, women as well as men, to follow the example of those ideal women such as the Virgin Mary and the Pharaoh's wife:

"And Allah sets forth, As an example to those who believe, the wife of Pharaoh: Behold she said: 'O my lord build for me, in nearness to you, a mansion in the Garden, and save me from Pharaoh and his doings and save me from those who do wrong.' And Mary the daughter of Imran who guarded her chastity and We breathed into her body of Our spirit; and she testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and of His revelations and was one of the devout" (66: 11-12).

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1. Leonard J. Swidler, *Women in Judaism: The Status of Women in Formative Judaism* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1976), p. 115
 2. Thana Kendath, "Memories of an Orthodox Youth", in Susannah Heschel ed, *On Being a Jewish Feminist* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), pp. 96-97.
 3. Leonard J. Swidler, *Women in Judaism: The Status of Women in Formative Judaism*, op. cit., pp. 80-81.
 4. Rosemay R. Ruether, "Christianity", in Arvind Sharma ed., *Women in World Religions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987) p. 209.
 5. For all the saying of the prominent Saints, see Karen Armstrong, *The Gospels according to Woman* (London, Elm Tree Books, 1986) pp. 52-62. See also Nancy Van Vuuren, *The Subversion of Women as Practiced by Churches, Witch-Hunters, and Other Sexists* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press) pp. 28-30.

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