

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”

Genesis 1:27, King James Version (KJV)

A little child would die without love—she is helpless.

She is holding out for the smallest of crumbs—of approval.

Her awareness is heightened to the briefest of moments—of kindness.

Her sense of self has no boundaries yet—it is endless.

She is vulnerable to every glance from you—you’re her leader.

She observes you carefully and takes in every habit—you’re her teacher.

Her thoughts are made of every word you say—you’re her words.

Chapter 1: Eve—Inferior from the Start?

My Background

Religion has always been important to me. I looked to the Bible to find answers about how to relate to myself and others, and my interpretations of Bible stories (or the ones I was taught and most commonly came across) were influential in how I experienced and thought about myself.

In addition, religion is a very big component of my Polish culture (they seem to be totally enmeshed with each other), which abounds in very beautiful religious traditions throughout the Catholic church calendar that have been passed through endless generations of families. For people from a Polish background, including myself, these can constitute significant aspects of their identities.

Within my own family, I have many fond memories of playing with hand-painted glass decorations on our Christmas tree, looking through the window of our apartment, and seeing a sea of Christmas tree lights in other apartment windows, shining prettily through the falling snow. There are memories of decorating Easter baskets and eggs (in traditional Polish folk patterns, of course) and attending Easter Mass in my best dress on crisp, sunny Sundays.

I also have many memories of country holidays spent at my cousin's home in a tiny Polish village. There I observed her family pray before every meal and at bedtime, and wear their very finest clothes on Sunday as they went to church, out of their reverence for Catholic Mass and the Holy Communion. I remember the kindness of the nuns who taught me religion and the quiet peacefulness of the parish priests. I grew up with the subconscious impression that Christianity represented reverence, joy, kindness, gentleness, peacefulness, goodness, and fun!

As I grew, I was gradually introduced to the stories of the Old and New Testament. The book of Genesis, including the story of Adam and Eve, was one of the first stories I came across. It is a tale from which everything else in the Bible originates; hence it was particularly memorable and impressionable to me. It also felt very personal, as I thought of Adam and Eve not as strangers but as my great-great-great-great ... grandparents, to whom I and every person were related and with whom I shared some genetic connection, however minuscule.

For me the story of Adam and Eve seemed such a sad beginning for the human race, in contrast to the happy associations I had with Christianity, around the beautiful Polish religious traditions, or the New Testament's message of peace, love, hope, and joy.

As a child, my understanding of the story of Adam and Eve was very basic. Following God's creation of light, water, dry land, the sun, fish, and birds (I can almost hear my favorite song that I sang so often in our religion class and still sing to my son: "God made flying birds, flying birds, rolling seas, rolling seas ...") He made Adam, the first man (of male gender). God then made Eve (a woman) so that Adam would not feel lonely (subconsciously implying that she was created to fulfill a subservient role toward him). They lived happily in a close and loving relationship with God in a beautiful garden called Eden. They were free to experience the joy and beauty of their paradise; the only requirement made of them was not to eat the fruit from one particular tree. Unfortunately, an evil snake convinced Eve to go ahead and pick the forbidden fruit from the tree and eat it, and she also gave it to Adam to taste. God then punished them both for their disobedience by throwing them out of their beautiful garden for all eternity.

I thought something along the lines of, *If it wasn't for Eve, we would still be living in God's beautiful garden, in closeness to Him and without pain and suffering.* I felt a mixture of disappointment and anger in Eve's bad judgment and its consequences, together with compassion for the suffering she

went through when having to abandon Eden. I still remember the image of Adam and Eve from my children's Bible, both looking ashamed and deeply distressed, with Eve leaning on Adam's shoulder, looking weak in her grief, walking away from God's beautiful garden—forever!

Eve's Legacy

Apparently I wasn't the only one who felt disappointed in Eve. In Christianity's history, there have been many theologians who held Eve responsible for humanity's banishment from Eden, and even for the death of Jesus (for example, Tertullian, c. 155–240). Such respected scholars of that time implied that Eve was the more "inferior" of the original pair, more susceptible to sin, easily influenced, and generally not to be trusted. They then went on to imply that all women were tainted accordingly by their hereditary association with her, and through that association shared these negative personality qualities. For example, Tertullian has been famously quoted as saying, "The curse God pronounced on your sex still weighs on the world ... You are the devil's gateway."¹ Another well-known quote by St John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople (c. 349–407), is just as derogatory: "The woman taught once, and ruined all. On this account ... let her not teach."² There are countless additional examples.

Eve's unfortunate legacy carried on throughout generations. For example, starting around the fourteenth century, many women, perhaps millions, lost their lives after having been accused of witchcraft and were sentenced to torturous death. It is likely that the perpetrators justified their actions through making similar negative associations between the accused women and the "sinful" nature of the original Eve.

Art throughout history abounds in images depicting Eve in a placating posture, ashamed of herself and leaning on Adam as a source of her strength, just as in the below image of *The Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise*, 1791, by Benjamin West.³ Or it depicts her as being tempted by the snake and reaching for the forbidden fruit.

Much fewer images portray her as being of equal worth to Adam, created in the image of God, and called to a sacred life of communion with Him. One that represents this to me is on a stained-glass window in Notre Dame de Dinant, Belgium.⁴

I wonder what the impact of Eve's legacy is on society's treatment of women today. There are still too many examples of women being treated in an inferior manner in relation to men in modern times.