



Put the Blame on Eve

*What Women
Must Overcome
to Feel Worthy*

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Prologue: The Scapegoat

Scapegoat. A powerful word.

It evokes an emotional, even visceral reaction from anyone who has been victimized as one.

Derived from a tale in the Hebrew Bible, scapegoating has come to mean irrationally blaming an individual or group for an act or disaster. It implies manipulating information to discredit a person or group. Blaming a minority group for the demographic or economic woes of a larger one is a far too common example. How easy, how convenient, to point the finger at others to avoid accountability for one's own actions!

The Old Testament story is of two male goats and a bull being offered as sacrifice in the temple in Jerusalem (Leviticus 16:3–28). Lots were cast to determine which goat would be a burnt offering along with the bull. The remaining goat would be the “scapegoat” to be banished to the wilderness, bearing the burden of guilt for mankind. New Testament theology has its own deeply poignant version of scapegoat in the form of Jesus who, having been driven into the wilderness by the high priests, took on the guilt of mankind.

The Scapegoat Society, formed in England in 1997 to study “scapegoating” and its effects on those implicated, defines the practice in this way:

Scapegoating is a hostile social-psychological discrediting routine by which people move blame and responsibility away from themselves and towards a target person or group. It is also a practice by which angry feelings and feelings of hostility may be projected, via inappropriate accusation, towards

others. The target feels wrongly persecuted and receives misplaced vilification, blame and criticism; he is likely to suffer rejection from those whom the perpetrator seeks to influence. Scapegoating has a wide range of focus: from “approved” enemies of very large groups down to the scapegoating of individuals by other individuals. Distortion is always a feature.

Put the Blame on Eve looks deeply into Eve’s perceived culpability for the Fall of Man, her resulting role as scapegoat, and how this conviction has determined the status of women for millennia. How did the conviction arise in the first place? Why has it prevailed? What role has “spin” played through the centuries, as different groups twisted the same information to elicit very different responses, depending upon their agenda?

My own “agenda” is not to elevate one gender over another. It is to equalize the roles gender plays, with an eye toward finding an optimal balance between them on this dynamic, volatile, and rapidly changing globe we share.

Toward this end, it is important to see how Eve and, by extension, women have been used as a scapegoat for millennia. It is important to see *exactly* how the established interpretation of the Garden of Eden account elevates men and subjugates women. It is important to see the extent to which such beliefs are responsible for the sexism and intolerance that persist today.

Fact, Faith, and Discernment

Finding truth about these things is not easy. While historical information is usually viewed as factual and truthful, we should not confuse history with fact. History is presented as truth, but clearly is a story told with the bias of a winner running all through it—informed and framed by the culture of the era. Rarely do we hear the perspective of the losers or the oppressed. Legends accepted as factual often possess only an element of truth, which has been exaggerated and embellished over time.

Doctrines taken on faith do not require proof or explanation to “believers,” and often cannot be explained with logic or fact. In organized religion, dogma often must be believed without proof—the Church has declared it true and demands “faith” in its teachings. Submitting to such a demand can

be very comforting to people who are searching for the Promised Land and feel that they can't possibly find their way without direction from organized religion. It may even bring or accompany an experience of something spiritual or mystical. But all too often it also requires forfeiting our prerogative of discernment, as the very effort to exercise it may be perceived as heretical.

In contrast, information meant to be taken as factual should be documented by verifiable date, artifact, and unbiased witnesses whenever possible. Anyone who has witnessed an accident knows, for example, that five separate observers will provide differing and sometimes conflicting accounts. Police look for the pieces of information that are most consistent. Without the benefit of actual documentation, circumstantial evidence concerning historical "fact" provides only *clues*. These clues help us determine possible truth, but our deductions are not necessarily conclusive. Careful discernment is needed.

People who employ discernment use their personal values and biases as parameters, determining which information to believe and retain and which information to discard. The process and parameters can vary dramatically from person to person, as "truth" determined by discernment does not derive its meaningfulness from external authority.

In my own case, I essentially believed for many years what I was told about historical facts and religious truth, doctor's diagnoses, legal advice, car sales information, and so on. I preferred to believe in the best in people, trusting that most are sincere. I tended to overrule a persistent subconscious acknowledgement that people often do have agendas and promote them passionately.

During the early 1960s, my college experience drew me into the civil rights movement for women and minorities; but activism soon was put on hold as a teaching position, marriage, and motherhood consumed my time, thoughts, and perspective. With the onset of middle age I endured a series of psychological and physical "crises." In the course of two years, I experienced major surgery, a divorce, a dissertation defense, selling my home, starting a new job, and having an empty nest with both my daughters away at college. Those events prompted some serious soul-searching for me as I attempted to determine my true identity, my life's purpose, and the means to accomplish it.

Questions long buried in the recesses of my brain began to surface. I wondered about the inequities in society, its prejudice and bigotry. Why are sexism and racism tolerated in a free country? Why does religious intolerance still prevail? Through much research I discovered many answers and far more questions. What I've learned so far has been both enlightening and disturbing, sparking my own personal flame of passion.

As my questioning and discernment transformed into a genuine Grail Quest, I began to focus on the role of women in early Christianity—perhaps as the result of my status as matriarch in a family of all females. That may also account for why Mary Magdalene became my passion. I was fascinated by the possibility of her significant leadership role as Apostle to the Apostles.

Although I am not a biblical scholar, I read volumes of information written by people who have dedicated their lives to such study. I was struck early on by works of feminist biblical scholars that present intriguing non-establishment interpretations, illuminated by the Gnostic gospels and other documents discovered in the twentieth century. In addition, I was blown away by stumbling upon the work of nineteenth-century suffragist Matilda Jocelyn Gage whose book, *Woman, Church and State*, was a hundred years ahead of its time. I also was struck by the work and courage of Margaret Starbird, as well as the research and insights found in Dan Brown's blockbuster *The DaVinci Code*.

Few people are aware, for example, that Mary Magdalene was exonerated by the Roman Catholic Church in 1969 from her erroneous title of penitent whore. My unofficial, informal poll of people I meet reveals that most Catholics have no idea that Magdalene had been wrongly labeled. Then again, newspapers rarely put retractions on the front-page either.

Why was the credibility of Mary Magdalene and other females dismissed? Why were misogynists allowed to influence so strongly the developing doctrine in organized religions and cultures?

All roads in my research led to the Garden of Eden and the reputed "Fall of Man" —in which Eve succumbed to the wiles of the serpent, dragging Adam screaming and hollering to bite into the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Ah, that must be it! All women are guilty because of an action of *one* woman, albeit the first woman, in a myth, a metaphor.

• • •

More and more modern writers speak of history as “his story”—a story that has discounted females, the feminine perspective, and the roles women have played through time. An objective researcher simply has to wonder how “history” might be portrayed differently if the feminine role and perspective were included. How might the role of contemporary woman look today if “history” had gotten it right? We will do some of that wondering here.

MJR

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