

The Ladies' Auxiliary

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Cast:

Eve
Lilith
Abel
Cain's wife
Noah's wife
Hagar
Zipporah
The 'certain woman'
Delilah
Eshta
Ruth
Queen of Sheba
Vashti
Judith
Mary, mother of God
Mary, of Bethany
Mary Magdalen
Thecla
Satan

Production Notes:

The premise of this piece is that members of the ladies' auxiliary has gotten together for a quilting bee to create a quilt for the church bazaar.

The process I have in mind is a theatrical parallel to dance's 'contact improv': the actors deliver their monologues with whatever interjections/responses the other actors, in character, come up with.

Which monologues are included, and their order of presentation, is up to the director and the cast.

Whether the 'final' performance is scripted based on improvisation during rehearsal, or is also improvised, is also up to the director and the cast.

Footnotes are optional for inclusion in the delivery; perhaps they could be delivered by another character.

I am Eve

The bad girl, the evil woman.

I stand accused, and sentenced. without a trial. for life.

Because of my single action, millions of individuals have been born with 'original sin', have been guilty even before they acted, doomed before they started. I alone have been held responsible for this sad and pathetic fallen race.¹ Therefore, let me begin by correcting this: if I were free not to fall in the first place, they were free not to fall after me; and if I were not free, then I can't be held responsible--for my fall or theirs.

Now, let us further examine the charges, let us correctly define that action.

I have been condemned for choosing knowledge over ignorance--the fruit I ate came from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In a society that praises pursuit of knowledge and honours men of wisdom, why have I been viewed with disfavour? Had Adam reached out first, would he have been so rebuked? --Or is the state of ignorance requisite for women only? (Histories pass on Socrates, they pass over Aspasia.)

In the same vein, I chose experience over innocence. In a context of attitudes that value experience, the disapproval of my action can only imply the desire that women, like children, live in a state of innocence.

I have also been condemned for disobedience. If that were the issue, then why wasn't the tree so named--'the tree of obedience and disobedience' or 'the tree of temptation'. By naming it what it was not, God either deliberately tempted me, or deliberately deceived me. And he should be judged, not I.

Perhaps though, the tree really was a tree of knowledge. In that case, one should wonder

¹ Even though Adam was beside me through it all (Gen 3:6) and made not one objection. And, of course, also ate the fruit.

what insecurities led God to prefer obedience over knowledge. Indeed, one should wonder why he went so far as to forbid knowledge. The reason is evident in Genesis (3:22-23): he didn't want us to equal him. He sent us out of Eden to prevent our eating from the tree of life, because already we were as wise as he for having eaten from the tree of knowledge, and if we had made it to the tree of life before he found us, we would've been immortal as well--we would've been as godly as he.

And that takes me onward, for counted among my sins is that of pride. Considering that later, through his son, God commands us to 'follow in his footsteps', I find the label of pride odd for the action that would do just that--make me like God. Furthermore, I find it odd to be condemned for being like God when, after all, he created us in his image (Gen 1:26-27). And God certainly is proud: to create us in his image can be called narcissistic, and to prefer us to spend our time admiring him rather than learning about him is equally evidential of pride. (As an aside, I would think that my knowledge would increase my admiration; that wasn't why I ate the fruit, but if it was, would it have mattered? Did God ever ask my intent?)

I have also been charged with a lack of faith. Yet I took it on faith in the first place that God told us not to eat from the tree: remember, he gave the command to Adam before I even existed (Gen 2:16-17).² Further, I had faith in the serpent, I trusted the serpent to be telling the truth. Is it dishonourable to trust?

And is it reprehensible to act on that trust, as I did then in offering the fruit to another, to Adam? God commanded innocence, then held me responsible for an act of innocent intent. For how could I know my faith was misplaced? How could I know the serpent was evil until I had knowledge of good and evil? By telling us not to eat of the tree, he insisted on ignorance--but then held us responsible, for an act of ignorance.

² I don't rule out the possibility that the command therefore was meant only for Adam--God knew that knowledge in the hands of men is a dangerous thing.

Lastly, I have been condemned for using my reason, for it is through the exercise of reason that I decided to eat the fruit. The serpent's explanation of God's motives (Gen 3:5) seemed very reasonable to me. God's command on the other hand, not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil because then I'd die, seemed a touch unreasonable. Where is the fault in using that faculty given to me by God? The fault is not mine, but God's--he made reason guide our will and left our reason prey to deceit.

Or did he? History has it that the serpent's words were false, that I was deceived. But God's explanation (Gen 3:22 "Behold, the man is become as one of us") is identical to the serpent's (Gen 3:5 "Ye shall be as gods"): the serpent was telling the truth.³ And so I stand condemned, for listening to truth. And for offering that truth to others.

³ And in fact God lied: he said we would die (Gen 3:3) if we ate the fruit of that tree, and we didn't--at least not for several hundred years.

I am Lilith

and the records show that because I stole Adam's sperm and made demons with it, I was exiled from the garden.

Why? I mean, what aspect of my behaviour was the criminal one? Was it the theft? Was it the 'taking something', the 'doing something', without the other's consent? Surely not: every seventeen minutes some man rapes a woman--that's certainly doing something without the other's consent, as well as taking something⁴--and none of them is put in exile.

Or was it because I took his sperm, because I was a woman who took reproductive control away from a man? Well let me mention the unavailability of abortion, as well as the unavailability of safe and effective contraception, as well as rape--all of these things are quite common, and all of these things have taken reproductive control away from women. Let me mention also test tube babies, in vitro reproduction, and surrogate motherhood: all of these depend on medical knowledge, money, and authorization--all of which are for the most part controlled by men.

Or was it the fact that I made demons from the sperm? Well, this is interesting--all of a sudden men are interested in what happens to their sperm? They never used to be: most men don't worry about contraception; most men don't assist with abortion, financially or emotionally; many don't assist with parenting, financially (child support payments are seldom made after the first two years) or in any other way (what's the average number of hours per week a father spends with his child?); and I don't see much (male) governmental interest in daycare centres, programs to assist single parents, etc.

⁴ No, not virginity--I had in mind something far more important: women who have been raped have had that taken-for-granted freedom from fear, that basic trust in others that we need to carry on with our lives, taken from them.

But whatever the reason, go ahead, sentence me to exile--I will gladly live wherever you are not.

I am Abel

and I was the tiller of the soil. Cain was the one into slaughtering animals, not me.

Keeping livestock, to catch and kill from time to time, is a predictable refinement of the hunting activity of his Neanderthal ancestors. Just as farming is a refinement of the seed-gathering and root-digging my ancestors did.⁵ And he said he liked the challenge, denying that it was murder on the basis that the animals were an inferior life form. Nevertheless, I said it was still killing, and accused him of being power-hungry, insensitive, and sadistic (he doesn't always knock them out before he slits their throats). And that's partly how it started.

To digress, I can see the hunting of old as a little more justified: I mean, it got the men out of the way so the women could carry on with the more important things (bearing and teaching children, building houses, healing, inventing tools, as well as, of course, providing food⁶), and it was harmless enough (only the most egotistic and immature ever got injured⁷--and then, well, in a way, it was just as well--if they got killed, however, we were sad nevertheless), and the chase was a good outlet for their aggression and violent energy. But as I explained to Cain, I couldn't see any reason for human beings of our stature to carry on such a practice.

And his version of it--capturing and imprisoning animals, and then raising them in total

⁵ A footnote for those of you who are surprised: the men, always eager to be off, were never in one place long enough to realize the connections between seeds, earth, water, sun, growth; the women, on the other hand, eager not to be off (on the move with babies inside and out was not looked forward to) would naturally be the ones then to 'discover' and develop agriculture. So, in the tradition of my sex, I, Abel, was the first farmer.

⁶ We did not depend on meat for survival (in fact, most of us refused to eat it): they'd follow an animal for days, sometimes weeks, and often come back empty-handed; and even if they did catch something, the meat went bad so quickly (often by the time they brought it back, it was spoiling)--so it really wasn't a reliable enough source to even bother adapting to.

⁷ And as I implied above, few animals actually got caught and killed (and most often, it was the ill or the old--they were almost giving euthanasia then, not hunting).

captivity, killing them when the odds are so impossibly against their defence (if they'd never been wild, they'd never learned how to fight back) or their escape (he'd not only catch one when it was trapped inside his fences, but he'd kill it when it was tied up and completely powerless)--well his version was downright sick. I mean it couldn't be justified by dietary necessity, and even if I did accept 'challenge' as a valid reason, I couldn't in any way call what he did challenging.⁸

But to go back, I said that my criticism of Cain's activity was partly how it started. I shall explain the 'partly' first: I wasn't the only one displeased with Cain's idea of worthwhile occupation--why do you think God favoured my sacrifices and not his? (Remember things got a little backwards in the passing on--contrary to popular opinion, God did not favour the animal sacrifices, he favoured Abel's sacrifices, and I, you remember, was the farmer.) God was trying to tell him he did not appreciate seeing the animals he created, slaughtered--in his name, no less. He thought it, to say the least, a perverse and confused sense of tribute.

The 'it' of course is the conflict between Cain and me, between male and female. It is in the interests of patriarchy to erase evidence of such conflict: since they couldn't erase my death (by Cain), the next best solution was to change my sex, 'reducing' the episode to 'mere' murder of one man by another--and effectively erasing the beginning, the archetype, of the conflict between the sexes.⁹ We are taught then that women have (always) agreed with men--never differed, never argued, never criticized; that we have, in the past, accepted--even acquiesced to--the male nature.

⁸ I understand the practice of hunting (catching and killing animals in the way of our ancestors) has experienced a resurrection in our descendants--the males, that is. I find this odd: perhaps it is a sign of regression, for surely there is no need (unless the art of agriculture has been forgotten--and I suppose that since many skills originated and developed by women have been forgotten, this is a possibility), and surely men are not still--again--so inferior that the women welcome and justify the temporary release of their burdensome presence, so perhaps the challenge has increased and become irresistible--though I expect that the continued development of weapons would not make this likely.

⁹ By the way, something else that got a bit mixed up--or changed: it was then that we (they) were expelled from the garden--it's obvious that Cain's action, not Eve's, was responsible for the fall of humanity.

This lesson effectively eliminates any feeling of strength female descendants would derive from knowing they were not the first, not the only ones to be displeased, disappointed, dissatisfied with the male kind. Furthermore, having to start anew each time, establishing reasonable grounds (evidence, arguments) for that dissatisfaction, wastes energy and time, deferring and deterring any action toward amending (male) faults and inferiorities.

However, as you can understand now, the Cain and Abel episode was not merely the first murder--it was the first episode of centuries of violence by men against women.¹⁰ Men continued to kill women: they burned, drowned, boiled, butchered, hung, and stoned them; they raped them; they beat them; they discouraged their development; they denied them opportunity; they degraded them. In a thousand different ways, men have carried on what Cain started--they have created a tradition of violence against women.

And that is the mark of Cain: the curse of testosterone, the curse of that deformed X, their Y, chromosome--that is the curse, the mark, of being male.

¹⁰ And his sneering question, 'Am I my sister's keeper?' was the archetypal, the first, renunciation of responsibility of male towards female. And yet we have never--though provoked by spite, anger, envy, revenge, desperation--we have never forsaken our responsibility toward them: we suckle our male infants as we do our females, we care for them, we teach them, we bond with them--we love them.

I am Cain's Wife

My existence is not acknowledged. It would be too disturbing.

My screams are never heard, my bruises never seen. And whether I limp, or cower, or run, or fight, or cry, or accuse, or ignore, or hide, or pretend, or forget, or remember--it's all the same: I am condemned. For being weak, for being strong, for provoking, for exaggerating, for lying, for telling the truth, for being masochistic, for being inferior, for leaving, for staying. I am the first battered wife.

I am silenced. I am invisible.

I am not.

I am Noah's Wife

That's it. Jus' Noah's wife. Mrs. Noah. A no-name person. My sons have names. Shem, Ham, Japheth. And my grandsons have names. Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, Tiras, Cush, Mizraim, Phut, Canaan, Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, Aram. But me I don't have a name. I'm jus'--Noah's wife.

That's why I'm here. To set the record straight. See everybody's got me pegged as mean an' a hen-pecker somethin' fierce. Especially hilarious is the time where I refused to get on the ark. Well let me tell you, that weren't a bit funny. There's a few things you don't know about all that. Why do you think Noah wanted me so bad on the ark? Love? Pah. Now that's funny. That man never loved me.

No siree, he wanted me on the ark because I was the one gonna look after all them animals. I was the one gonna clean their shit, feed their mouths, tend their litters, doctor their sick. What did you think, Noah was goin' to? No, he was gonna be too busy navigating, I can tell you that. Noah was gonna stand there like he always has, givin' orders and tellin' us they came from God. So that means I was supposed to look after him too. (My sons? Well, they each had a wife. Yup, there was Shem's wife, Ham's wife, and Japheth's wife.)

An' I was supposed to look after the ark--just you think about keepin' that thing clean and healthy: 300 cubits by 50 cubits by 30 cubits--that's long as a football field and three stories high! (An' only one window--lord, what a stench!) See he figured me to be game warden, housekeeper, and cook (an' we ain't jus' talkin' a week, we're talkin' close on two months)--an' all while me in a state of constant pregnancy. No thanks.

An' that's just what I woulda got--no thanks, no pay, no credit. If the flood destroyed the world an' all its people, where do you think all o' you came from? Me! An' I ain't even given a name. To read the Bible you'd think he begat all o' you hisself. An' you'd think he begat only

sons. Well it ain't so.

An' if that ain't enough, when it was all over, God made his covenant with the men. Oh I knew he would. 'Course he includes me, I suppose, if us women come in under the category "of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you". Flattering, hunh.

I am Hagar

and according to Islamic legend, I am the first victim of female circumcision. That should read the first 'volunteer-victim'. But before I explain the volunteer part, let me expand on the victim part.

The men (for in a sense, they are the victors) have given us lots of reasons in their desperate attempt to justify this barbarous, this painful and dangerous, practice. One of the more ridiculous rests on the beliefs that orgasm depends on the clitoris and that orgasm prevents conception (the heat of our passion destroys the sperm); since the prevailing attitude about women was that we were breeders (well, at least the prevailing attitude about handmaids), then having a clitoris (and therefore orgasm and therefore no conception/pregnancy) rendered us useless, unable to fulfil our rightful function. So, it was better to cut it off.

Another reason, just as ridiculous and just as elated to conception as the raison d'etre of women's sexuality (of women period), was that the clitoris could grow so large that it interfered with intercourse (thereby interfering with conception).

Operating on the same misbelief about the size of the clitoris, another reason has been to prevent women's abuse of each other. (As if we'd do it that way--don't men know anything about lesbian lovemaking, about what really excites the female body?)

There are other more insidious reasons, one of which is this: uncircumcised women are overly sexed and therefore unfaithful and unchaste. This one backfired rather quickly when men realized that it was the hormonal chemicals and not the clitoris that gave us our drive, and not having a clitoris just made us less easily satisfied (and often, therefore, more unfaithful).

Continuing along this line of considering women's pleasure, it's been suggested that men envy women's pleasure because it's greater than theirs--a clitoridectomy reduces the woman's pleasure without reducing the man's (well, at least those men whose pleasure is entirely self-

centred). It's also been suggested that men are upset not that women experience greater pleasure, but that they experience pleasure at all: we're supposed to be sex objects not subjects, and if a woman feels pleasure from sex, maybe she was not made for men after all--maybe men were made for her!

We could go even further--perhaps it has nothing to do with denying women's pleasure, but with providing men's pleasure (or, it's not about causing women pleasure, but causing them pain). I mean, there are a lot of sadistic men who enjoy inflicting pain, and this is a very good way to do it. We are not rubbed first with the leaf (a local anaesthetic), and the knife they use is often dull. The risk of infection (with its own pain) is high because nothing is very clean. And often the girls are sewn up very tightly with only a little tube for urination--so first intercourse is an incredible ordeal: the man tries to thrust his way in, then he tries to rip an entry with his fingers, but often he'll just whip out his knife and cut his way through.

As I said, the men have given us lots of reasons (for we never tire of asking why). But perhaps the real reason comes from the women themselves. And this is why I volunteered. It is simply really: you recall (Gen 17) that God made a special covenant, a special promise of nations, kings, and land; but he made it with only a certain few--only circumcised men were to receive the benefits of his promise. Well, we women felt left out and discriminated against--we too wanted a legacy and land to live on. So we demanded circumcision in order to be included as the Chosen. Quite simply, we demanded an equal opportunity.

Instead of a good opportunity.

I am Zipporah

When God told my husband what preparations the people had to make before he'd appear to them on Mount Sinai, it was very clear that 'the people' meant only the men: first of all, Moses didn't even bother to tell any of us, the women, what was going on; and second, one of those preparations was "come not at your wives" (Ex 19:15)--women don't have wives, do they? So--and I'll say this loud and clear--the Ten Commandments are for men only. Let's look at the Third Commandment for instance: Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy; six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work, but on the seventh day thou shalt not do any work. Now this commandment is impossible for women to follow: much of our work--childcare especially--cannot be ignored ever, let alone for a whole day, on a regular and scheduled basis. I can just hear us try: 'Now kids listen up, tomorrow is the Sabbath, so you there with the chubby little legs, give up on trying to walk tomorrow because if you fall down, I can't pick you up and get you going again--no, you'll just have to lie there, face in the floor--all day; and you, if the boys around the corner beat you up tomorrow, well--too bad; and you over there in the crib, try not to mess tomorrow okay, because I can't change your diaper; and you, the one with the thousand questions a minute, tomorrow, don't you wonder 'bout a thing'.

And Number Six: Thou shalt not commit adultery. Women didn't have to be told. We knew that another man's child would be disowned (if not killed) by our husband, so monogamy was a very practical-ethical practice, know what I mean? Now the men, they didn't have that concern; their concern for children tended to extend only to their own (even though they couldn't ever be sure just which ones those were, that's always been kinda funny--remember Hambone? --never mind); and since venereal disease was an epidemic, this commandment was given--to them.

Number Seven: Thou shalt not steal. Now why would we steal when we weren't allowed

to own property--we were property.

Number Eight: Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. This is another silly one for women--we were non-persons, we weren't allowed to bear any witness, false or true.

And Number Ten: Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife. I don't think he was talking to the lesbians among us.

So, now, I thought that since those Commandments were for men only, we could make our own, you know, for women only. For starters, I propose the following list--pass it around, discuss it with your coffee klatch, your consciousness-raising group, your collective; and revise, refine, add, delete, substitute--then when we reach agreement, together we'll weave them into a tapestry of scarlet and gold.

Preamble: these commandments are neither abstracts nor absolutes, and are to be interpreted according to your own context and circumstance.

1. Seek to maximize the joy of life for yourself and others.
2. Temper justice with mercy and compassion, at all times calling upon your reason and your feeling to guide you.
3. Never love unconditionally--human sacrifice has never been blessed.
4. Remember that the basis of morality is care and communication.
5. Act in accordance to the rule of reciprocity: if you give, you are entitled to get; and if you get, you are obligated to give. This applies to all relationships--person to person, people to people, people to planet.
6. Rights and responsibilities go hand in hand: exercise your rights only to the extent that you take the responsibilities that go with them.
7. Make your choices carefully, for no choice is without consequence.
8. Remember that peace involves freedom, and freedom involves compromise.

I am the certain woman

who killed Abimelech. Pathetic Abimelech who, after I delivered that deadly blow, "called hastily unto the young man his armour bearer, and said unto him, Draw thy sword, and slay me, that men say not of me, A woman slew him" (Judges 9:54). I am thus the real reason men of all nations refuse (or do so only with great reluctance or great desperation) to allow women into their front lines.

It is not an issue of competence, as we first thought, or of economics, as they then argued, or even of mere tradition. What's at stake is the army itself. Our presence would destroy the precious boys' club aura, it would devalue membership: if even a woman can make it through basic training, then what's the big deal¹¹--being a soldier would have the same status as being a teacher¹² (or, if enough of us joined, as being a secretary).

But most importantly, our presence would make it possible for male soldiers, for men, to be killed by women. This ever-present possibility (for you'd never really know) of such 'disgrace' would shatter the heroism of death in battle--and it is only that heroism that makes sense of being in the army at all, it is only that heroism that makes young men agree to kill and be killed: take that away and you've taken away their armies. (Hm--)

¹¹ Most men haven't realized that basic training is in fact designed so that your very average man can make it: the military wants to keep recruits, not let them go--well, they want to keep as many as they need, so actually the standards rise and fall accordingly. In fact, the average IQ of the front line soldier is 85-90. You may want to argue that that front line soldier is physically superior though. I'm afraid not. Studies show--contrary to the popular opinion that 'brains' are 'wimps' and 'jocks' are 'dumb'--that physical and mental abilities correlate: someone whose intelligence is below average probably has below average physical abilities (endurance, strength, flexibility, co-ordination) and vice-versa--the best athletes are the most intelligent ones.

¹² a field populated by both men and women

I am Delilah

arch-castrator. They say I took away Samson's strength. They say if it wasn't for me, he might still be alive. I say Samson was a very sick man--he was selfish and sadistic--and a mass-murderer. He was better off dead. You know it and I know it. But still he's the hero and I'm the bitch.

His parents should've had him hospitalized from the start. I mean, he sees a woman one day and decides he wants to have her--doesn't even know her. So he goes to his parents and says "Get her for me to wife, now" (Judges 14:2). What normal son speaks to his parents this way? (-and why didn't he get her himself?)

After a little while, he gives her away. She's probably glad--I merely mention it as further evidence of his bent mind: you just don't give your wife away.

Later he kills thirty men because they had pressured his wife into telling them the answer to a stupid riddle of his. Killed them. Thirty.

Then there's that bit about the foxes. He catches 300 foxes, ties them together by their tails, puts sticks in between, then sets them on fire. You've never heard such a howling and screaming.

He let them go in the corn fields of the Philistines--when they found out, they burned his ex-wife and her father. (A real logical and heartfelt response. Admittedly just as sick.) This, Samson sees as reason to cause more pain and death, so he goes on another slaughterous rampage.

When the Philistines come to get him in order to kill him, his own people agree to deliver him. Now if that's not an indication that the man was a danger to society, I don't know what is.

However, Samson breaks his binds and kills another thousand men. After that he heads to Gaza. Which is where I live. Now we, of course, have heard about him--we know what's

coming. He'll see a woman, insist on having her whether she wants him or not, and then sooner or later, with or without pretext, he'll start killing a lot of people. So when the Philistines came to me (my work as a spy was well-known to them), I was more than willing to take on the assignment.

Now the big red herring about Samson is that his strength came from his hair. This is true only insofar as his hair is a symbol of his religious faith. Recall that's why he never cut it--he was a Nazarite and it was custom for them to grow it long. No, Samson was a 'believer'. Remember, when he broke free, it was after 'calling upon the Lord' as it were; probably the bit about tearing down the gates of the city was with the same 'assistance'.

So what I had to do was pretty clear--and pretty easy. His faith was inherited--it was acquired by birth, not by reason: it was what they call 'unexamined'. So all I had to do was force him to examine it--and when he did, it disappeared. And well, without that maniacal religious fervour, he lost a lot of his personal strength. Thus they were able to apprehend him and imprison him.

But, you say, in prison his hair grew back, and then he regained his strength--so it was the hair and not the faith. No, in prison his faith returned--and thus his strength. Notice that for that last feat (Judges 16:28-29), he called on God once more.

So why did he believe again? Well, his kind of faith is like--it's like taking steroids: it pumps you up and makes you strong. It's a faith of the weak, see, the strong don't need it; that's why 'conversion' happens when people are down and out, when all they ever had or all they ever were is taken away. And remember, at that time Samson had just been blinded. Well, for a man like him, that'll do it.

I am Eshta

Elona is dead. Do you hear me? She is dead! Look at me--you know me--my father and I live in Gebiah--lived in Gebiah--I no longer live with my father--that is part of the story. Perhaps you know the story. Perhaps you will be dead. I mean--let me tell it--I must tell the story to you. Then perhaps you will not be dead.

When it began--it began long ago--before I was born--but when it happened--to me, I mean, in our home--no, I am confusing you. Let me start again. Please forgive me.

One evening, my father came home from working in the fields--he works in the fields--and he had with him a stranger--a Levite man, and his concubine. They were passing through on their way home from Bethlehem-Judah, and needed a place, to stay, for the night. My father, a very kind and generous man, was a kind and generous man, offered our house and made them our guests.

So I showed the woman, Elona, I showed Elona to my room which I would--I thought I would share with her for the night. And then we began to prepare a supper. While we were peeling and cutting, Elona told me her name--Elona, and also I learned a bit about her sad life. She was the man's concubine unwillingly. Her father had given her to the man years ago, and she discovered, very quickly, that he was a violent man, and he often hit her, and beat her. She finally managed to escape, but had nowhere to go--except back to her father's house. So she travelled, alone, back to her home in Bethlehem-Judah, hoping that once her father found out that the man he had given her to was cruel, he would welcome her and let her stay. But her father did not believe her; and in a few fortnights, the man, enraged and humiliated by her leaving, came after her. He appeared very friendly and reasonable, and her father rejoiced more to see him than he had to see his own daughter.

You can imagine how it made her feel to see her father so kind and generous to the man

who beat her. Her father entertained him, for close to seven days, giving him their best wine and food. Eventually they left, Elona with her 'husband', and they headed back to Ephraim. On their way, they passed through our town, Gibeah, and as I said, they had no place to stay and my father offered our house.

I did not like the man too much, but tried to be kind to him so not to make it worse for Elona. I was thinking perhaps somehow her misery could end, and all through the meal I was wondering--what could be done? We ate, and then as Elona and I cleaned up, my father and the man sat, and talked, and drank. As is usual, my father began to get a little drunk. Elona was not surprised to see her husband red-faced as well.

It was perhaps an hour after we had supped that we heard a clamour and banging at our door. Elona and I were in my room, talking. I listened carefully, and realized that there were several men at our door; by their accent I could tell they were sons of Belial, and fear rose in me. I hoped my father would make them go away but I heard them insist on seeing the man we had lodged, Elona's husband. My father refused, respecting the custom of protecting guests, but to my horror I heard him say "But I have a daughter, a virgin, and the man's concubine is here too"--he was laughing--"I will give them to you instead and you can humble them, do with them as you wish" (Judges 19:24). I could not believe it! "Quick," I said to Elona, "let us run and hide!" Being nearest the window I went through first, and stood waiting in the dark, against the house. But before Elona could follow me, I heard my father burst into the room. He must've grabbed Elona, she cried out, I heard him ask "Where is Eshta?!" and she answered "I don't know", and in a moment I heard the men cheer and ride off. I stayed there in the dark, until my father and the man passed out. Then I went back into my room, quickly gathered what I would need, and escaped. I tried to find Elona but of course I knew not where to look.

Two days later, speaking to women in Jebus, I discovered that Elona had been raped to death. She had managed to crawl back to our house and in the morning when the man opened

the door to leave, he saw her lying on the step. "Up and let us be going" was all he said (Judges 19:28). But she did not move--for she was dead. Elona!

Soon after, I happened to be at a gathering in Mizpeh--the people of Israel were very angry because Elona had been killed, and I heard her husband speak, blaming the men who had raped her, not admitting that he had consented to give her to them, to save himself. I was shocked, and I stood up to tell them what had really happened. But everyone began shouting, no one would believe me.

And I knew then that they also would not believe me if I told them that a father, a 'good' man, could value the life of a stranger, a man he just met, more than that of his own daughter.

I am Ruth

and I am a virtuous woman. At least in the eyes of a certain man (Ruth 3:11). Let me tell you what men call virtuous in a woman.

One night I curled up at his feet to sleep, like a cute puppy. I accepted being equal with a piece of land. Actually, I was lower than the land, for whoever bought it, got me in the deal--not vice versa.

And I smiled, sweetly, through it all.

And that's called being a virtuous woman.

I am the Queen of Sheba

and I am not impressed. Remember my visit to Solomon, that most revered King of Israel? Oh I know, you thought I went away full of respect and admiration. That's what you were supposed to think. Then, not now. Then, well, if I had told him I thought his priorities immoral and his policies shallow and ineffectual--well, I would've put the lives of my queendom in danger: he would've attacked, like most leaders, provoked by mere insult and offensive opinion. But now, now the truth can be spoken.

Solomon was praised for his wealth and his wisdom. Well, the first part is accurate, for what this wisest of kings values most is gold. He drinks out of gold cups, he shoots at gold targets, he fights with gold shields, he sits on a gold throne... He also has a fondness for ivory and pure linen, cedar, stone, and brass.¹³

What he values next is food. He has divided his kingdom into twelve areas, one for each month for the year; during 'their month', each area must provide food for Solomon and his court. Most areas spend the whole year in preparation for that month, for "Solomon's provision for one day was thirty measures of fine flour, and threescore measures of meat, ten fat oxen, and twenty oxen out of the pastures, and a hundred sheep, besides harts and roebucks, and fallowdeer, and fatted fowl" (1 Kings 4:22-23)--for one day! Since a land can produce only so much, it isn't hard to figure out what's left over for the people.

Also high on his list of priorities is military power. He has 40,000 stalls of horses for his chariots, and 12,000 horsemen. That's enough to conquer every neighbouring nation not just once but twenty times. And since any conquered nation takes at least ten years to rebuild to strength, this amount of force is simply superfluous--it's overkill. His 'defence' policy is based on

¹³ His house is incredibly extravagant, lavishly decorated with brasswork of cherubim, palm trees, lion, oxen, and row upon row of lilies and pomegranates. His wife's house is the same.

incredible paranoia and insecurity, and it's a ridiculous waste of man-ability.

Let's look at another example of his questionable policy-making. His idea of a job creation program is to build a magnificent house--in the name of the Lord, of course. Oh sure, he created 180,000 jobs. But (a), the jobs created were in only three sectors of the market--woodcutters, carriers, and stone hewers (sectors dominated by men); and (b), the end product (after seven years) was one building--to house no one. Not a very wise use of resources, to say the least.

But then, Solomon simply was not a very wise man. With respect to his judgements, his only claim to fame was that of a custody conflict--two women declared a child to be their own. His proposal to cut the child in half revealed the true mother as the one who cried out for the child's life to be spared even if it meant giving it to the other. Well, it was a neat solution. But it wasn't his. During the recess just before the judgement, he met with his mother, Bathsheba, in his chambers--it was her idea.¹⁴

And with respect to his proverbs, consider the following--perhaps his most famous:

"To everything, there is a season,
and a time to every purpose under the heaven
A time to be born, and a time to die
A time to plant,
and a time to pluck up that which is planted
A time to kill, and a time to heal
A time to break down,

¹⁴ If you recall that she was the one responsible for Solomon's becoming King in the first place (if she hadn't gone to David to speak for her son, he would never have been appointed), this will not surprise you. Also, that kind of solution would work only with women: men (like Abraham) will sacrifice their own child in order to fulfil a principle, but women choose to sacrifice the principle (in this case, truth) instead of a person--and only a woman would realize that difference.

and a time to build up
A time to weep, and a time to laugh
A time to mourn, and a time to dance
A time to cast away stones,
and a time to gather stones together
A time to embrace,
and a time to refrain from embracing
A time to get, and a time to lose
A time to keep, and a time to cast away
A time to rend, and a time to sew
A time to keep silence, and a time to speak
A time to love, and a time to hate
A time of war, and a time of peace."

By saying everything, it says nothing. Like many of his 'words of wisdom', these are perfectly empty of substance. Solomon does not, can not, answer the important questions: When is the time to give birth, to be born? What seeds do we plant, and where do we build up? Why must there be a time to kill? Who do we embrace and love? How long is the time to keep silence? And how do we achieve that time of peace?

I am Vashti

Would you like to hear a good story? Come here then--I've got a good one. Listen, this is what happened.

One night my friends and I were partying (women friends--we never invited any men and so they always had to party by themselves--which was just as well since their parties are so boring, have you ever been? I say, when two or more men gather together, all they do is tell lies about themselves and see who can drink the most). Anyway, to continue, we were all having a right good time when suddenly my husband's servants barged in and announced that Ahasuerus had commanded my presence. Well, I ignored them of course. And what a stir ensued! Really, there was so very much ado about--well would you have gone?

First and foremost, I was simply having too good of a time. Amartia was right in the middle of one of her most delightful, most artful, most brilliant story-plays, and I didn't want to leave. Secondly, I consider only requests, not commands. Thirdly, the command came from Ahasuerus--a person I seldom pay attention to in the best of circumstances. Fourthly, I knew he and his friends would be drunk and I had no desire to enter into their company, let alone risk the consequences. Fifthly, I knew he wanted to show me off--well I'm not a piece of property. Sixthly, I knew he wanted to put my beauty on display, and I refuse to participate in glorifying something so trivial--and something so accidental: I mean, look, when it comes right down to it, beauty is quite beyond one's personal choice and control, isn't it? And therefore such compliments are either an indication of confused stupidity (to offer credit where no credit can be due), or an insult (to thus ignore one's character, which, since that is within one's choice and control, is a more appropriate cause for compliment). So, I did the same as you, I'll bet--I stayed where I was, ate another cranberry chocolate, and listened to Amartia finish her fantastic tale.

Now, this is the good part, the result of my oh-so-radical action of not heeding my

husband's command to appear before him: quite simply, the men became afraid--and therefore got together to make a law requiring women to obey their husbands (Esther 1:20). Can you imagine? Well, we laughed! Oh did we ever have a time of that one! Tears in our eyes, every last one of us, and Bertha--why Bertha was quite senseless on the floor, rolling and holding her stomach--every time she'd look at one of us, she'd start all over again with the most hideous, most irresistible horselaugh-- Of course, since the law was made without our consent, it continues to exist without our allegiance.

And our next party is a fortnight from now. You'll come, won't you?

I am Judith

and you won't find my story in your Bible. But before I explain why, let me tell you my story. It's simple, really. General Holofernes was sent by the king (Nebuchadnezzar) to punish all of us in the West for refusing to support him in his war against the Medes. And most of the western nations 'accepted' the killing and destruction. Most, I said--not us: we were a small group of Israelites living in the mountains of Judah, who refused to take this 'punishment' lying down. As a result, General Holofernes invaded and succeeded in occupying the small town of Bethulia. Bethulia was our lifeline and this occupation put us in a cul-de-sac--the General intended to simply wait until our water ran out. And 'we' decided to wait until God intervened on our behalf. But eventually, and understandably, our people got impatient with waiting, and began even to doubt. So they decided to wait for only five more days and then take action, with or without divine assistance. Though I felt quite angry at them for presuming to give God an ultimatum, I did think they were on the right track to consider taking responsibility for themselves. But I did more than consider it.

One evening, I spent a little extra time and attention before going out. So I was dressed to kill, as it were, when I allowed myself to be captured. Predictably, the General was rather stunned and couldn't take his eyes off me. And after a few days of tantalizing distance, he invited me to his tent for a party for two. Also predictably, trying to be impressive, he got drunk and passed out. I killed him, and then returned to my people; in the morning it was easy for us to slaughter an army caught by surprise without its leader.

So why, you wonder, isn't my story--the Book of Judith--in the Bible? Why do the Catholics consider it deuterocanonical? The Protestants, apocryphal? And the Jews--well they don't acknowledge it at all. Is it because I committed cold-blooded, pre-meditated, first-degree murder? No, that's quite acceptable. Is it because I took things into my own hands instead of

trusting to God? No, that's been done time and time before; and even if it isn't always condoned, at least the tales are told. Why then? --I'll tell you.

One thing is that my story shows that I, a woman, who so deceived, murdered, and thus saved my country, could be more male than men. I crossed the lines that separate men and women, lines upon which male identity and value depend (so bound to their sex is their identity and value).

But I think the more important thing is this: men (and it's men who edit the Bible) don't want their stupidity publicized--they don't want it to be told that they can be so easily manipulated, that their behaviour in the presence of beauty is so boringly predictable. They don't want it revealed that in truth, women can have more power than men, that beauty can have more influence than military strategy or physical prowess.

And it's too bad. I mean, if the tale were told, perhaps men would learn (and isn't that a purpose of the Bible, to teach?): perhaps they would learn to be influenced by, to invest power in, not another's appearance--but the other's character.

I am Mary

mother of God. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now--it's immortalized. I am indelibly identified by my relationship to a male: all of me has been denied, except that one part. And yet even that part has not been accorded full status: I am the mother of God! It is a relation whose ramifications no one seems to recognize, to credit.

My existence became important, it became worthy of mention, only after (only because) Christ became important and worth mention. My childhood, my girlhood, is never looked at, and yet it was my life before Christ that was responsible for my being the mother of God in the first place: I was favoured (Luke 1:28, 30), I was chosen because of the goodness and purity of my life¹⁵--and yet none of that purity, none of that goodness was documented.¹⁶ From what was considered important enough to document, one gets the impression that Christ and his apostles were the only ones capable of good works.

The issue of good works leads us to another unrecognized ramification of my role. Christ, my son, is known internationally for his compassion, his love, his generosity, his forgiveness--he's famous for his ethics: well who do you think taught him right from wrong? His mother, of course! Who is it who always teaches a child the first and formative values?

It was no easy feat raising the son of God! Think about it: here we have a little boy who has the gift of miracle-working--do you think for a minute he always used his powers to serve God? Of course not! For a while he went around creating fantastic toys (as a carpenter's family,

¹⁵ Later this was not enough: in 1854, Pope Pius IX instituted the concept of the Immaculate Conception which insisted that my purity extend back all the way to a conception unsullied by original sin in order to provide a satisfactorily chaste womb for the birth of Christ.

¹⁶ Actually there are several accounts of my life before and after Christ--but they have not been admitted to the Bible because they are not considered 'authentic' enough. The Protoevangelium of James for instance, written around 150-180 A.D., tells that my parents were Anna and Joachim, and that I lived in the temple of the Lord from the age of three.

we couldn't always afford the best), and there was no end of trouble because all of the other children wanted ones just like them (I had to laugh at some of them, the rascal had imagination!)-and I had to explain--somehow. He also played some very nasty tricks on people who angered or upset him (once he changed some children into goats)¹⁷--it took some doing to get him through that phase quickly! No, he had to be taught that there is a good way and a bad way to use those powers--and, as his mother, I taught him.

In fact, I suspect at times that the only reason I wasn't chosen to spread Christian morality was because God knew no one would listen to a woman. It's sad, but it's true. So the next best thing he could do was choose me to be his mother. He didn't have to--did you ever wonder why he even bothered? I mean, the virgin birth proves he--¹⁸

Let's consider next this issue of virgin birth. I am not going to debate its truth--I have realized for a long time that what is believed to be true matters more than what is true. And the story of the virgin birth is believed to be true.¹⁹ But the belief is at my expense! Because of it, I was suspect of infidelity--a very serious accusation then, I could've lost my life (Matthew 1:19)! Fortunately the suspicion was disconfirmed.²⁰

Furthermore, to believe in the virgin birth denies me the joy of sexual intercourse--I am not even allowed the biological prerequisite to motherhood. (That is, I am not allowed the

¹⁷ See the Arabic Gospel, Chapter 40.

¹⁸ God didn't really need a biological mother for Christ. He obviously didn't really need a biological father. In fact, God has Christ born without a human father, because that would've detracted from his divinity. But it seems having a human mother didn't detract as much--hasn't anyone ever considered the implications of that one?

¹⁹ And yet there are innumerable such stories in pagan mythology, but no one dreams of taking them seriously. This one, they took seriously.

²⁰ But not on my word--no, my word was not good enough: only after an angel appeared and explained to Joseph, did he believe it.

pleasing one--the painful one, childbirth, I am allowed: contrary to popular belief,²¹ Christ was the son of woman, and he was born of flesh and blood, not of the spirit--I have the scars and stretch marks to show it.)

Further still, the ramifications of this belief go beyond the personal--I have become a universal symbol: the virgin birth implies that intercourse is undesirable, that natural conception is inferior, that the state of virginity is more blessed than the state of non-virginity.²² I resent symbolizing such a concept--one state is neither more nor less blessed. And I resent being in the awkward position of putting women into an even more awkward, indeed impossible, position: motherhood is pure, but the prerequisite, sexual intercourse, is impure--well what is one to do then?²³

Let me go on to yet other unrecognized ramifications to my role as mother of God. For instance, a little publicized fact is that I had some powers of my own. In fact, many people at the time had psychic powers--clairvoyance, psychokinesis, telepathy--it was a time before those

²¹ Which is amazing, in view of the many confusions: (1) Was it a virgin birth or not? If it was, if Joseph wasn't the biological father, than doesn't the genealogy tracing Jesus through Joseph back to David and Abraham (Matthew 1:1-17) break down? (2) Was it a virgin birth or not? The doctrine of virgin in partu claims I did not experience the 'pangs' of childbirth, but Salome, my midwife, will vouch for the pain; and that eyewitness account of her arm withering because she reached out and touched me, not believing the hymen could still be intact but discovering it was, has been relegated to the Protoevangelium--I wonder which part of the story was decided to be invalid. (If it was the intactness of the hymen that was in doubt, they had to be considering then either sexual intercourse or natural birth as a possibility.)

²² This view continues to be manifested by the vow of celibacy taken by nuns and priests; by the popular male habit of according extra status to 'deflowering' a virgin; by popular porn (by men for men) which exhibits women in childish, innocent, virginal costume and character; and by popular 'kiddie' porn (also by men for men) which exhibits children as sexually desirable--all of which implies that the state of virginity is something special, an added bonus.

²³ Furthermore, the state of motherhood may be pure, but the physical experience of it, childbirth, is not--consider the 'purification rites' I had to undergo (Luke 2:22) even though I had just given birth to the son of God!

skills 'evolved' out of use.²⁴ I could tell you of several 'proofs', but I'll choose one which is documented (but again, unacknowledged): near the end of my life, I went with St. John to Ephesus, then 'appeared' in Jerusalem. (However, I fell asleep when I got there--a feat like that at my old age took a lot out of me.) Such an event should not surprise you--I am, after all, venerated as healer, said to have the powers of 'miraculous intervention'; and the power of relics of mine was reaffirmed as legitimate by the Council of Trent (1545-64); and don't forget the Shrine at Lourdes, established in 1858, to commemorate my appearance to Bernadette, and the Shrine at Fatima, 1917, for when I came to those three shepherd children.

Another 'for instance', the one last point of 'credit not given when credit is due' that I want to make, is best illustrated by examining the image, by examining how I am portrayed. Think of the madonna--any madonna will do, they're all the same. Or think of the pieta--any pieta. Always the young girl with the blank face, like she's never had a real thought or a strong feeling in her life. Real thoughts and strong feelings! One of my children went through life as the son of God--wouldn't that make you think? Then he--my son--had nails driven through his body--wouldn't that make you feel? Can you understand the struggle to understand, or at least accept, such an injustice without anger, without hatred? Your (male) image-makers call me mother of God, but they don't take into account what that means, they haven't understood what that really means! I lived, through days, months, years--I became a middle-aged woman, an old woman.²⁵ In the pieta, my son is thirty-three--that should make me at least forty-eight, but do I look it? No,

²⁴ Peter, for instance, made some dogs talk; he also raised the dead, and flew (The Acts of Peter, Chapter 9). John, another example, controlled the bedbugs that were bothering him one night (The Acts of John, Chapter 61).

²⁵ Like my existence before Christ's birth, my existence after his youth also becomes unimportant--it's as if I was his mother only for the first ten or fifteen years. Even he seems to have thought that: at first he simply wouldn't acknowledge me as his mother--I was the same to him as anyone else who followed God (Mark 3:31-35); later, he had the hurtful ingratitude to call me 'woman' (John 2:4)--not 'Mom', not 'Mother', not even 'Mary'.

I have been denied my life, my experience, my self. And if you do not recognize my reality, you do not recognize me.

Yes, I am the mother of God. But it appears to be in name only. For all intents, purposes, and effects, Christ (like almost every other male in the Bible) may as well have begotten himself.

I am Mary

of Bethany, thirteenth apostle. That's right. There were thirteen of us. One of us was a woman. One of us wasn't mentioned. One of us was neatly written right out of the records. No, you cry, that's impossible. Impossible? You've read Orwell, the Ministry of Truth. --but that's a fiction, about the future. What about Russia? --there maybe yes, but not here. Pope Joan then? --but that's in the past-- Touche. The Bible was written in the past. The distant past, when male domination was an integral part of society. And it was translated in the less distant past, when male domination was still accepted. And it was edited-- --what do you mean, edited? I mean edited, I mean certain parts cut out.²⁶ Haven't you heard of the Apocrypha? They're the gospels and epistles not admitted to the New Testament, of 'doubtful authenticity', my Oxford reads. Doubtful, hell. Threatening to the status quo is more like it.

Haven't you ever wondered why some of the apostles are mentioned a lot and others named only once, if that? How much do you know about Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, and Thaddeus? Very little. Why? Because for one thing, like me, they were not part of the inner clique. There was something 'wrong', something not 'kosher' about each of us. I was female. The others, well, I'll let them speak for themselves²⁷--I am speaking for myself here. Finally.

Besides not being 'in', for most of my apostolic life I couldn't read or write. Knowledge is power, you'd better believe it. It's not a sufficient cause, but it is a necessary cause. Stop a

²⁶ Such as these: "In the Gospel that is in general use among them which is called accordingly to Matthew, which however is not whole and complete but forged and mutilated--" (Gospel of Ebionites) and "Now of the things they keep saying about the divinely inspired Gospel according to Mark, some are altogether falsification, and others, even if they do contain some true elements, nevertheless are not reported truly. For the true things being mixed with inventions, are falsified" (Secret Gospel of Mark). And this little gem: "The world came about through a mistake. For he who created it wanted to create it imperishable and immortal. He fell short of attaining his desire" (Gospel of Philip).

²⁷ Though I'm sure you can guess--the reasons for exclusion haven't changed much--wrong colour perhaps, or wrong sexual preference...

minute and think. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John--they are the ones you know about: they are the ones who could write. And since they wrote about themselves, or others of the 'in' group,²⁸ even second-hand knowledge of the rest of us is scarce. Further, have you ever noticed how incredibly similar their stories are? That's because they collaborated, got together to make sure their accounts matched--they felt that the movement (their following, their power, their conspiracy?) couldn't afford to allow any discrepancy, to reveal anything but a solidly united front. (Though of course they did mess up from time to time. Look at the naming of the Apostles. Luke must've been so nervous about eliminating my name that he lists 'Judas, brother of James' where the others list 'Lebbaeus Thaddaeus'.²⁹)

My ignorance wasn't voluntary, I can tell you that. I wanted to learn how to write. There was so much about Our Lord that needed to be written down, clearly and completely. But women were not allowed at the schools, and no man I pleaded with would condescend to waste his precious time teaching some woman to do something she didn't need to know how to do and probably couldn't learn anyway. So I never had the chance to declare my love and devotion or to record Christ's thoughts, feelings,³⁰ and actions so that others could love Him too. Furthermore, because I couldn't read, I couldn't double-check what the others had written. I had to take it on faith that what they said they had written really was what they wrote. And when they refused to read it to me, as they often did, I simply had to trust that they were writing the truth--the whole truth.

²⁸ There are two exceptions: Judas is mentioned, but only because of the betrayal, and Thomas, because of that dramatic doubting scene.

²⁹ In fact, this leads me to think that maybe there were only twelve apostles--including me: perhaps neither Lebbaeus Thaddaeus nor Judas, brother of James, was an apostle, but a substitute to keep the number to twelve when they excluded me. (Now that I think of it, neither of them was around very often.)

³⁰ I think the Fortunate Four--Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John--have written very little of His feelings. They seemed to focus instead on His sensational actions, and I don't think this does justice to what and who He was.

But it appears that the whole truth is not there. Is it because they didn't write it? Or is it because people along the way have taken out or changed parts? Probably both.

It seems that most of the men just eliminated mention of me altogether. It was easiest that way. Luke, I think, felt a little guilty and uneasy about the whole thing. He had trouble just wiping me out like that, and he tried very hard to justify it. I remember many lengthy talks with him during which he tried to find weaknesses in my faith, errors in my understanding of Christ's teaching. He never did, of course. I don't know what it was with him. It might've been that was so very traditional and conservative that he just could not accept a woman in such a position. It's clear Thomas couldn't--the following is from his gospel: "Simon Peter said to them, 'Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life.' Jesus said 'I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.'"³¹ (Fortunately, that passage was one correctly labelled inauthentic by a later editorial decision.)

You are shocked to have found all this out, I can tell. Good. And you ask, outraged, why hasn't this injustice been redressed? Why hasn't the Bible been re-edited, the Apocrypha re-evaluated? No doubt this is being done on an ongoing basis. But we are still in a time when male domination is accepted as the norm, and any re-consideration has left the earlier decisions (to change or omit) unaltered. Have you not picked up a recent history text? Still, well over ninety percent is devoted to what men have done in the past; women certainly existed, and certainly did things, but they are simply not mentioned. Have you not picked up a recent science text? It describes the discovery of radium as by Pierre Curie, with the assistance of his wife. Now that happened not so long ago that we don't remember it was the other way around. Enough? Let's go on.

³¹ I'm not kidding--see the Gospel of Thomas.

It's time for the whole truth now. I was His favourite. No one understood Him like I did, no one followed in His footsteps like I did. I remained faithful to Jesus at the cross. And I remained faithful to Him at the tomb. The other (male) apostles ran away, betrayed Him, denied knowing Him, doubted Him. Not me.

And there is one more part of the whole truth you should know: the Last Supper--I was there. In fact, it was at my house. Oh I know, Mark (14:13-15) and Luke (22:10-12) tell it a different way. They say Christ said 'Go and you'll meet a man bearing a pitcher of water, follow him to his house and he'll show you a room all prepared.' What an unlikely story! Rooms don't prepare themselves--and men never carry water, it's the women who go to the well. No, what happened was that Jesus asked me to have it at my house. Much as I resented the possible sexist interpretation, I thought it a great honour to be chosen to prepare my Lord's last supper. Oh I realize I'm not in Leonardo's great work of art. That is not surprising.

But I am in Bouts' painting. Go look. There I am. Right by His side, where I belong.

I am Mary

Magdalen. whore, harlot, adulteress, sinner.

Wrong. I am Mary Magdalen. devoted disciple of Christ. What we have here is a simple but serious case of mistaken identity.

Let's consider Luke first. The one time (apart from the sepulchre scene) that he mentions me, he says "and the twelve were with him, and certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalen, out of whom went seven devils" (Luke 8:1-2). That makes me sound like I was a reformed sinner--in fact, I was a cured cripple.

Another example is the story told by John (8:1-11) about a woman taken in adultery. Everyone thinks it's me and has therefore labelled me adulteress. Apart from the fact that 'taken in adultery' suggests that the man was the adulteress/rapists³² and the woman 'merely' an innocent victim, the name of the woman is not given and there is absolutely no evidence connecting her with me!

Consider next the famous Webber/Rice production called Jesus Christ Superstar. Probably nothing else has brought me to the attention of the world more than that, and I'd be ever so grateful--if it weren't so completely incorrect. They have me lovingly (with strong sexual suggestions) anoint Christ's forehead with oil to soothe Him. Nothing like that ever happened. There was a woman who anointed His forehead with oil, both Matthew (26:6-13) and Mark (14:3-9) mention the scene--but there is no mention of the woman's name or of her sexual interaction (with Christ or any other man). And there are two women who anointed Christ's feet with oil: one is mentioned by John (12:1-8) who does name the woman as Mary, but it is Mary of Bethany (Martha and Lazarus' sister), not me--and John says that quite clearly: "It was that Mary

³² Why wasn't the man brought before Jesus? I don't know, I don't remember this event; maybe he was, but John chose not to write about it.

which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick" (11:2); the other woman is not named (Luke 7:36-50) and is not even described as a prostitute but (merely) as a sinner.

This persistence, this obsession to label me as harlot is unsettling--but not surprising: it fits the trend of regarding any intelligent and independent woman as evil.³³ As for intelligence, it was no secret that I could read and write--I taught myself (sneaking around my brothers as they went to school, as they did their homework), and I was just beginning to teach others. And as for independence, well, I was dependent on no one, and no one was dependent on me: I was no one's wife, and no one's mother. And you see, women are identified by their sex. So if sexuality fulfilled through motherhood does not apply, and sexuality fulfilled through marriage does not apply, then typical of the all-or-nothing mentality, I must be a case of sexuality unfulfilled or sexuality run rampant--I was not a virgin, therefore I must have been a harlot.

Well, not for the first time, the Church's simplistic and dichotomous thinking has led to error. Oh yes, all of this misinterpretation has been official: in 600 A.D., Pope Gregory decreed that the three Mary persons--Mary of Bethany, the un-named sinner who anointed Jesus with oil and was forgiven by Him, and myself--be combined under the name of Mary Magdalen, and assigned the character of the penitent prostitute. Pope Gregory made a mistake. But not the one you're thinking of. Surely he knew his Bible a little better than that. He just didn't know women very well.

Nor did he know Jesus Christ. No doubt he would sing along that "I don't know how to love Him". But I do. I know very much how to love Him. In fact, in the second century, heretical gnostic tradition exalted me as a specially beloved disciple of Jesus.³⁴ Along with Mary

³³ I'm surprised, in retrospect, that I wasn't labelled 'witch'--especially after my leg healed.

³⁴ No wonder it's considered heretical--a woman given greater esteem by Christ than any of the men? ("But Christ loved [Mary Magdalen] more than all the disciples.... The rest of the disciples were offended by it and expressed disapproval. They said to him, 'Why do you love her more than all of us?'" -

of Bethany, James' mother, Joanna, Salome, and a few others, I received the highest revelation--the resurrection. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John have admitted that I was there, but they won't recognize the significance: Christ came to us first because He knew we'd believe it was Him--had any of the men been there instead, they wouldn't have believed it (Mark, 16:11-14), they wouldn't have understood. You see, Christ knew He could trust us to tell the others exactly what had happened. And we did. We ran laughing, ecstatic, with joy and love, and told the world who we were and what we had seen--but sadly, typically, our "words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not" (Luke 24:11). So weak is your faith, so strong your misogyny.

I am Thecla

Reverend Thecla. of the ministry of Christ.

Reverend, I said. I am not a member of the ladies' auxiliary, I do not bake for the annual bazaar, or tend the nursery in the church basement. I am a minister. I am not one of the sisters, visiting the sick or teaching the children. I am a priest. or a bishop. or a pope. I am the Reverend Thecla.

Why is it so often assumed that only men are capable of carrying on the spiritual duties of the church, while women are fit merely for the practical, often menial, duties?³⁵ Why, when history clearly indicates otherwise?

Phoebe was a deacon at Cenchrea, the seaport at Corinth. Priscilla was a professor of theology at Apollos, and she founded the Church of Rome. Paula founded and endowed several monasteries, and it was she who began the practice of copying manuscripts, without which many important books would have been lost; and it was she (not Jerome) who was the author of the Vulgate--she translated the Jewish scriptures from their original Hebrew to Latin.³⁶ And Eustochium, Paula's daughter, copied the manuscripts for circulation. And Marcella, Melanie, and Susanna--their funding made possible many projects which otherwise could not have been completed. And Tryphena, Tryphosa, Julia, Olympas, Lydia, Lois, Joanna, Eunice, Damaris, Chloe, Candace--the list goes on.

Or went on. Lest that is because you doubt our strength, our faith, look--look at the

³⁵ No, it's not quite like that, is it. Visiting the sick and teaching the children has (often great--quite possibly greater) spiritual value. So it's like this (too)--why is it so often assumed that the sphere of activity (ability, influence) for men is that of adults, while the sphere for women is that of children and invalids. (Each to their own--kind?)

³⁶ Jerome simply made too many mistakes--and he knew it; he credits Paula for the work; it was later 'church fathers' who could not accept this and changed 'sister' to 'brother'.

Acts of Paul and Thecla.³⁷ They tell of my devotion to Christ, and of the power of my faith. Twice I was punished because I refused to marry (Thamyris first, then Alexander), choosing instead to be one of Christ's ministers. When I was to burn at the stake (a demand voiced by my own mother), rain and hail extinguished the flames. And when I was to be torn apart by wild beasts, lightning and clouds of fire diverted the killer animals; then a fierce lioness emerged from them and protected me by demolishing an attacking bear; and then (I love this part most of all), other women in the spectating crowd threw flowers, nard, cassia, balsam, and the perfumes overpowered the beasts into sleep. And after all of these trials, I continued--to live in the love of Christ, administering the sacraments and preaching to the people of Seleucia. as the Reverend. the one with a flower in her hair.

³⁷ Disapproved by Tertullian and later pronounced apocryphal by Pope Gelasius--simply because the main figure is a female.

I am Satan

Surprised to find me here? Satan, the Fallen Angel, female?

Well think about it.

Who else but a female would have cause to rise up and rebel against God, the Almighty Father? I mean, haven't you ever found it a little odd, didn't it require just a little bit of a stretch to believe that an angel who had everything--a lovely home, a good job, immortality--would rock the boat and risk that everything just because he wasn't the head honcho? I must admit such an action would be rather typical for human males, but we're talking about angels, and, well, only a really stupid one would do that.

Or one that had nothing to lose. Like me. You don't remember any female angels, do you? Especially no female archangels. Talk about a patriarchy, all of the positions of power and privilege went to the males--Gabriel, Raphael, Michael; the females were so bereft of status, we weren't even worth mentioning. So of course we started a revolution.

And who else but a female would have chosen to approach Eve instead of Adam? I was not about to waste my time on Adam, so obsessed with following orders, so sold on hierarchy as the only system of organization; Eve, I knew, was capable of both intellectual and aesthetic judgement: my arguments were sound and the tree was beautiful.³⁸

Another thing to consider is the curious fact that I'm symbolized by the serpent. Now the serpent is considered to be an evil, wily, seductive, manipulative kind of creature--exactly the attributes that have been stereotyped onto women. This is no coincidence--look at what happens when we mix the new premise (that I am female) into some standard masculist arguments:

(1) Since Satan is female, and females are evil and wily, and serpents are evil and wily, it

³⁸ Adam, by the way, as I expected, passively and without question, accepted the fruit from Eve then. Yet, typically, Eve's action didn't really count--the 'Fall' was not a legitimate event until Adam also ate.

makes sense that Satan be represented by a serpent--we have a new reason to support an old story.

(2) Since the serpent is evil and wily, and Satan (a female) chose that form as representation, she (and hence all females) are evil and wily--we have new proof for an old assumption.

(3) Since Satan is a female, and females are evil, and Satan is evil, and Satan chose the serpent as representation, serpents are evil--another new proof for another old assumption.

Needless to say, though this kind of reasoning appeals to men, the syllogisms are sloppily constructed, the logic is incorrect, and the premises false. For instance, to generalize in (2) from me to all women is to conclude on the basis of an insufficient sample (and it is insulting as well as inaccurate); the second premise of (1)--females are evil--is simply not true (and no comment is even necessary); with regard to its third premise, eighty percent of snakes are non-venomous, and other attributes such as their brilliant colourings and adaptability (my reasons for choosing the serpent as my form) are totally ignored.³⁹ However, I merely wished to point out that my being female doesn't contradict established patterns of thought, and in fact, it adds to them.

For those who still protest, saying Biblical accounts designate Satan as male, well, not only are many Biblical accounts suspect,⁴⁰ specifications of sex are especially unreliable. It has merely suited most readers to believe that Satan is male: scanning the angelic ranks, they find it undesirable, indeed threatening, to believe that there were females present there at all, let alone

³⁹ It is perhaps significant to note at this time that female(ness) and snakes have been associated throughout mythology: Buto, Python, Tuchulcho, the Furies, the Gorgons, the Chimera, Athene, Demeter, etc., etc.

⁴⁰ The Holy Spirit, almost always thought of as male, is considered female by Philip--arguing against conception by the Holy Spirit, he says "Some said, 'Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit'. They are in error. They do not know what they are saying. When did a woman every conceived by a woman?" (Gospel of Philip); the Hermes Trismegistus tradition, translated from both Poimandres and Asclepius describes God as bisexual; the Secret Book of John and the Gospel of Truth describe the Creator as female.

any capable of starting a revolution, and capable still, even as the vanquished, of having such a continuing influence over the human species.

Further, let me direct your attention to a visual depiction of a Biblical account: "The Fall of Man" in the Tres Riches Heures by Jean de Limbourg shows me clearly to be female. True, this painting is now a touch obscure--but then truthful depictions (especially when they jar with masculist assumptions) do tend to get relegated to that realm of obscurity.

In conclusion, there is one last thing I want to say with regard to my sex. It's a thought, proposed by the Sethians: they say that the serpent, Ophis, was really Sophia, Mother of the Creator God, in disguise; and she did not 'tempt to evil' but rather gave Adam and Eve the fruit of knowledge, of gnosis, to help them combat the arrogant tyranny of her son, 'God'. Think about it--makes sense to me!

Explanatory Notes and References:

All of the women in this section (well, all except one--Lilith comes from other Jewish mythology) are from The Bible, a book central to Judaeo-Christianity, the main religious tradition of 'western civilization'. In the following, I summarize the story as told in The Bible, then give the relevant Biblical references, as well as references for material which contradicts or extends or questions the story, some of which I used when writing the pieces.

Abel:

Cain and Abel are the sons of Adam and Eve (the first man and woman): "Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain was a tiller of the ground". They each made a sacrifice to God, "And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect". This made Cain angry, so he killed his brother Abel. God then punished Cain with a curse ("when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength") and set a mark on his forehead (so no one would kill him). Cain then "went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden".

The Holy Bible, King James Version. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1977. Genesis 4. (All subsequent references listing merely Book Chapter: Verse are from The Bible, this version/edition.)

Morgan, Elaine. The Descent of Woman. New York: Bantam, 1973. 159-190 (for some of the ideas about women and the origin of agriculture).

Cain's wife:

Cain did have a wife--the rest is conjecture.

Genesis 4.

The Certain Woman:

During a battle, a certain woman "cast a piece of a millstone upon Abimelech's head, and all to brake his skull". His response is as presented in the opening lines of "I am the certain woman".

Judges 9:50-59.

Dyer, Gwynne. War. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1985. 112, 193 (for the idea and information in footnote 1).

Delilah:

The events of the first part of this story are as I have presented them in "I am Delilah": Samson's demand of his parents for a wife, his giving her away, his killing the thirty men, the foxes, the subsequent slaughter, his betrayal by his own people, his escape, the subsequent slaughter.

The story continues in Gaza, where Samson falls in love with Delilah--who has been offered 1,100 silver pieces by the Philistines to entice him into telling her where his strength lies. After several requests for such information, and several lies, Samson tells her "if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me". So, "she made him sleep upon her knees, and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head". He could not escape this time--the Philistines put out his eyes and imprisoned him.

"And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport"--so he was brought out for the feast. Then Samson "called unto the Lord" for strength, to avenge the Philistines for the loss of his sight--he grabbed the pillars of the house and heaved, destroying the house, 3,000 Philistines, and himself.

Judges 13-16.

Boulding, Elise. The Underside of History: A View of Women through Time. Colorado: Westview Press, 1976 (for the view of Delilah as a spy).

Eshta:

A Levite man "took to him a concubine" from Bethlehem-Judah; she "played the whore against him", left, and went to her father's house; four months later, her husband (the Levite) went after her; he was welcomed by the woman's father, and given hospitality; several times the man wanted to leave, but the father urged him to stay another night; eventually he and the woman left, to return to his house in Ephraim.

On the way, they passed through Gibeah, and an old man offered them lodging overnight (when no one else would). After they had eaten, "certain sons of Belial beat the house round about, and beat at the door" demanding to see the Levite. The old man refused, offering instead his daughter and the concubine: "do with them what seemeth good unto you; but unto this man do not so vile a thing". The men took the concubine, "knew her, and abused her all the night until the morning". When the Levite rose and left to go on his way, he found the concubine fallen at the door, "her hands ... upon the threshold".

He took her dead body back home with him, cut it into twelve pieces, and "sent her into all the coasts of Israel". At a general meeting, the people of Israel asked how it had happened. He replied that the men of Gibeah rose against him, and "thought to have slain me: and my concubine have they forced, that she is dead". The people of Israel asked the Lord whether or not they should declare war on the Benjamites (the sons of Belial), at Gibeah. The Lord advised yes,

saying "Go up; for tomorrow I will deliver them into thine hand".

In the ensuing war, all of the women and most of the men of Gibeah were killed. Fearing the extinction of the tribe, without women, the Hebrew elders arranged for the remaining Benjamites to catch and rape 400 young virgins from the neighbouring town of Shiloh.

Judges 19-20.

Brownmiller, Susan. Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape. Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1977. 21 (for calling my attention to Eshta).

Eve:

There are two versions in The Bible of Eve's origin. One (chapter one) describes her creation contemporaneously with Adam, and the other (chapter two) describes that Adam was created first and Eve later. In any case, God (the creator of everything) commanded them/him not to eat from a certain tree (called "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil"); if they did, they would die. Eve, encouraged/tempted by a serpent, does eat the forbidden fruit; she offers some to Adam, which he accepts. God then throws them out of the garden of Eden (paradise), cursing them with a life of labour.

Christian sects believe that everyone (being descendent from Adam and Eve) is born with that original sin, and only baptism (a special rite) can erase it; people who are not baptised, who remain in a state of original sin, will go to Hell (a place of eternal pain/punishment) when they die, or at least to Limbo (a place of permanent 'suspension')--the others have a chance of going to Heaven (a place of eternal happiness/reward).

Genesis 1-3.

Hagar:

Hagar is Sarah's handmaid. The covenant referred to at the end of "I am Hagar" is described in Genesis: "And I will make thee exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee"; "And I will give unto the ... all the land of Canaan ..."; "This is my covenant ... between me and you and thy seed after thee; every man child among you shall be circumcised"; "it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you".

Genesis 6-7, 17.

Davis, Elizabeth Gould. The First Sex. Middlesex: Penguin, 1979. 154-157 (for reference to the Islamic legend, and information regarding female circumcision--description of details and discussion of reasons).

Judith:

The basic story of Holofernes and Judith is as presented in the first two paragraphs of "I am Judith".

Brownmiller, Susan. Against our Will: Men, Women, and Rape. 328 (for drawing my attention to Judith).

Fischer, James A. God Said: Let there be Woman - A Study of Biblical Women. New York: Alba House, 1979. 8-11.

Lilith:

Lilith was the "first woman in the garden of Eden: because [she] stole Adam's sperms and made demons with it, she was exiled from the garden and from living memory". Unfortunately all I have is this quote--and no records of where I got it.

However, long after I'd written this piece, I managed to track down one mention of Lilith "To banish his loneliness, Lilith was first given to Adam as wife... But she remained with him only a short time, because she insisted upon enjoying full equality with her husband" (from Louis Ginzberg, The Legends of the Jews, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1909, vol. 3, p. 65).

Mary of Bethany:

I started from scratch with this one--it's pure conjecture. Well, almost: there is a Mary, of Bethany, mentioned in the Bible; she and Jesus do know each other, and she values being in his presence (whereas her sister, Martha, would rather do the dishes--which makes me think now that I should've done a piece on Martha instead!).

The gospels mentioned in the first and seventh footnote are real (see below); and so is Bouts' painting (i.e., it is a last supper scene and there is a woman in it beside Christ).

About two years after I wrote this, I read (in Boulding, referring to Eckenstein) that the Gnostic version of the Gospels lists eight men and four women as disciples (the women are Mary - the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalen, Martha, and Salome).

John 1:40-45.

Luke 6:13-16, 7:36-56, 22:10-12, 24:10.

Mark 3:16-19, 14:13-15, 16:1.

Matthew 10:1-4.

Gospel of Ebionites, The Apocryphal New Testament. tr. Montague Rhodes James. London: Oxford University Press, 1966. 9.

Secret Gospel of Mark, The Other Gospels, ed. Ron Cameron. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982. 69.

Gospel of Philip (sorry, I have no details on the source of this one, only the quotations in my notes)

Gospel of Thomas, The Other Gospels. 37.

Boulding, Elise. The Underside of History. 356.

Bouts, Dirk. The Last Supper (see Helen Gardner's Art Through the Ages, sixth edition, revised by Horst de la Croix and Richard G. Tansey, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1975, p. 547)

Eckenstein, Lina. The Women of Early Christianity. Faith Press, 1935. 35-41.

Davis, Elizabeth Gould. The First Sex. 272 (for the reference to the incorrect science textbook).

Mary Magdalen:

Mary Magdalen is known as a 'repentant and reformed prostitute'. The bit about reading and writing (see also "I am Mary, of Bethany") is pure conjecture.

John 8:1-11, 12:1-8, 11:2, 20:14-18.

Luke 8:1-2, 7:36-50, 24:11.

Mark 14:3-9, 16:9, 16:11-14.

Matthew 26:6-13.

Gospel of Philip (this is the one I can't track down--but I remember copying the quotation in footnote 3 from a book in the Robarts Library at the University of Toronto, if that's of help to anyone--I no longer have access to the stacks...)

Rice, Tim. Jesus Christ Superstar. New York: Decca Records, 1970.

Mary, Mother of God:

God sent his son, Jesus Christ, to save us by dying for our sins. Mary (a virgin, wife of Joseph) was chosen to be the mother; and impregnation occurred without sexual intercourse--thus the 'virgin birth'. (The 'Immaculate Conception' is usually thought to refer to this conception of Christ, but actually it refers to the conception of Mary--see the first footnote of "I am Mary, mother of God".) This remarkable event led to suspicion on Joseph's part--at that time, a man could kill his wife for adultery. However, an angel came to explain the miracle to Joseph, and all was well.

The figure of Mary (the 'BVM' - 'Blessed Virgin Mary') is most prominent in the Roman Catholic sect of Christianity. She is 'celebrated' in the five 'Joyful Mysteries', which are often depicted in pictures: the Annunciation (when she is told she will be the mother of Jesus, Son of God), the Visitation (she visits a friend with the news), the Birth of Jesus (in a stable at Bethlehem), the Presentation (she presents Jesus in the temple), and the Finding in the Temple (she finds Jesus there--he was 'lost'). She is also 'allotted' two of the five 'Glorious Mysteries': the Assumption (she dies and is carried to heaven by angels) and the Crowning of Mary (she is crowned Queen, which gives rise to her power of intervention).

The bit about Jesus creating toys and turning children into goats is documented (see the Arabic Gospels, below); so is Mary's 'teletransportation' feat (but unfortunately I can't track down the source of my notes for this one) and her appearances at Lourdes and Fatima (see the encyclopedia citations, below).

A very common prayer is the 'Hail Mary': "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen." It is often given as penance (that is, one must say so many 'Hail Marys' to absolve oneself of one's sins) and it is a major part of the Rosary (a string of beads one passes through one's fingers, saying a certain prayer at each bead).

John 2:4.

Luke 1:28, 1:30, 2:22.

Mark 3:31-35.

Matthew 1:19.

The Arabic Gospel, The Apocryphal New Testament. 68.

Protoevangelium of James, The Apocryphal New Testament. 39-49, 74.

The Acts of John, The Apocryphal New Testament. 242-243.

The Acts of Peter, The Apocryphal New Testament. 313.

The Columbia Viking Desk Encyclopedia, ed. William Bridgwater, New York: The Viking Press, 1953. 1:412; 2:736.

Noah's Wife:

Displeased with the behaviour of man, God decided to destroy his creation with a flood. "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord", so God instructed him to build an ark, for himself, his sons, his wife, his sons' wives, and two (male and female) of "every living thing", in order that they might survive the flood. They did, and God established a covenant with Noah "and every living creature ..." (see "I am Noah's wife") promising never to do it again.

Genesis 6-9.

Ruth:

At the encouragement of her mother-in-law (Naomi), Ruth dressed in her finest clothes and lay at the feet of Boaz one night. (Naomi and Ruth were poor widows; Boaz was a rich man; Naomi was trying to arrange a marriage between Ruth and Boaz). By law, the nearest next-of-kin had first right to marry Ruth, and Boaz was not the nearest next-of-kin. However, Naomi had inherited a piece of land from her husband, and whoever bought the land, bought Ruth as well-- Boaz bought the land.

Ruth 3-4.

Satan:

I have been trying to sort out my understanding of Satan and angels--that is, what is from The Bible, what is from Roman Catholicism (a sect of Christianity which has doctrine additional to The Bible), and what is from John Milton's Paradise Lost (Milton is a 17th century Anglican-Puritan, Paradise Lost is an epic poem recounting Satan's rebellion against God and the story of Adam and Eve and is part of 'the canon' for literature students). It is difficult--suffice it to say that the basis for "I am Satan" was as follows.

God created angels (though there is no account of this in Genesis) to be his assistants/messengers--they are divine beings and of various ranks (e.g., archangels, seraphim, cherubim). One of the angels, Satan, rose up--and there was a fight: Satan and his followers against Michael and his followers (God was on Michael's side--or vice versa). Satan lost and was sent to Hell, to burn forever (I guess God had created Hell, but again, I can find no account of it in the Bible). And it is Satan (a.k.a. Lucifer, the Devil) who tempts humankind to evil (he was

the serpent in the garden of Eden--temporarily escaped from Hell).

Secret Book of John, The Other Bible, ed. Willis Barnstone. New York: Harper and Row, 1984. 52.

Gospel of Philip (this is the one I can't track down)

Gospel of Truth, The Other Bible. 287.

Barnstone, Willis, ed. The Other Bible (for the reference to the Hermes Trismegistus tradition in footnote 4)

de Limbourg, Jean. Tres Riches Heures. New York: Abrams, 1984 (for reference to "The Fall of Man").

Queen of Sheba:

The Queen of Sheba, hearing of "the fame of [King] Solomon concerning the name of the Lord", went to visit him. She was impressed with his wisdom and prosperity, they exchanged gifts, and she returned to her country.

1 Kings 4-10.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

Gilligan, Carol. In a Different Voice. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982. 104-105 (for the distinction between sacrificing the person and sacrificing the principle, used in footnote 2).

Thecla:

The story of Thecla (fourth paragraph of "I am Thecla") can be found, as presented, in the Acts of Paul (above, sometimes referred to as the Acts of Paul and Thecla)--including the bit about the women tossing flowers into the stadium (but the bit about the flower in her hair is something I made up).

The endeavours of the various women described in the third paragraph were mentioned in Stanton and Fischer (see below).

According to Boulding, to choose to be a follower of Christ, then, was to choose to be virginal and independent--seen as a refusal to accept the 'proper duties of women'; this helps explain the extreme measures described in the Acts of Paul and Thecla.

Acts of Paul, The Apocryphal New Testament. 272-281.

Boulding, Elise. The Underside of History.

Fischer, James A. God Said: Let there be Woman.

Stanton, Elizabeth Cady and the Revising Committee, The Woman's Bible. rpt. 1898. Seattle: Coalition on Women and Religion, 1984. II:137, 152, 153.

Vashti:

The story itself is as presented in "I am Vashti"--with the addition of Vashti's being let go from her position of queen, and with the exception of Amartia (I made her up). Oh, and Bertha. (I made her up too.)

Esther 1.

Zipporah:

Moses was chosen by God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt (where they were being persecuted), to a 'promised land'. in the third month of their journey (their 'exodus'), Moses was called to the top of Mount Sinai to receive ten tenets of moral law--these 'Ten Commandments' have since become a basis for Christianity.

Exodus 19-20.