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*Of the Equal or Unequal Sin of Adam and Eve:
An honorable disputation between the illustrious lord
Ludovico Foscarini, Venetian doctor of arts and both
laws, and the noble and learned and divine lady Isotta
Nogarola of Verona, regarding this judgment of
Aurelius Augustine: They sinned unequally according to
sex, but equally according to pride.¹*

Introduction

The dialogue translated below is one of the most significant works by a woman humanist penned during the Quattrocento. The dialogue, on the relative guilt of Adam and Eve, is a discussion between Ludovico Foscarini, a Venetian nobleman, and Isotta Nogarola, composed by Isotta (with Ludovico's encouragement) from letters exchanged between them.²

Ludovico Foscarini was a well-known figure in Venetian culture, a diplomat, lawyer and humanist.³ Between 1451 and 1453 he and Isotta developed a close friendship through their correspondence. Although only one of her letters to him survives (apart from these related to the Adam and Eve debate), a number of his to her exist, and they reveal a relationship as passionate as that of two lovers. More than anyone else, he lifted—for a time—her veil of isolation and allowed her to enter into the world of male culture more than she had done before or was to do afterwards. When she received a proposal of marriage she asked his advice; he told her in strong terms to maintain her present course—advice which she followed. She, in turn, suggested to him the possibility of giving up his life as a diplomat and entering a religious retreat similar to hers, but in two letters responding to her he suggested that she had chosen the nobler path, while he had chosen to serve Caesar. Thus it must remain.

Given the nature of the relationship between them, it is not surprising that in their epistolary discussion of the relative responsibility of Adam and Eve for the fall and its consequences, they engaged in a veritable battle of the sexes, with Isotta defending Eve and Ludovico Adam.

Ludovico opens the debate by stating but not defending his position that Eve was more guilty because she received a harsher punishment, was motivated by pride, and was the cause of Adam's sin (not he of hers). Isotta responds that Eve could not be more guilty than Adam because Eve was weaker, lacking in constancy. It was because of her weakness (rather than her pride) that she ate of the fruit of the tree. Moreover, even at the beginning, when God placed the two in Eden, he made Adam responsible, telling him (not them) not to eat of the fruit of the

tree of knowledge. Finally, Isotta contends, Eve was not given a harsher punishment, for while she was told that she would deliver children in pain, Adam was punished with labor and death.

Ludovico responds that Eve did not sin from ignorance or, if she did, is still responsible for her sin. If she was inconstant, she is responsible for that as well. Her sin was not her frailty but her pride, which was overweening. Moreover, Adam's punishment was not more severe than Eve's, for Eve became subject to labor and death as much as Adam did, in addition to which she also was punished with bearing children in pain.

So much for the refutation of Isotta's arguments. Turning to his own position, Ludovico contends that Eve sinned more greatly because it was on her account that Adam sinned. She set the example for Adam and he, out of his love for her, followed it.

To this Isotta responds that Eve's ignorance was not crass or affected but implanted by God, and ignorance of this kind certainly excuses sin. Her inconstancy, then, derives from the fact that she was created an imperfect creature to begin with. Adam, on the other hand, was created perfect. It was to Adam that God gave dominion over the earth. Even Adam's body was more perfect, since God created Adam's body himself, but he created Eve's body from Adam's.

Still further, even if Eve sinned out of pride (the desire to know good and evil), her sin was less than Adam's, who transgressed a divine commandment. So slight was Eve's sin, in fact, that no reference was made to her redemption. Her crime was not great enough to require redemption. Thus if man merited redemption, woman all the more so did, because her sin was less. Nor can Eve's case be compared with that of the fallen angels, who cannot plead Eve's weakness of nature.

That Adam's sin was greater than Eve's can be proved, Isotta continues, by the fact that it required Christ's suffering to redeem it. Neither can it be argued that Eve is more guilty because of her example—that she caused Adam to sin. For Eve was inferior to Adam. Therefore, Eve could not constrain Adam's free will. If he had free will, he is more guilty; and if he did not, it was God who took it from him, not Eve. Moreover, since Eve was weaker than Adam, she sinned less in following the serpent than Adam did in following her. The fact that Eve sinned before Adam (and hence for a longer time) is also of no consequence, since Eve was weaker; it was not the case of sin among equals. Finally, Eve's example does not make her more guilty. The Jews, who were not ignorant of God's laws, prophets and the signs concerning Christ, were condemned more harshly than Pilate, who was.

Ludovico responds that Eve's inconstancy was not innate but rather a moral choice. And even if Eve were inferior to Adam, nonetheless God implanted reason in her sufficient for the health of her soul. If she were created to console Adam she failed and, instead, brought him sorrow. The argument that Adam broke a divine commandment does not acquit Eve, since she did not keep the commandment either. Finally, regarding the discussion of Eve's example, Ludovico avers that the female sex in general is deceitful. His words close the debate.

Structurally, the arguments just recounted are the same as those of Eve's weakness to excuse her from responsibility. It is that of Adam, while Ludovico argues that Eve's weakness should condemn her both for her own sin and for the limited character of Eve's sin to minimize the culpability of Adam's sin (against a divine commandment that required Christ to redeem it), while Ludovico argues that Eve's sin was a commandment and that Eve's was never more severe than Adam's punishment was less than Adam's (painful labor and death), while Ludovico argues that it was greater than Adam's.

Who won the debate? Ingenuity and subtlety (the upper hand), Ludovico clearly won, for he argued only on a confession of Eve's weakness of nature. Isotta thoroughly accepted her culture's evaluation of Eve's sin and did not defend her sex without at the same time conceding to it.

This translation is based on the Latin text of *Seneca* 2:187–216.

LUDOVICO BEGINS: If it is in an attempt to excuse Eve of human sinfulness, then we must conclude that she is less condemned than Adam's [for transgressing] a just judge to a harsher punishment than she was made more like God, and she committed sins against the Holy Spirit. [Third], she sinned—sin—not he of hers; and although it is more severe, nevertheless none was more tolerable than hers.

ISOTTA: But I see things—since you are arguing from a different and contrary viewpoint. For where there is more sin, there there is less sin; and Eve [lacked sufficient strength] to resist less. Knowing [her weakness] that craftily she was thinking the man perhaps invulnerable [and she] in *Sentences* 2:⁴ Standing in the world, she did not boldly persuade, but approached her husband and said, "Do not eat of the tree of paradise?" She was not seeing that she doubted the words of God, "You will die," but "you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

[Adam must also be judged more guilty than Eve for greater contempt for the command. For he was commanded Adam, not Eve, where it was said, "Do not eat of the tree of paradise?"]

Structurally, the arguments just recounted are of three kinds. First, Isotta argues Eve's weakness to excuse her from responsibility both for her own sin and for that of Adam, while Ludovico argues Eve's pride and willful (moral) choice to condemn her both for her own sin and for Adam's. Second, Isotta argues the limited character of Eve's sin to minimize its harmfulness and the unlimited character of Adam's sin (against a divine commandment) to maximize its seriousness (it required Christ to redeem it), while Ludovico argues that both disobeyed a divine commandment and that Eve's was never redeemed. Finally, Isotta argues that Eve's punishment was less than Adam's (painful childbirth as opposed to labor and death), while Ludovico argues that it was greater (labor and death *and* painful childbirth).

Who won the debate? Ingenuity and imagination aside (in which Isotta holds the upper hand), Ludovico clearly won, because Isotta's defense is based essentially on a confession of Eve's weakness and inferiority to Adam. Isotta had so thoroughly accepted her culture's evaluation of the worth of women that she could not defend her sex without at the same time undermining its dignity.

This translation is based on the Latin text published by Abel in Nogarola, *Opera*, 2:187-216.

Text

LUDOVICO BEGINS: If it is in any way possible to measure the gravity of human sinfulness, then we should see Eve's sin as more to be condemned than Adam's [for three reasons]. [First], she was assigned by a just judge to a harsher punishment than was Adam. [Second], she believed that she was made more like God, and that is in the category of unforgiveable sins against the Holy Spirit. [Third], she suggested and was the cause of Adam's sin—not he of hers; and although it is a poor excuse to sin because of a friend, nevertheless none was more tolerable than the one by which Adam was enticed.

ISOTTA: But I see things—since you move me to reply—from quite another and contrary viewpoint. For where there is less intellect and less constancy, there there is less sin; and Eve [lacked sense and constancy] and therefore sinned less. Knowing [her weakness] that crafty serpent began by tempting the woman, thinking the man perhaps invulnerable because of his constancy. [For it says in] *Sentences* 2:⁴ Standing in the woman's presence, the ancient foe did not boldly persuade, but approached her with a question: "Why did God bid you not to eat of the tree of paradise?" She responded: "Lest perhaps we die." But seeing that she doubted the words of the Lord, the devil said: "You shall not die," but "you will be like God, knowing good and evil."⁵

[Adam must also be judged more guilty than Eve, secondly] because of his greater contempt for the command. For in Genesis 2 it appears that the Lord commanded Adam, not Eve, where it says: "The Lord God took the man and

placed him in the paradise of Eden to till it and to keep it," (and it does not say, "that they might care for and protect it") ". . . and the Lord God commanded the man" (and not "them"): "From every tree of the garden you may eat" (and not "you" [in the plural sense]), and, [referring to the forbidden tree], "for the day you eat of it, you must die," [again, using the singular form of "you"].⁶ [God directed his command to Adam alone] because he esteemed the man more highly than the woman.

Moreover, the woman did not [eat from the forbidden tree] because she believed that she was made more like God, but rather because she was weak and [inclined to indulge in] pleasure. Thus: "Now the woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for the knowledge it would give. She took of its fruit and ate it, and also gave some to her husband and he ate,"⁷ and it does not say [that she did so] in order to be like God. And if Adam had not eaten, her sin would have had no consequences. For it does not say: "If Eve had not sinned Christ would not have been made incarnate," but "If Adam had not sinned."⁸ Hence the woman, but only because she had been first deceived by the serpent's evil persuasion, did indulge in the delights of paradise; but she would have harmed only herself and in no way endangered human posterity if the consent of the first-born man had not been offered. Therefore Eve was no danger to posterity but [only] to herself; but the man Adam spread the infection of sin to himself and to all future generations. Thus Adam, being the author of all humans yet to be born, was also the first cause of their perdition. For this reason the healing of humankind was celebrated first in the man and then in the woman, just as [according to Jewish tradition], after an unclean spirit has been expelled from a man, as it springs forth from the synagogue, the woman is purged [as well].

Moreover, that Eve was condemned by a just judge to a harsher punishment is evidently false, for God said to the woman: "I will make great your distress in childbearing; in pain shall you bring forth children; for your husband shall be your longing, though he have dominion over you."⁹ But to Adam he said: "Because you have listened to your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I have commanded you not to eat" (notice that God appears to have admonished Adam alone [using the singular form of "you"] and not Eve) "Cursed be the ground because of you; in toil shall you eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to you, and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, since out of it you were taken; for dust you are and unto dust you shall return."¹⁰ Notice that Adam's punishment appears harsher than Eve's; for God said to Adam: "to dust you shall return," and not to Eve, and death is the most terrible punishment that could be assigned. Therefore it is established that Adam's punishment was greater than Eve's.

I have written this because you wish since this is not a woman's task. But y of my writing clumsy you will correct

LUDOVICO: You defend the cause of so [well] that, if I had not been born a champion. But sticking fast to the truth, I have set out [here] to assault your fo begin by attacking its foundations, whi of Sacred Scripture, so that there will be

Eve sinned from ignorance and inco she sinned less seriously. [But] ignoranc are obligated to know—does not excu nores this, he shall be ignored."¹¹ The ment opens. He who has been foolish especially when the sinner's mistake occu ignorance, born of arrogance, does not ex and the [lawyers], who teach a true ph deserving of a double punishment.¹² N you, so many ages distant from Eve, fa divinely created by the highest craftsma pent lurking in paradise. For, as you tempt to persuade her but approached

But the acts due to inconstancy are due to ignorance]. For to the same de and constant mental attitude are more v ones, so should those issuing from in since inconstancy is an evil in itself an the sin worse.

Nor is Adam's companion excused b her, [contrary to your contention th employed by a householder are not p ment like strangers or those in whom the woman's frailty was not the cause o the demon promised her knowledge, wh pride], according to the apostle.¹³ For beginning of every sin."¹⁴ And though the first since, when man existed in a dient to him and [did not struggle] ag therefore, was an inordinate appetite to its own nature, as Augustine wrote to

I have written this because you wished me to. Yet I have done so fearfully, since this is not a woman's task. But you are kind, and if you find any part of my writing clumsy you will correct it.

LUDOVICO: You defend the cause of Eve most subtly, and indeed defend it so [well] that, if I had not been born a man, you would have made me your champion. But sticking fast to the truth, which is attached by very strong roots, I have set out [here] to assault your fortress with your own weapons. I shall begin by attacking its foundations, which can be destroyed by the testimony of Sacred Scripture, so that there will be no lack of material for my refutation.

Eve sinned from ignorance and inconstancy, from which you conclude that she sinned less seriously. [But] ignorance—especially of those things which we are obligated to know—does not excuse us. For it is written: "If anyone ignores this, he shall be ignored."¹¹ The eyes which guilt makes blind punishment opens. He who has been foolish in guilt will be wise in punishment, especially when the sinner's mistake occurs through negligence. For the woman's ignorance, born of arrogance, does not excuse her, in the same way that Aristotle and the [lawyers], who teach a true philosophy, find the drunk and ignorant deserving of a double punishment.¹² Nor do I understand how in the world you, so many ages distant from Eve, fault her intellect, when her knowledge, divinely created by the highest craftsman of all things, daunted that clever serpent lurking in paradise. For, as you write, he was not bold enough to attempt to persuade her but approached her with a question.

But the acts due to inconstancy are even more blameworthy [than those due to ignorance]. For to the same degree that the acts issuing from a solid and constant mental attitude are more worthy and distinct from the preceding ones, so should those issuing from inconstancy be punished more severely, since inconstancy is an evil in itself and when paired with an evil sin makes the sin worse.

Nor is Adam's companion excused because Adam was appointed to protect her, [contrary to your contention that] thieves who have been trustingly employed by a householder are not punished with the most severe punishment like strangers or those in whom no confidence has been placed. Also, the woman's frailty was not the cause of sin, as you write, but her pride, since the demon promised her knowledge, which leads to arrogance and inflates [with pride], according to the apostle.¹³ For it says in Ecclesiasticus: "Pride was the beginning of every sin."¹⁴ And though the other women followed, yet she was the first since, when man existed in a state of innocence, the flesh was obedient to him and [did not struggle] against reason. The first impulse [of sin], therefore, was an inordinate appetite for seeking that which was not suited to its own nature, as Augustine wrote to Orosius: "Swollen by pride, man obeyed

the serpent's persuasion and disdained God's commands."¹⁵ For the adversary said to Eve: "Your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."¹⁶ Nor would the woman have believed the demon's persuasive words, as Augustine says [in his commentary] on Genesis, unless a love of her own power had overcome her, which [love is] a stream sprung from the well of pride.¹⁷ [I shall continue to follow Augustine in his view that at the moment] when Eve desired to capture divinity, she lost happiness. And those words: "If Adam had not sinned, etc." confirm me in my view. For Eve sinned perhaps in such a way that, just as the demons did not merit redemption, neither perhaps did she. I speak only in jest, but Adam's sin was fortunate, since it warranted such a redeemer.¹⁸

And lest I finally stray too far from what you have written, [I shall turn to your argument that Adam's punishment was more severe than Eve's and his sin, accordingly, greater. But] the woman suffers all the penalties [inflicted on] the man, and since her sorrows are greater than his, not only is she doomed to death, condemned to eat at the cost of sweat, denied by the cherubim and flaming swords entry to paradise, but in addition to all these things which are common [to both], she alone must give birth in pain and be subjected to her husband. [Her punishment is thus harsher than Adam's, as her sin is greater].

But because in such a matter it is not sufficient to have refuted your arguments without also putting forward my own, [I shall do so now]. Eve believed that she was made similar to God and, out of envy, desired that which wounds the Holy Spirit. Moreover, she must bear responsibility for every fault of Adam because, as Aristotle testifies, the cause of a cause is the cause of that which is caused.¹⁹ Indeed, every prior cause influences an outcome more than a secondary cause, and the principle of any genus, according to the same Aristotle, is seen as its greatest [component]. In fact, [it] is considered to be more than half the whole.²⁰ And in the *Posterior Analytics* he writes: "That on account of which any thing exists is that thing and more greatly so."²¹ Now [since] Adam sinned on account of Eve, it follows that Eve sinned much more than Adam. Similarly, just as it is better to treat others well than to be well-treated, so it is worse to persuade another to evil than to be persuaded to evil. For he sins less who sins by another's example, inasmuch as what is done by example can be said to be done according to a kind of law, [and thus justly]. For this reason it is commonly said that "the sins that many commit are [without fault]." [Thus Eve, who persuaded her husband to commit an evil act, sinned more greatly than Adam, who merely consented to her example]. And if Adam and Eve both had thought that they were worthy of the same glory, Eve, who was inferior [by nature], more greatly departed from the mean, and consequently sinned more greatly. Moreover, as a beloved companion she could deceive her husband [vulnerable to her persuasion because of his love for her]

more easily than the shameful serpent persevered longer [in sin] than Adam, are that much more serious (according to length of time they hold the unhappy discourse to a close, Eve was the cause greatly increases the guilt in the case of not err, condemned more severely the it came first, than he did the sentence. They who have betrayed me to you to be called Christians have always agreed all most Christian, will approve and dare to do much, because you have excused so learnedly.

ISOTTA: I had decided that I would you because, as you say, you assault me [propositions] you have presented me with ed that it would be difficult not merely to oppose them. But since I recognize I decided to obey your honest wish. Even yet I will earn the highest praise if I am

Eve sinned out of ignorance and in she sinned more gravely, because the obligated to know does not excuse us know will not be known." I would conclude or affected. But Eve's ignorance with God himself is the author and founder knows less sins less, like a boy who less than a noble. Such a person does required for salvation, but implicitly, the question of inconstancy proceeds simply which proceed from inconstancy are inconstancy is understood which is not in

The same is true of imperfection. Responsibility is imposed. When God created him perfect, and the powers of his standing and knowledge of truth as well it was that the Lord led to Adam all of heaven, so that Adam could call them us make mankind in our image and like the fish of the sea, and the birds of the

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more easily than the shameful serpent could deceive the woman. And she persevered longer [in sin] than Adam, because she began first, and offenses are that much more serious (according to Gregory's decree) in relation to the length of time they hold the unhappy soul in bondage.²² Finally, to bring my discourse to a close, Eve was the cause and the example of sin, and Gregory greatly increases the guilt in the case of the example.²³ And Christ, who could not err, condemned more severely the pretext of the ignorant Jews, because it came first, than he did the sentence of the learned Pilate, when he said: "They who have betrayed me to you have greater sin, etc."²⁴ All who wish to be called Christians have always agreed with this judgment, and you, above all most Christian, will approve and defend it. Farewell, and do not fear, but dare to do much, because you have excellently understood so much and write so learnedly.

ISOTTA: I had decided that I would not enter further into a contest with you because, as you say, you assault my fortress with my own weapons. [The propositions] you have presented me were so perfectly and diligently defended that it would be difficult not merely for me, but for the most learned men, to oppose them. But since I recognize that this contest is useful for me, I have decided to obey your honest wish. Even though I know I struggle in vain, yet I will earn the highest praise if I am defeated by so mighty a man as you.

Eve sinned out of ignorance and inconstancy, and hence you contend that she sinned more gravely, because the ignorance of those things which we are obligated to know does not excuse us, since it is written: "He who does not know will not be known." I would concede your point if that ignorance were crude or affected. But Eve's ignorance was implanted by nature, of which nature God himself is the author and founder. In many people it is seen that he who knows less sins less, like a boy who sins less than an old man or a peasant less than a noble. Such a person does not need to know explicitly what is required for salvation, but implicitly, because [for him] faith alone suffices. The question of inconstancy proceeds similarly. For when it is said that the acts which proceed from inconstancy are more blameworthy, [that kind of] inconstancy is understood which is not innate but the product of character and sins.

The same is true of imperfection. For when gifts increase, greater responsibility is imposed. When God created man, from the beginning he created him perfect, and the powers of his soul perfect, and gave him a greater understanding and knowledge of truth as well as a greater depth of wisdom. Thus it was that the Lord led to Adam all the animals of the earth and the birds of heaven, so that Adam could call them by their names. For God said: "Let us make mankind in our image and likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, the cattle, over all the wild animals

and every creature that crawls on the earth,"²⁵ making clear his own perfection. But of the woman he said: "It is not good that the man is alone; I will make him a helper like himself."²⁶ And since consolation and joy are required for happiness, and since no one can have solace and joy when alone, it appears that God created woman for man's consolation. For the good spreads itself, and the greater it is the more it shares itself. Therefore, it appears that Adam's sin was greater than Eve's. [As] Ambrose [says]: "In him to whom a more indulgent liberality has been shown is insolence more inexcusable."²⁷

"But Adam's companion," [you argue], "is not excused because Adam was appointed to protect her, because thieves who have been trustingly employed by a householder are not punished with the most severe punishment like strangers or those in whom the householder placed no confidence." This is true, however, in temporal law, but not in divine law, for divine justice proceeds differently from temporal justice in punishing [sin].

[You argue further that] "the fragility of the woman was not the cause of sin, but rather her inordinate appetite for seeking that which was not suited to her nature," which [appetite] is the product, as you write, of pride. Yet it is clearly less a sin to desire the knowledge of good and evil than to transgress against a divine commandment, since the desire for knowledge is a natural thing, and all men by nature desire to know.²⁸ And even if the first impulse [of sin] were this inordinate appetite, which cannot be without sin, yet it is more tolerable than the sin of transgression, for the observance of the commandments is the road which leads to the country of salvation. [It is written]: "But if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments;"²⁹ and likewise: "What shall I do to gain eternal life? Keep the commandments."³⁰ And transgression is particularly born of pride, because pride is nothing other than rebellion against divine rule, exalting oneself above what is permitted according to divine rule, by disdainning the will of God and displacing it with one's own. Thus Augustine [writes] in *On Nature and Grace*: "Sin is the will to pursue or retain what justice forbids, that is, to deny what God wishes."³¹ Ambrose agrees with him in his *On Paradise*: "Sin is the transgression against divine law and disobedience to the heavenly commandments."³² Behold! See that the transgression against and disobedience to the heavenly commandments is the greatest sin, whereas you have thus defined sin: "Sin is the inordinate desire to know." Thus clearly the sin of transgression against a command is greater than [the sin of] desiring the knowledge of good and evil. So even if inordinate desire be a sin, as with Eve, yet she did not desire to be like God in power but only in the knowledge of good and evil, which by nature she was actually inclined to desire.

[Next, as to your statement] that those words, "if Adam had not sinned," confirm you in your view [of Eve's damnability], since Eve may have so sinned that, like the demons, she did not merit redemption, I reply that she also was

redeemed with Adam, because [she was] flesh."³³ And if it seems that God did because God held her sin as negligible woman deserved it much more because an angel cannot be excused by ignorance, understands without investigation or the likeness of God's—to which it seems man. Hence the angel is called intellect because the woman sinned from her desire for power. While knowledge of the world can be partaken of by the creature, in no way can the soul of Christ. Moreover, the angels receive mercy, believing certainly that the mercy is so great as to warrant God's forgiveness. Hence the angel did not think [of mercy]. Hence the angel in the *Moralia*: "The first parents were excused by the mercy they committed by transgressing they were deceived by the persuasive serpent was never punished because he was called to grace. Thus, in sum, Eve clearly merited angels.

[As to your argument] that the woman sinned on the man, and beyond those which were born in sorrow and has been subjected to death at that point. As I said, the good spreads itself and the evil itself. So also evil, the greater it is the more it shares itself the more harmful it is, and the more severe the punishment is. Furthermore, the severity of the punishment is of the sin. Hence Christ chose to die a shameful and horrible kind of death, and to suffer every kind of suffering by type. Hence the Son of God: "The only-born Son of God in executing the law bears witness that he consummated even to death, he gave up his spirit."³⁵ The reason he responded to the guilt. Adam took the fruit from the tree and so made satisfaction. [writes]: "Adam disdainned God's commandment in eating the fruit from the tree, but whatever Christ paid the penalty for sin he had not taken." "For what I have not taken, then I atone for with the greatest [possible], because the punishment was the greatest [possible] and was general in all men in Adam."³⁸

redeemed with Adam, because [she was] "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh."³³ And if it seems that God did not redeem her, this was undoubtedly because God held her sin as negligible. For if man deserved redemption, the woman deserved it much more because of the slightness of the crime. For the angel cannot be excused by ignorance as can the woman. For the angel understands without investigation or discussion and has an intellect more in the likeness of God's—to which it seems Eve desired to be similar—than does man. Hence the angel is called intellectual and the man rational. Thus where the woman sinned from her desire for knowledge, the angel sinned from a desire for power. While knowledge of an appearance in some small way can be partaken of by the creature, in no way can it partake in the power of God and of the soul of Christ. Moreover, the woman in sinning thought she would receive mercy, believing certainly that she was committing a sin, but not one so great as to warrant God's inflicting such a sentence and punishment. But the angel did not think [of mercy]. Hence Gregory [says in the] fourth book of the *Moralia*: "The first parents were needed for this, that the sin which they committed by transgressing they might purge by confessing."³⁴ But that persuasive serpent was never punished for his sin, for he was never to be recalled to grace. Thus, in sum, Eve clearly merited redemption more than the angels.

[As to your argument] that the woman also suffers all the penalties inflicted on the man, and beyond those which are common [to both] she alone gives birth in sorrow and has been subjected to man, this also reinforces my earlier point. As I said, the good spreads itself, and the greater it is the more it shares itself. So also evil, the greater it is the more it shares itself, and the more it shares itself the more harmful it is, and the more harmful it is the greater it is. Furthermore, the severity of the punishment is proportional to the gravity of the sin. Hence Christ chose to die on the cross, though this was the most shameful and horrible kind of death, and on the cross he endured in general every kind of suffering by type. Hence Isidore writes concerning the Trinity: "The only-born Son of God in executing the sacrament of his death, in himself bears witness that he consummated every kind of suffering when, with lowered head, he gave up his spirit."³⁵ The reason was that the punishment had to correspond to the guilt. Adam took the fruit of the forbidden tree; Christ suffered on the tree and so made satisfaction [for Adam's sin]. [As] Augustine [writes]: "Adam disdained God's command" (and he does not say Eve) "accepting the fruit from the tree, but whatever Adam lost Christ restored."³⁶ [For Christ paid the penalty for sin he had not committed, as it says in] Psalm 64: "For what I have not taken, then I atoned."³⁷ Therefore, Adam's sin was the greatest [possible], because the punishment corresponding to his fault was the greatest [possible] and was general in all men. [As the] apostle [says]: "All sinned in Adam."³⁸

"Eve," [you say], "must bear responsibility for every fault of Adam because, as Aristotle shows, whatever is the cause of the cause is the cause of the thing caused." This is true in the case of things which are, as you know better [than I], in themselves the causes of other things, which is the case for the first cause, the first principle, and "that on account of which anything is what it is." But clearly this was not the case with Eve, because Adam either had free will or he did not. If he did not have it, he did not sin; if he had it, then Eve forced the sin [upon him], which is impossible. For as Bernard says: "Free will, because of its inborn nobility, is forced by no necessity,"³⁹ not even by God, because if that were the case it would be to concede that two contradictories are true at the same time. God cannot do, therefore, what would cause an act proceeding from free will and remaining free to be not free but coerced. [As] Augustine [writes in his commentary] on Genesis: "God cannot act against that nature which he created with a good will."⁴⁰ God could himself, however, remove that condition of liberty from any person and bestow some other condition on him. In the same way fire cannot, while it remains fire, not burn, unless its nature is changed and suspended for a time by divine force. No other creature, such as a good angel or devil can do this, since they are less than God; much less a woman, since she is less perfect and weaker than they. Augustine clarifies this principle [of God's supremacy] saying: "Above our mind is nothing besides God, nor is there anything intermediary between God and our mind."⁴¹ Yet only something which is superior to something else can coerce it; but Eve was inferior to Adam, therefore she was not herself the cause of sin. [In] Ecclesiasticus 15 [it says]: "God from the beginning created man and placed him in the palm of his counsel and made clear his commandments and precepts. If you wish to preserve the commandments, they will preserve you and create in you pleasing faith."⁴² Thus Adam appeared to accuse God rather than excuse himself when he said: "The woman you placed at my side gave me fruit from the tree and I ate it."⁴³

[Next you argue] that the beloved companion could have more easily deceived the man than the shameful serpent the woman. To this I reply that Eve, weak and ignorant by nature, sinned much less by assenting to that astute serpent, who was called "wise," than Adam—created by God with perfect knowledge and understanding—in listening to the persuasive words and voice of the imperfect woman.

[Further, you say] that Eve persevered in her sin a longer time and therefore sinned more, because crimes are that much more serious according to the length of time they hold the unhappy soul in bondage. This is no doubt true, when two sins are equal, and in the same person or in two similar persons. But Adam and Eve were not equals, because Adam was a perfect animal and Eve imperfect and ignorant. [Therefore, their sins were not comparable, and Eve,

who persevered longer in sin, was not equal to Adam.]

Finally, if I may quote you: "The woman was the cause of the cause of sin, and Gregory emphatically extolled her [as the cause of sin] who provided] an example, and Christ was crucified for the Jews, because it was first, more than for the Gentiles." He said: "Therefore he who betrayed me to the Jews did not condemn the cause of the ignorance, because it was vicious and devilish due to the devil, but he did not sin from ignorance. The gentiles were more ignorant things than the Jews, who had the law and the prophets daily saw signs concerning [Christ]. For if they were spoken to them, they would have not sinned, but they did their sin."⁴⁴ Thus they themselves said: "They were working signs."⁴⁵ And: "Art thou the Messiah? For the [Jewish] people was special to thee, and thou wast not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." The children's bread and cast it to the children, because Jesus loved them more.

Let these words be enough from me.

LUDOVICO: So divinely have you explained the sin that I could believe your words were not from human wisdom and theology but from heaven. Hence there is no contradiction. Yet, lest you be cheated by your own [to receive from this debate], attend to the other side, for the opposite view, that you may see the truth, which will delight readers and surmount objections.

Eve's ignorance was very base, because it was in her rather than in the creator. This ignorance is attested by writings attest, and certainly does not excuse her. plainly told, it was extreme stupidity rather than the excellent God had set for her, [but she had had and what she aspired to.]

The issues which you have cleverly raised concern the nature of Eve which has been condemned as a habit of habit. For those qualities which are not nor blamed, according to the judgment of God, the woman's nature was excellent and good. For just as teeth were given to wild beasts for their survival, to the woman men were given for preservation and pursuit of the hearth.

who persevered longer in sin, was not on that account more guilty than Adam].

Finally, if I may quote you: "The woman was the example and the cause of sin, and Gregory emphatically extends the burden of guilt to [the person who provided] an example, and Christ condemned the cause of the ignorant Jews, because it was first, more than the learned Pilate's sentence when he said: 'Therefore he who betrayed me to you has greater sin.'" I reply that Christ did not condemn the cause of the ignorant Jews because it was first, but because it was vicious and devilish due to their native malice and obstinacy. For they did not sin from ignorance. The gentile Pilate was more ignorant about these things than the Jews, who had the law and the prophets and read them and daily saw signs concerning [Christ]. For John 15 says: "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin. But now they have no excuse for their sin."⁴⁴ Thus they themselves said: "What are we doing? for this man is working signs."⁴⁵ And: "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?"⁴⁶ For the [Jewish] people was special to God, and Christ himself [said]: "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. It is not fair to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs."⁴⁷ Therefore the Jews sinned more, because Jesus loved them more.

Let these words be enough from me, an unarmed and poor little woman.

LUDOVICO: So divinely have you encompassed the whole of this problem that I could believe your words were drawn not from the fonts of philosophy and theology but from heaven. Hence they are worthy of praise rather than contradiction. Yet, lest you be cheated of the utility [you say you have begun to receive from this debate], attend to these brief arguments which can be posed for the opposite view, that you may sow the honey-sweet seeds of paradise which will delight readers and surround you with glory.

Eve's ignorance was very base, because she chose to put faith in a demon rather than in the creator. This ignorance actually is due to her sin, as sacred writings attest, and certainly does not excuse her sin. Indeed, if the truth be plainly told, it was extreme stupidity not to remain within the boundaries which the excellent God had set for her, [but] to fall prey to vain hope and lose what she had had and what she aspired to.

The issues which you have cleverly joined I shall not divide. The inconstancy of Eve which has been condemned was not an inconstancy of nature but of habit. For those qualities which are in us by nature we are neither praised nor blamed, according to the judgment of the wisest philosophers. Actually, the woman's nature was excellent and concordant with reason, genus and time. For just as teeth were given to wild beasts, horns to oxen, feathers to birds for their survival, to the woman mental capacity was given sufficient for the preservation and pursuit of the health of her soul.

If [as you say] Eve was naturally created to aid, perfect, console and gladden man, she conducted herself contrary to the laws [of her nature], providing him with toil, imperfection, sadness and sorrow, which the holy decrees had ordained would be serious crimes. And human laws, too, ordered through long ages by the minds of great men, by sure reasoning have established that the seizure of someone else's goods merits the more serious punishment the more it injures the owner.

Your argument about [Adam's] transgression of God's commandments does not acquit Eve [of responsibility], because neither did she keep them. As to your distinction between the sin of the angel and of man, [by means of which you argue that Eve's sin was less serious than that of the rebellious angels, and thus redeemable], that is a huge issue, and though it provides worthy food for your brilliant mind, it is too abundant to consider in this brief space. And how you can consider it to be concordant with the principle of the highest God's goodness that greater punishments are poured out upon those who have sinned less [—for you argue that the evil consequences of Adam's sin, when diffused to Eve, whose being had derived from his, were intensified—] I cannot understand.

You push too far Aristotle's views on first causes. [You agree that] every cause of a cause is a cause of the thing caused, [but argue that since Adam had free will his act could not have been caused by Eve]. But since Adam had free will, I do not consider him free from obligation to sin, and even though I have assigned Adam's whole fault in some degree to Eve, yet [I do not contend] that Adam's sin was entirely and in every way caused by Eve.

I agree [with what you say] concerning free will and the [essential] goodness of [human] nature.

As to the ease of the man's consent to the woman's words, [which you see as indicating his sinful weakness], I want, since I am writing to you, to pass by in silence the matter of the deceitfulness of the [female] sex. But this ancient proverb states: "There is no plague more deadly than an intimate enemy."⁴⁸ The first mother kindled a great fire, which to our ruin has not yet been extinguished.⁴⁹ This demonstrates the extreme seriousness of her sin. For just as those sicknesses of the body are more serious which are less curable, so the [diseases] of the soul [which Eve brought upon us are serious indeed].

Though I have spoken, you may not hear. You may spurn and disdain [my words because of] Augustine's conclusion that they were equally guilty: "The principle of how much longer, etc." Let us read the history of the passion and the dreams of the wife, the words of Pilate, the washing of hands, the avoidance of judgment, and we shall confess that he understood better than the Jews that the sentence was unjust. These things make it quite clear that the force of my arguments has not been weakened.

I have explained my views with these few words, not to exceed the paper [you] sent me, and I am most learned. For I do not wish to be a guide because of your great goodness, all things considered, indeed—a single man and a mere mortal, I have only pointed a finger, so to speak. And although others may find that my writing is worthy, if you, most brilliant, accept them and they are already written, our views will become visible amid the shadows. And if what I have written will make it worthy of your mind, virtue will lead to new battles to the sound of sacred eloquence (of trumpets), always more learned and more powerful against me, who has applied the whole strength of my mind all at the same time, and to my writing I will defend myself against yours, although the motions toss me about at whim. Farewell.

II

*Oration of Cassandra Fedele
in the University of
for Bertucio Lamberto, C.
Receiving the Honors of*

Introduction

In 1487, when Cassandra delivered this oration and culminating her classical education. It was the result of her studies, and well it might have been so for women's involvement in university life. It was that Cassandra was invited to address a banquet, but not allowed to study.¹ In addition to this oration during the same period.

Although Cassandra says that a good education and piety, there is not one religious refer-

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I have explained my views with these few words, both because I was ordered not to exceed the paper [you] sent me, and because I speak to you who are most learned. For I do not wish to be a guide on such a road to you for whom, because of your great goodness, all things stand open in the brightest light. I, indeed—a single man and a mere mortal, as it were, a reflection of the celestial life—have only pointed a finger, so to speak, in the direction of the sources. And although others may find that my writings suffer from the defect of obscurity, if you, most brilliant, accept them and join them to what you and I have already written, our views will become very evident and clear, and will shine amid the shadows. And if what I have written is clumsy, by your skill you will make it worthy of your mind, virtue, and glory. For you march forward to new battles to the sound of sacred eloquence (as do soldiers to the clamor of trumpets), always more learned and more ready. And you march forward against me, who has applied the whole sum of my thinking to my reading, all at the same time, and to my writing, that I might present my case and defend myself against yours, although the many storms and floods of my obligations toss me about at whim. Farewell.

II

*Oration of Cassandra Fedele, Maiden of Venice,
in the University of Padua,
for Bertucio Lamberto, Canon of Concordia,
Receiving the Honors of the Liberal Arts*

Introduction

In 1487, when Cassandra delivered this oration, she was twenty-two years old and culminating her classical education. It was one of the crowning achievements of her studies, and well it might have been, for it is one of the earliest precedents for women's involvement in university life. There is not a little irony in the fact that Cassandra was invited to address a body of scholars among whom she was not allowed to study.¹ In addition to this oration, Cassandra delivered several others during the same period.

Although Cassandra says that a good education is one which tends toward religion and piety, there is not one religious reference in this address. All her citations