
The Book of Heresies

by Mary

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I

THE PRINCIPLES

Choose.

creation

1 - 1

To create a sound one must first destroy the silence that was there before.

justice

1 - 2

Justice is revenge cloaked in saintly raiment. It does nothing to heal the wound and only sours the healing. Killing the murderers of the world for the sake of vengeance will not bring back their dead, and only stains the hands of the self-appointed righteous with the color of blood.

heresy

1 - 3

A heretic is one who chooses for themselves. The meaning of the word has strayed far from its root in ancient Greek, but there is no dishonor in having the strength of self to choose.

honor

1 - 4

Honor is the refusal to surrender a self-affirmed code no matter what the threat to property or life or soul may be.

individualism

1 - 5

The associations we choose to make do not define us, nor can they limit us unless we choose to give them that power over us. We are defined by the boundaries that we draw about ourselves.

jealousy

1 - 6

Jealousy is a twisted emotion, the feeling that one's own absolute worth or potential is degraded by the worth of another.

responsibility**1 - 7**

Humans are not sentient. Humans have the capacity to be sentient. The capacity is based not upon intelligence nor courage, but upon the willingness to choose to take responsibility for the world around one.

ritual**1 - 8**

Ritual is the symbol of the thing. It gains value in what it represents to those who bear it. It bridges the gap between mind and reality, and forges an unbreakable link between the two. The whole power of a ritual is given up only to its creator.

fear**1 - 9**

Fear is the greatest enemy one can ever have; it strikes from the shadows, remorseless, mercilessly, without compassion or distinction. Heroism is not feeling no fear - it is overcoming that fear which we all feel.

beauty**1 - 10**

Beauty is always subjective. What is beautiful is that which puts into material form a part of the hopes and dreams and feelings that lie within us.

control and influence**1 - 11**

Control arises from power. Influence from respect. The first lasts only so long as the knife stands at the throat; the second lasts in all places and in all times.

confidence**1 - 1 2**

Confidence is both an insidious trap and the path from it. Confidence in anything other than one's own willingness to adapt and survive is merely arrogance; the failure of arrogance is that it breeds blindness.

entropy**1 - 1 3**

Entropy is not chaos - rather, it is the ultimate state of order. Chaos is the ultimate state of infinite possibility.

aggression**1 - 1 4**

Aggression is a reaction against the fear of the unknown; existence threatened, we fight to understand what was not understood before, or we flee, or we destroy if we see no other path. To speak of destroying aggression is to speak not of destroying violence, but of destroying the very will to live.

denial**1 - 1 5**

Denial breeds hatred. Acceptance breeds understanding and, finally, mastery of oneself. Acceptance entails not submission, but rather an acknowledgement of the existence of the thing. In accepting a weakness in oneself, one is able to take the first step of many towards its mastery.

freedom**1 - 1 6**

Freedom is of the mind, not the body. It is the strength of self to choose.

violence 1 - 17

Violence is a road, not a place, and sometimes it is the only road one can take to reach the place where one is going.

respect 1 - 18

Respect is neither a right nor a privilege. It is something that must be earned a thousand times over, from each person, young or old, wise or foolish, powerful or weak.

strength 1 - 19

The beginning of the path to strength lies in the admission of vulnerability.

identity 1 - 20

The name is not the thing itself. The act of naming defines by drawing a line between what is and what is not.

humanity 1 - 21

The most dangerous line that can be drawn is the one between who is human and who is not.

hate 1 - 22

We hate what we fear in ourselves.

religion 1 - 23

Religion is the set of beliefs upon which we rely.

sacrifice**1 - 2 4**

The greatest sacrifice is giving up one's life for another in the darkness, where no one will ever know.

Is the sacrifice of a moment balanced by the potential sacrifices of tomorrow? The magnitude of the choice is irrelevant. The difference is not whether one person or a million is saved, but whether you, who had the capacity to act, acted.

immortality**1 - 2 5**

What matters is not whether we win, nor how many we save, nor even the joys we cause nor the terrors we banish. What matters is that we fight and try, and try again, and do not let even the fires of hell stay us from our chosen path.

And so we pass on our inheritance, we build our legacy so that something might stand when we are gone. We father children, we bear sons and daughters, we build something that might yet survive that darkness that waits for us all when, at the last, Death opens her arms and welcomes us home. We are strong not from what we build, but what we are. What we build or make will become a truth of its own. Our children, our works, they will be nothing greater and nothing less than themselves.

What we make is not our strength; our strength is the might of the moments of our existence. Though the universe be rallied against us, we are in the end only the sum of our actions. No more, no less, but simply the raging of the light against the darkness that engulfs us all.

fate**1 - 2 6**

We think ourselves free because the future is as yet undetermined, but in truth we are free because we cannot know the mind of Fate.

action**1 - 2 7**

Life is a losing game, and one day the game will be called on account of darkness. Success is not the product of a lifetime; it is the product of a day.

faith**1 - 2 8**

The ultimate expression of faith is the act of trusting another with no guarantee or expectation beyond that the act of trust is in itself the first step towards the building of a unity greater than the sum of all of its parts.

gnosis**1 - 2 9**

If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.

ignorance**1 - 3 0**

Self-ignorance is a form of self-destruction.

success and failure**1 - 3 1**

We are remembered by our successes, but we are defined by our failures.

luck**1 - 3 2**

Luck always favors the best horse.

sentience**1 - 3 3**

We are trained to think of our skin as the boundary between what is “us” and what is “everything else”.

Are “you” the microorganisms that assist your digestion?

Are “you” the T-cells that attack unfamiliar elements?

Are “you” the things that you see?

The answer is simple: You are the thinking of the machine.

Sentience is the waking from the slumber of instinct; it is the ability to see the universe in both its singularity and its multitude of consciously defined patterns.

We are all of us the sum total of all existence. We are the hands of the universe building the furtherance of life itself. We are the hands of order; we are the hands of chaos. We are capable of miracles, for everything we can do is a miracle.

love**1 - 3 4**

Who you choose to love shapes who you are. What you choose to love shapes what you are.

surrender**1 - 3 5**

Only by being willing to surrender all that we are can we hope to gain all that we might become.

emotion**1 - 3 6**

The struggle for survival births all other struggles. We live, learn, and love through this single reality. In other animals we call it instinct. In ourselves we call it emotion.

That this is so does not damage the value of emotion. The source does not change what it has become; love is no less great for having reason and purpose beyond the fact of its existence.

time**1 - 3 7**

Time is an abstraction; we chop it up into little pieces, calling this one a year, another one a day, this one over here a minute. The truth is that the divisions are of our own devising. What exists for a breath is as great as what exists for a century. Existence is the crucial distinction; all else are mirages born of our own imagination, distracting us from that which is.

defilement**1 - 3 8**

What is done to us does not defile us. What defiles us is what we choose to do to others.

loss**1 - 3 9**

It is only after we have lost everything that we can gain anything.

perspective**1 - 4 0**

A chair is a piece of furniture designed to be sat upon; if it is cold enough, that same chair is so much firewood. Identity is determined by necessity.

knowledge 1 - 4 1
Knowledge not acted upon is merely a collection of facts.

roads 1 - 4 2
Roads are for journeys, not destinations.

possession 1 - 4 3
We own what others agree that we own. The tree recognizes no master. Cut down the tree, but still it will not recognize you as its master, only as the stronger of the moment.

expectation 1 - 4 4
Good things will happen to you and bad things will happen to you, but the choices you make should be independent of the expectation of reward or the fear of punishment.

death 1 - 4 5
Existence has no beginning and no end. Time is as much a dimension as location. What has existed once, will exist always; death is another word for change.

apotheosis 1 - 4 6
The action of awakening to our own sentience, the recognition of ourselves as the universe and the universe as ourselves is the first statement of apotheosis. The conscious choice to commit oneself to whatever choices the world presents to us, great or small, is the second statement of apotheosis. The act within the moment of the doing is the third statement of apotheosis.

II

THE APOCRYPHA

A story does not spring out of cloth whole; it must be spun and woven, the threads placed this way and that until at last the story stands complete. But even then, that is not the end, for the story must change as it passes from speaker to listener spawning a hundred shadows and reflections, each a living thing born in the heart's own blood of its mother.

in the beginning

2 - 1

My name is Mary. I was named after another Mary, now gone.

My mother's name is Angela. In the late 1960's she worked as a nurse. She never told me the name of the hospital where she worked, but it doesn't matter. It might have been any of a thousand hospitals, and the beginning would have been the same.

This is the story my mother told me.

angela begins

2 - 2

Passing by Mary on the street, you would not have looked twice at her, but when she looked at you, when her eyes met yours, there was a quality that lay within them that could not be measured with mere words.

Mary was pregnant. Pregnant from rape with twins and a month overdue. Mary had already told the hospital that she had no home, no family. Angela went to her and tried to be comforting, and Mary said to her:

"Rape is the most horrible thing you can imagine, but you don't have to imagine it all of the time."

Mary always spoke like that, her words twisting around what you thought she said with what she had, until you started to wonder why she was laughing.

Angela made light talk then, speaking of her friends in New York and other places. Angela asked Mary if she had been to New York City and Mary replied:

"I don't travel much."

Angela asked:

"Why not?"

Mary just smiled and said:

"Because the world is everywhere you are."

Mary always had an answer, even if it never was the answer to the question you asked, but to the one you should have asked.

one chooses life, the other death

2 - 3

The doctor induced labor; Mary gave birth to twins early in the morning on the last day in April.

One boy, one girl. The girl was stillborn. She had been strangled by her own umbilical cord. When the doctor told Mary she said:

"One is choosing life; the other death."

Mary turned to the doctor and asked to hold the girl. The doctor handed her the dead child and Mary took her, stroking her forehead gently as she said:

"To the House of the Unfleshed,
To the place where the journey ends.
Never again shall you return,
Never again shall you make your way back.
Sleep now, my daughter. Sleep."

Later, the Circle would say that the death of Mary's daughter marks the beginning of the Choosing.

time and chance to them all

2 - 4

They said it was an electrical fire.

Smoke poured from the creche. Angela and the other nurses tried to evacuate the nursery. Mary came and stood, staring into the smoke. After a moment Mary stepped into the nursery, though the others attempted to stop her.

It was long moments before Mary emerged from the smoke, breathing normally. In her arms was a child, not her own. She handed the baby to Angela, who asked Mary:

"How did you get out of there alive?"

Mary replied:

"Step by step."

Angela said:

"But what of your own baby?"

Mary shook her head, and said:

"Who can straighten what he himself has made crooked? When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider:

A man of good heart perishing in his goodness, and a cruel man living long in his cruelty. Live for living, or live for death, for the race is not always to the swift nor the battle always to the strong, and time and chance happen to them all."

But as Mary walked past her, Angela noticed the tears running down Mary's face.

choose to fear, or choose not to

2 - 5

Angela asked:

"I don't understand how you can choose not to fear death."

Mary said:

"Choose to fear or choose not to. When we choose not to we have entered into a covenant with death; with the grave we have made an agreement. When an overwhelming scourge sweeps by, it cannot touch us, for we have made life our refuge and living our hiding place."

a good name

2 - 6

Mary's child had died of asphyxiation in the fire.

The next day Mary was discharged from the hospital. As she left, Angela removed her identification card and placed it on the front desk, and quietly quit her job.

Angela walked up to Mary and asked her if she might go with her. Mary asked:

"What is your name?"

She said:

"Angela."

Mary smiled.

"That's a good name."

Angela says it was the second of May when Mary was discharged from the hospital, and so the Circle would later call the date to be the consummation of the Choosing.

departures and arrivals

2 - 7

Angela walked with Mary for hours until at last Angela asked:

"Where are we going? How long will it be before we get there?"

Mary replied:

"Have you found the beginning, then, that you are looking already for the end?"

They came upon a park by the water, and there sat down. Mary knelt and picked up a nut from the ground where it had fallen and handed it to Angela. Mary said:

"Take this and look upon it. When you believe you understand, come back to me."

Angela took the nut and sat beneath the tree and watched. An hour later she returned to where Mary sat on a bench and told her everything she had learned. And Mary said:

"You can do better. Go back, and look again."

Angela returned to her place beneath the tree and watched again. This time she saw not the task, but the doing, and when at last she looked up she was startled by how much time had passed and went to Mary who said:

"Tell me what you see."

Angela said:

"When I first looked at it, all I saw was what it is. Now I see what it is, but also what it was, where it came from. I see the oak it would become if I planted it here, and I see it also as others see it and do not see it."

And Mary said:

"These people around us are like the blind, who have never known what sight is.

You do not see, being blind, but now understand that there is such a thing as sight. You know now that you have eyes, if you have but the will to see."

ignorance

2 - 9

Mary said:

"The fool does more harm in his ignorance than the monster in his wickedness."

an open thing cherished in secret

2 - 1 0

A man passing by heard this and stopped. He asked:

"Where did you hear this? Through my own ignorance I have harmed more than I meant to save. "

And he sat and spoke with Mary until he asked if Mary would be there again tomorrow. When Mary said she would, he promised to return and left them there to return in the morning.

Mary turned to Angela and said:

"Where there is one, there are two.
Where there are two, there are three.

As others come to me, bring others to you. Make of yourselves a Circle and keep it, and in so doing be reminded that it is what we do that is important, not what we believe. It is not a secret thing laid bare by the world, but an open thing cherished in secret."

choice and action

2 - 1 1

Mary said:

"Choice is not action. Action is choice."

leadership**2 - 1 2**

Angela asked:

"You ask of me something I have not to give; I am not a leader to call others to common cause."

Mary replied:

"Where have I said that one dines on leadership?

They that are the sustenances of life are what walk, what move, what rejoice, what laugh.

In all truth it is said, they are the lords, they are the rulers - they are what conquer."

kith and kin**2 - 1 3**

Angela asked:

"Which are more important, family or friends?"

Mary said:

"There are the associations we are born to, and there are the associations we choose. Honor the one, but cherish the other."

freedom**2 - 1 4**

Mary said:

"A man in prison for a crime he did not commit came up for parole. They did not believe that he was blameless, and if he maintained his innocence, they would accuse him of being unrepentent and he would remain in prison, but if he lied and claimed repentence he would be released.

Which path lies to freedom?"

His name was Julius. He asked Mary:

"You say so little of where you came from, of those who came before you. Who are you?"

Mary said:

"Are we where we came from? Are we those who walked with us, or those who brought us into the world? All of these are who we are, but none of them are all of who we are. I am you, and you are me.

For I am the honored and the scorned.
I am the whore and the priestess.
I am the wife and the virgin.
I am the mother and the daughter.

I am barren, and many are my children.
I am the bride and the groom, and it is my husband who begot me.
I am the mother of my father and the sister of my husband, and he is my offspring.
I am the staff of his power in his youth, and he is the rod of my old age.

I am the voice whose sound is manifold and the word whose appearance is multiple.
I am the utterance of my name.

I am knowledge and ignorance.
I am shame and boldness.
I am strength and I am fear.
I am war and I am peace.

In my weakness, do not forsake me, and do not be afraid of my power.

For why despise my fear and yet curse my pride?

I am she who exists in all fears and the strength in all trembling.

I am the one who has been hated everywhere and the one who has been loved everywhere.

I am the one whom they call life, and you death.

I am the one whom they have pursued, and the one you have seized.

I am control and the uncontrollable.

I am the union and the dissolution.

I am the judgement and the acquittal.

I am a mute who does not speak, and great is the multitude of my words.

I am the speech that cannot be grasped.

I am the name of the sound and the sound of the name.

I am the sign of the letter and the designation of the division.

And I will speak that name.

For I am godless, and I am the one whose God is great."

four circles

2 - 1 6

Mary said:

"Listen, all who would hear:

First, there is yours and mine.

Second, mine is yours, and yours is mine.

Third, there is no mine, and no yours.

Fourth, there is no me and no you.

Wherever you may hear this, know that some will call them this and some that. One follows another, yet the pursuit of even one is a life's work."

the world

2 - 1 7

Mary said:

"No one who possesses snow would find it difficult to exchange it for jewels or pearls. The world is snow exposed to the sun. The snow will melt until, at last, it will disappear entirely, while understanding is like a precious jewel that will never pass away."

divinity

2 - 1 8

Mary said:

"Divinity is not a thing separate from the world, it *is* the world. To turn to the divine is to turn to each other."

god

2 - 1 9

Angela asked:

"Does God exist?"

And Mary laughed.

"Do you exist?"

Angela said:

"Yes. I believe I do, at least. But I asked about God, not myself."

Mary said:

"Define your God for me."

Angela replied:

"God is omniscient and omnipresent, all-knowing and ever-present."

Mary said:

"If God is all-knowing and ever-present, doesn't that make the universe God?"

Angela laughed.

"No. The universe does not know, it simply is."

Mary replied:

"Can a person know?"

Angela hesitated.

"Yes."

Mary continued:

"Are you part of the universe?"

Angela said:

"Yes."

Mary nodded:

"Then, if you are part of the universe, the universe can, indeed, know things. We are the universe's way of being conscious of itself.

Your hand is a part of what you think of as *you*, but your hand is not, in itself, conscious of its own existence.

Does a molecule know where it is supposed to go, how it is supposed to behave? Being requires neither consciousness nor awareness - only being."

Mary smiled then:

"I am God. You are God. Everything that exists is a part of God, for God is that which is all-knowing and ever-present. To ask if God exists is to doubt the existence of the universe around you."

applications of faith

2 - 20

Mary said:

"Inspired truth and revealed truth are not greater than reasoned truths. Intuitive or deductive, what is, *is*. Rapture and a greater glory cannot be had simply by the application of blind faith, and revelation is a poor substitute for understanding."

truth and knowledge

2 - 2 1

Mary said:

"Truth is the mother; knowledge the father."

truth and ignorance

2 - 2 2

Mary said:

"Let each one of us dig down deeply after the root of evil which is within and pluck it out of one's heart from the root. If we recognize it, it will be unrooted, but if we remain blinded to it and refuse to see it, it will sprout and produce its fruit within us.

Truth is like ignorance; where it is hidden, it grows and gestates, and when it is revealed it emerges and is given freedom."

truth and fable

2 - 2 3

Mary said:

"A story need not to have happened to be true."

peace

2 - 2 4

Mary said:

"If two make peace with each other within a single house, they will say to the mountain, 'Move!' - and it will move."

the struggle

2 - 2 5

Angela asked:

"When will we begin to combat the wrongs that lie around us?"

Mary said:

"Better to ask how will you know, for what you are looking forward to has already come to be.

Your struggle is not against flesh and blood; your crusade is against the authorities of defilement and the spirits of atrocity."

the second responsibility

2 - 2 6

Mary said:

"It is not enough to be aware of the truth. Neither is it enough to practice the truth.

To seek the truth one must seed the truth. Seed it and spread it, engender and birth it. One must put forth the choice where others may see it.

As you have chosen, so too let others choose. The seeker's responsibility is to ensure that the choice is seen, but it is the supplicant's choice alone to seize upon the choice or turn away from it."

fall

2 - 27

It was fall, and cold. They had come to a shelter, and there Mary sat quietly with the people. She listened where there were those who would speak, spoke where there were those who would listen.

A scuffle broke out and a woman was struck in the face with a tire iron. The woman in charge insisted that a man who had not come within ten feet of the injured woman had done it - a man not liked by the woman in charge. The police were called, and then an ambulance.

Mary went to the woman in charge and said:

"You accuse one who is innocent not because he is guilty, but because he is convenient.

By accusing him, you accuse us all."

the accused

2 - 28

Mary turned to Angela and said:

"I will go to them when they come, and I will tell them I did what she would accuse him of doing."

Angela protested:

"But you cannot go. You are needed."

Mary said:

"One or a million, it is all the same. What matters is that we who had the capacity to act, acted. They will believe her as she accuses him, and they will ignore his pleas of innocence. They will see accusation as the same thing as guilt."

Angela asked:

"If you go now, what can we do? What will we do, when you are gone?"

Mary said:

"Go now not to those who will not listen, but to those who will. Go to them and do as you would have done to you, treat with them as you would have them treat you. I send you out not as conquering soldiers, but as messengers; I am the Bow, you the Arrows, and it is into the hearts and minds of men and women that I fire you.

When you are in the dark, speak of light; what is whispered in your ears, proclaim from the rooftops. Do not fear those who can kill the body. Rather, fear the one who can kill the soul and yet leave the body blameless.

Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for the sake of another will find it."

in childbirth

2 - 3 0

Angela says:

"But what if people try to stop this from happening?"

Mary said:

"For a long time I have kept silent.
I have been quiet and held myself back.
But now, as in childbirth,
I cry out, I gasp and pant.
I will lay waste the mountains and hills
And dry up all their vegetation.
I will turn rivers into islands
And dry up the pools.
I will lead the blind by ways they have not known,
Along unfamiliar paths I will guide them;
I will turn the darkness into light before them
And make the rough places smooth.

It is I who am the blacksmith
Who fans the coals into flame and
Forges a weapon fit for its work.
And it is I who have created the destroyer
To work havoc;
No weapon forged against you will prevail,
And you will refute every tongue that
Accuses you."

Angela asked:

"When will you come back to us?"

Mary said:

"Not to me should you turn your faith, but to each other. Look not to me for answers, but to your sister. Look not to me for succor, but to your brother.

Remember, there is no me and no you. What is, is. What was, was. What will be, will be. The boundaries that you see are only those of your own making. Let your hands be guided by the miracles that are always yours to give.

I tell you this, keep the Circle! Watch for what has been hidden, seek after that which has been lost. Give to others the gift that you have given yourself. Let others share with you what is theirs to give, so that you may share with them what is for you to give. Not for my sake should you do this, but for each other.

In the darkness Death will come to you, she will take your hand and lead you to the House of the Unfleshed, to the place where the journey ends. Never again shall you return, never again shall you make your way back, but though you are gone, you will in truth have never left."

the benediction

2 - 3 2

Angela said:

"I will do as you say, Mary. But it is hard still to see you go."

Mary smiled, and then placed her hand on my mother's head and said:

"So soon have you forgotten what I taught you, Angela. Remember, there are no endings, only beginnings."

in the beginning

2 - 3 3

Mary approached the police when they arrived and there, in front of everyone, confessed to the crime. The police took her from there and into custody.

In December of 1972, on the Friday before Christmas Day, Mary vanished from prison.

That evening Angela held a Candlemass, lighting one candle for Mary, and others for every other loved one who had passed from her life. She placed the candles in the windows of her apartment, letting them burn until late into the night.

I was born three years later, in 1975. She named me, perhaps predictably, after that other Mary.

Until my twenty-fourth birthday, I had never known why my mother lit the candles in the window every year. On my twenty-fourth birthday she sat me down and told me, asking me to write it down as she spoke.

I do not know how much happened as she said it, but it does not, in the end, matter, for however it happened, it is a true thing.

At first, I thought the important thing was who Mary was and what had happened to her.

But Mary was not the truth; she was the Bow, I an Arrow, loosing a solitary message into the night, a message consisting of only a single word.

Tonight I will light my candles.

III

THE RECORDINGS

October 2001.

Of those of us who knew Mary, Angela knew her first, and best. She was the beginning of the Circle, but not the end, for the Circle, like Mary, has no ending, only beginnings.

We will not walk and breathe and sing forever; two of us now have been given to the darkness that waits at the end of all things, and the voices that remain must be recorded.

What follows are the voices of that beginning.

the nature of divine submission

3 - 1

It has been said that science occupies the place of religion in that both seek to explain the universe. As science has explained more of the physical nature of the order of things, religion has receded to occupy a place of explaining or giving meaning to those aspects of existence that science is unlikely to penetrate. Religion seeks to define itself in moral and ethical terms, to give a sense of purpose and meaning to what might otherwise seem bleak, desolate and empty.

Surrendering to a presence that is infallible, immortal and everpresent grants unto the believer a portion of that infallibility, that immortality. It makes the believer a part of infinity, and the price that such a surrender requires is the sacrifice of some measure or kind of autonomy - or perhaps simply pride.

Sentience has evolved under the general drive to preserve first the species, then the self. The genetic aspect that is involved in the dynamic interplay between nature and nurture strives towards this, for to do otherwise would inevitably result in destruction for the species. Our emotions, our instincts, provide general rules designed for nothing more and nothing less than the survival of *us*.

Hitler's Nazi Germany in its pageantry of moral depravity gives voice and thought to the idea of man-as-god, of the Master, the Führer. No longer is God confined solely to the heavens; the images of a grim god of humanity reach forth to bind humanity to stark and barren purpose. In other places there are the shadows of an Organic State; the individual is the cell. An execution is no different than trimming one's fingernails.

Religion is so often seen in terms of ritual, when its true fountainhead has always lain in its power to bind and harness the human imagination to something greater.

If, then, religion is at its core a submission to the greater whole of the human soul, then there is no necessary contradiction between a secular pursuit of scientific understanding and submission to the greater "instinct" of humanity.

If, then, religion is at its heart merely the greater expression of humanity's will to survive, and the rituals are merely symbolic representations of this greater will, then truly, as Robert Heinlein wrote, "Thou art God."

Thou art a part of God for here God is the whole of human hopes and dreams. Submission to the divine is then acceptance of oneself, and of a commitment to that nature that Nature has granted us.

Choose.

I keep that word on a little sign on my desk. A few years ago, a man came into my office. His wife had died of cancer a week before. As we spoke, his gaze kept staying to my sign.

"I didn't choose for my wife to die," he said. "She didn't choose to die. What kind of monster would say that everything is our choice?"

Choose.

We make millions of choices every moment of our lives. We make some decisions consciously, but most of our important choices we make silently. We are not even aware of them unless we pay attention.

We choose to live or not to live.

Once, a series of traumatic events shook me. In their wake, I found myself seeking constant distraction from my own thoughts. The company of those who loved me became difficult, for they would ask about my life, a topic which I found painful. I put off important obligations. I buried myself in work. I felt as though I were viewing the world from the bottom of a pond.

I was choosing not to live.

One day, I awoke and decided to clean my home; I began again to love those who loved me. My obligations began to seem less like horrible ordeals and more like pleasant exercise. Bit by bit, moment by moment, I was choosing to live again.

We are the composer, the singer, and the song. We may choose to leave off singing or to sing again.

The man's wife did not choose to fall ill. She did not choose to leave her husband alone in the world, but until the moment of her death, this woman chose to live. In every moment of the life that she did have, she lived.

"Choose" is a command. It is not Mary's command, nor Angela's. It is the world itself that orders each of us to choose. The command is the world's. The choice belongs to us. The choice is all that *can* belong to us.

The command is not "choose to live" or "choose to be happy." If the command dictated the choice, then the choice would cease to be. It is up to each of us, in each moment, to find our choices.

Each choice is a note in our song.

Corporate entities are not corporeal entities.

Too often we forget that a group is nothing more than a network of individuals centered around a common set of ideals, goals or conceptions. When a group of individuals chooses to act without ethics, it is they - not "the corporation" or "the group" - who have fallen from grace. When a squad of firefighters saves a family from a burning building, it is those individual firefighters - working together - who save the people, not "the squad".

The group is a concept - not a thing. It is when we forget this and put the "rights" and accountability of a group above those of the individual that we lose sight of the trees for all the forest around us.

It is not "the group" that commits high or mean deeds; the group is merely the lens through which our individual efforts are focused. A group cannot love, it cannot weep, nor can it be brave or honorable - these are things reserved for individuals and individuals alone.

Our organizations and groups are the strings that bind us together, but they are strings, not chains. They exist to help us do those things that cannot be done alone. They are transitive elements in an eternal game.

It is when we accuse and honor by group rather than individual that we fail and fall. Honor the individuals who have worked together, yes - but to honor the effort itself is to give respect to the clothes, not the man.

change

3 - 4

We have a choice to remain silent and let the world around us remain as it is, or we can open our mouths, break the silence and attempt to influence change.

Will we succeed? Not always. Does success matter? Success will ease the path for those around us, and allow them to do things and function in ways they may not have had the liberty to do.

Success will set a precedent for others to follow, but it is the mere act of attempting that ultimately matters. It is the choice to make a difference, the choice to *do* something rather than simply examining and discoursing.

There are many willing to sit in judgement and condemn, to decry loudly and call for others to follow suit.

Others prefer to sit in silence or ignore these things - playing the ostrich and hoping for someone else to choose for them or claim that they have no choice, that others have decided already for them.

Giving up the right, surrendering the ability to choose is a choice in and of itself. We may act, or we may not, but regardless of how we attempt to avoid it, we will choose.

The purpose of existence is to survive.

The desire to continue, to expand, to grow is bred into every aspect of our existence. An animal is driven by its instincts; humans, too, have instincts, though we call them emotion.

The key to understanding the emotive aspect of who we are - the human instinct - is to understand that it is something built upon millions of years of trial and error to produce a basic pattern of response that more often than not will lead to the survival of the group. It need not work all the time, it must work only enough to ensure that there is another generation.

Our emotive aspect emerges in our literature, our principles, our sense of duty and honor and fair play, of compassion and romance. We need to resist the temptation to be offended that these things we consider to be absolutes hold a reason and logic behind them, and a very cold and hard logic at that.

That there is a logic behind emotion and principle and compassion does not in any way diminish the existence of the compassion, of the principles we build families and communities and nations upon.

Instead of fighting human nature we must cherish it, nourish it and let it grow. Sometimes it is necessary to restrain it or guide it, but we can do neither responsibly until we understand it.

We are who and what we choose to be.

Every day, every hour, every minute we make the choices that shape how others see us. With every breath we take we shape the world about us.

The simple choice to get up an hour earlier or an hour later can change the whole scope of the day. The choice to answer the phone when a friend calls may seem a small thing, but it may be the kindness that saves a life or preserves a marriage.

Each day people complain about how they feel, about where they work and how they spend their free time, as if there were no choice. If they but opened their eyes they might see the multitude of choices awaiting them.

It is a cascade effect – one choice affects the existence of other choices. If I do not choose to go to a movie, I no longer need to choose where I sit or if I get popcorn. If I do not choose to take a job, I no longer need to choose whether to support my co-workers or whether I should quit. If I do not choose to become a nurse, I no longer need to choose whether to answer a call bell or to sit up all night with an ill patient whose family is gone.

We cannot escape choices, for each choice we make affects us, whether directly or indirectly.

death and self

3 - 7

A wave begins mid-ocean as a random ripple. Gathering strength from wind and sun, the wave rushes towards the shore. Reaching it, there is a crashing and a whiteness of foam, and it is gone, leaving a brief wash of seawater on the shore.

Where has the wave gone?

So it is with ourselves. We begin in microscopic smallness, gathering strength from those closest to us. As we grow in size and experience, our voices echo in the world. Then we are gone, leaving merely a jumble of flesh and bones which the world inexorably reclaims.

Where have we gone?

We cannot say, "We have returned to dust," merely because our bodies have done so. The wave upon the ocean contains not a drop of the water it will contain when it crashes upon the shore. Our bodies are constantly crumbling to dust and regrowing anew, and there is not an inch of us that remains the same from birth to death. Our bodies, from moment to moment, are mere borrowed coats of matter.

It is just as plain that we cannot say, "We are our minds, which merely manipulate our bodies." Our minds are the churning of the waves. Our minds are the light of the candle-flame. As our bodies fail, so fail our minds. Just as the body is constantly replenishing its form, the mind is ever reinventing itself with its own dream of existence.

At a funeral, should we laugh or weep?

Weeping and laughter are two sides of the same coin. When someone dies, there is a crash that ripples outward through us all. Our laughter and our weeping are both echoes of that crash.

When a wave foams upon the shore, it has not gone into another world. The ocean is as full and as turbulent as ever it was. The crash signifies a transition. The single wave has lost its identity. It has become unimaginably less, and yet endlessly more.

the solipsist and the pantheist

3 - 8

The solipsist states that all reality is merely the projection of the mind that experiences it; self is the whole of reality, only "I" exist.

Reality is ultimately irrelevant. We cannot ultimately know what is and what is merely illusion. The measure of sentience is not perception, however, but choice. Not experience, but action.

The pantheist holds the universe to be synonymous with God. The world is an illusion for a more profound spiritual truth, to the pantheist. Immanence takes precedence over transcendence, with the divine being placed here, now, and transcendent divinity being treated as the illusion.

Divinity does not imply sentience, however, only being. Not thought, only substance, but the absence of thought cannot be taken as evidence of the right of dominion, for the imposition of power can have effects upon the whole that are never easily forseen.

Neither does divinity imply either omnipotence or omniscience. That everything *is* does not mean that everything *knows*. Existence does not insist upon the assumption of choice.

the gifts of the magi

3 - 9

Help or harm. How do we define what is one and what is the other? The act of giving assistance can harm those we seek to help by destroying the chance for them to make their own choices. In turn those we seek to hurt may find freedom in our harsh words or actions.

Acting to help someone is not always an act of kindness. Many who help others are merely seeking to fulfill their own needs. They look to others for their worth instead of finding it within, or they seek to bind those they help more closely to them.

The attempt to hurt someone can be the kindest act one can perpetrate. The honesty and abruptness of the act can create liberation. It can be a breath of reality and an awakening.

This does not mean we should seek to hurt those we care for, nor aid those we hate, but merely that we must examine our actions and motives before we act.

Why are we moved to do this? What do we hope to accomplish? Who do we do this for?

It is not the action so much as the intent that is important.

We fear death not for the passing, nor for the crossing, but rather for the loss of self.

In death, as in sleep, we lose volition, we lose control, and, finally, we lose even choice. Our bodies will fade to ashes, our borrowed coats of matter returned and recycled in the lasting cycle of life.

Before we were here, we did not think, and yet we do not fear that time before we were born. When our bodies have at last failed us and our consciousness fled, we will be no different than that *when* before the beginning of our self.

If there was consciousness before or after our physical existence, then death - and birth - are merely transitions of consciousness. If there is no consciousness beyond the moments of our physical existence, then we will not know what we are not.

Fear does not exist where thought does not go.

We are the might of the moments of our existence. Einstein showed that time and space are different shapes of the same substance, yet still we cannot let go our hold upon our conceptions of reality. What was once, *is*. The reformulation of a being or thought cannot change the fact of its existence.

As Mary said, there are no endings, only beginnings.

Fear is a friend.

From my friend I can learn of myself. I can choose to learn, to avoid, or even to hate the very things I fear.

Most of us choose to hate, yet do not even realize it. We choose to avoid the things we fear, but the things we hate never leave us. They grow and expand, they affect our sleep, our waking hours, our bodies, our health and lives, and, if we so choose, they may even affect our choices.

Why fear? Things will happen to us no matter what we do, and whether we live in fear or we learn to live with the fear and use it to teach us the lessons about living the life we want to live - we all die.

Knowing that my boss has fears, that my parents and teachers, my family and friends each has fears has been the most liberating feeling I have ever had. I can hide and become hateful, or I can choose to learn to enjoy relating with those that seem to make of my life a hell.

I have seen and done both, and I choose now to live, to share, to be vulnerable.

It is a great thing to fear; it is an opportunity to live, to break free from the things that we don't even know are holding us down. Acknowledge that fear, greet it with joy and learn to listen to what it is trying to show you.

The thing I fear most is thinking upon all of the things I have let hold me back.

of religion

3 - 12

There was a time when I can recall someone - Julius or John Mac Tavish, I think it was - asking whether I thought Mary had offered us philosophy or religion.

Religion offers explanation; explanation of the world, of the self and of the soul. Religion makes a community of its adherents and fashions an ethical system of behavior from the raw material of social interactions.

Philosophy offers solace in the fortress of rational thought. It apportions measures of understanding and truth, but chooses to sacrifice in their stead the sense of both community and purpose.

It is a confluence of history and circumstance that have led religion to oppose reason, rather than it being a necessity and foundation of religion.

The Heresies, as Mary called them, are a religion of reason, though not only of reason. They require neither blind faith nor surrender of design, for they offer explanation and do not sacrifice a sense of purpose in the order of the world.

The Heresies perceive God in the grass and stone about us. They see God in the sun and the waves, the fire and the moonlight. God is female and male, profound and base, simple and complex. God is greater than the solitary soul, but the comfort that there is does not come *from* God, but rather from the knowledge and awareness *of* God. We are God. Apart, we are mere shards of divinity, but together, we are an infinity.

We are not "saved" by Mary and the Heresies. Everything is woven together, not in any mystical sense, but in the actuality that everything affects everything else, ripples in an ocean that fills all of reality. I cannot be saved by anyone but myself. Surrendering the responsibility that defines us for who we are is a betrayal of not only our own existence, but of *a//* existence.

Faith becomes an issue of commitment rather than a question of belief. Our leap of faith is one of a commitment to a thing that we wish to become truth. I neither "believe" in God nor do I "have faith" in the Heresies. Belief and faith are actions only meaningful in the absence of substantiation.

We do not "submit" to Mary and the Heresies, as we do not submit to God. Submission implies subordination. Reality in all its forms demands not submission, but acceptance. It demands not surrender, but understanding.

Acceptance and understanding imply neither agreement nor approval, merely recognition. The recognition of what *is* is the first step to making that which will be.

We cannot "relinquish" the corporeal in favor of Mary and the Heresies, for they speak of nothing but the tangible, and nowhere but the physical. What can be perceived, is. What can be remembered, was. What can be imagined, will be.

The Heresies assert a canon that is not dogma. They speak of truths that do not deny a conscious union with the divine, and they breathe a message that requires not affirmation, and asks only acceptance.

Where there is one, there are two. Where there are two, there are three.

As others came to Mary, bring others to you. Make of yourselves a Circle and keep it, and in so doing be reminded that it is what we do that is important, not what we believe. It is not a secret thing laid bare by the world, but an open thing cherished in secret.

A Circle is not a church, it is not a coven, it is not a congregation. It is the solitary notes of a common song.

We are a part of the universe, but not its entirety; when we come together in a Circle, each of us brings together that which is our part of the universe to share, for it is together that we are both our greatest and our least. Cherish the great; learn from the least.

There is the Circle closest to our heart, there is the Circle that consists of everything, and there are all the Circles in between.

A ritual is the symbol of the thing. It gains value in what it represents to those who bear it. It bridges the gap between mind and reality, and forges an unbreakable link between the two. The whole power of a ritual is given up only to its creator.

On the last day of April, what we have come to call the Choosing begins. We choose what we let come into our lives. We choose what we fear, and we choose what we allow to have power over us. We lay out two candles, but we burn only one.

On the second day of May, the Choosing is consummated. We build a fire against the night, and each of our Circle throws in something we wish or need to leave behind.

On the first Saturday following the first of August, we hold the Regale; a feast that is not for ourselves, but for the others of our community. It is an expression of a responsibility for others, an acceptance of our part in the greater whole of existence. Personal responsibility, through choice, frees us to share, and the Regale is one outward symbol of this.

On the Friday in the week of the Winter Solstice we hold our Candlemass, our festival of lights. When the evening comes we light one candle for Mary, and other candles, one each for each other loved one who has passed from our life, whether by death or distance. We let the candles burn until late into the night, a lighting of passion and fire to stand against the darkness.

the word

3 - 1 4

In the powerful religions that dominated in the twentieth century there was always a single word, a single directive to guide and shape each.

Islam told us to *submit* to Allah.

Christianity told us to *believe* in Christ.

Buddhism told us to *relinquish* the material.

One must pour out what was in a bowl before it may be filled with something new.

By submitting, you choose to surrender your pride.

By believing, you choose to accept hope.

By relinquishing, you choose to lay down fear.

Over and over, whatever path we walk, whatever lens we gaze through, always we are faced with the same challenge and the same choice.

Choose to live, or choose not to. Choose to take responsibility for yourself, for others and for the universe around you.

The adversary of good is not evil, but apathy. When we limit our capacity and willingness to share the anguish and joys of others, we breed apathy and birth tragedy.

prayer

3 - 1 5

We pray to know we are not alone.

Our supplications are rarely prayers for corporal aid in our endeavors, but instead prayers for the emotional succor that a mother provides her children.

We pray to know we are loved; we pray to know we are wanted. We pray to know that another has confidence - when we do not - that we can achieve what we labor to realize. The desire to pray is the desire for inner strength.

We pray to speak to the divine from the fragility of our self. We meditate to hear ourselves in the silence of our soul.

We gain from our awareness of the nature of God the knowledge that we are part of something that is greater than ourself, and that joined together in awareness and interconnection with it, we are infinite and invincible.

Creation. Justice. Heresy.
Honor. Individualism. Jealousy.
Responsibility. Ritual. Fear.

Beauty. Control. Confidence.
Entropy. Aggression. Denial.
Freedom. Violence. Respect.

Strength. Identity. Humanity.
Hate. Religion. Sacrifice.
Immortality. Fate. Action.

Faith. Gnosis. Ignorance.
Success. Luck. Sentience.
Love. Surrender. Emotion.

Time. Defilement. Loss.
Perspective. Knowledge. Roads.
Possession. Expectation. Death.

Apotheosis.