

FEMININE IMAGES IN THE
PATRISTIC CHURCH

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
Nancy B. Meulendyke
1968

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ABSTRACT

FEMININE IMAGES IN THE PATRISTIC CHURCH

by Nancy B. Meulendyke

Since the sub-Apostolic age was one of moral and intellectual ferment, it was a crucial period for the development of women's rights and status in Western civilization. This study examines Patristic theology on the Church, virginity, marriage, and the Virgin-Mary in order to abstract early Christian feminine ideals. It also tries to determine woman's actual ministry in the Church, and the influence women had on the Fathers.

The secondary sources relating to Christian woman in the first five centuries have been examined through 1966. The primary sources, the writings of the Church Fathers available in English, have also been studied to try to determine the overall view of particular Fathers and to seek evidence not available in the secondary sources. Both positive and negative views about women were encountered, but the evidence uncovered indicates that due to the very positive influence of Christ and the Apostles on feminine sexuality, the Patristic teaching was favorable to women even when the feelings of some of the Fathers were to the contrary.

FEMININE IMAGES IN THE
PATRISTIC CHURCH

By
Nancy B. Meulendyke

A THESIS

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Preface

Two events of the past decade prompted the writing of this thesis. The first was the publication of Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique (New York, 1963). The author challenged the traditional assumptions that there were significant differences between men and women. She concluded that the role one played should be left to choice and not predetermined by society in the name of nature. This prompted me to question sexuality on a deeper level and to study the biological, psychological, religious, and historical roots underlying Western sexual mores.

The assassination of President John F. Kennedy, also in 1963, brought home to me the amount of barbarism and violence in our society and turned my attention from the effects of sexuality on individuals to the needs of society itself for some kind of balance between the progressive, assertive, competitive, masculine qualities and the conservative, civilizing, feminine ones in order to maintain both thrust and equilibrium. Sexual differences viewed from this perspective did not seem so much the result of cultural prejudices as had been postulated by Mrs. Friedan, but looked much more like the cosmic forces which the ancient Chinese had called the yin and the yang.

Because I was looking for sexual ideals as well as masculine and feminine roles in Western society, I felt that religious history would be more fruitful than the economic, political, or social spheres. More importantly, I felt that early Christianity would serve as a model of how the masculine Fathers influenced and were influenced by the feminine institution--the Church.

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KCE

NESE,

NESE,

ODCC

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ANF The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325. Revised and arranged with prefaces and notes by A. Cleveland Coxe. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950-51. The American Reprint of the Edinburgh Edition, 1867-97.
- FC The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation. Edited by Ludwig Schopp, et al. 58 vols. New York: CIMA Publishing Co., Inc., 1947-1966.
- NCE New Catholic Encyclopedia. Edited by William J. Mc Donald. 15 vols. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966.
- NPNF, 1st ser. A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: First Series. Edited by Philip Schagg. 7 vols. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publish Company, 1956.
- NPNF, 2nd ser. A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series. 9 vols. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952-56.
- ODCC The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church. Edited by F. L. Cross. London: Oxford University Press, 1958.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an attempt to reconstruct the acceptance or rejection of feminine qualities and attributes during one period in the development of Western civilization. It is not just a study of women in the early Christian Church, although it includes that, but it takes up the whole spectrum of femininity--woman's role in marriage, her function in society, and the feminine ideas and ideals which have religious weight behind them.

There have been many historical studies of women in Western civilization. There have also been many studies of women's official role in the early Church. Writings on Marian theology are voluminous. But a direct look at the Church in order to determine its role as preserver and teacher of femininity itself has not been attempted. This is becoming of more and more interest today.

The principal difference between the feminist movements of the late nineteenth and those of the mid-twentieth centuries is that today women are confused about their own sexual identity. Some would go so far as to deny that there are any such things as constituent feminine elements. Seventy years ago this was not overtly questioned; women then merely sought more influence in public life. If it

could be shown that women had once had an official role to play within the Church hierarchy, this could be used as a wedge for readmittance. The basic research on woman's official function in the Church was done in the late nineteenth century and led to the establishment of deaconesses in the Anglican Church.¹

Today woman's public role is only part of a much larger question. Political democracy, socialism, and the feminist movement itself have led to a confusion and blurring of sexual roles. Some women wish to push this to the ultimate extreme by removing every law and custom which differentiates between men and women, even seeking to repeal legislation originally passed to protect women--such as laws which made it illegal to use women in underground mines. They now call this discrimination.

Other men and women have wondered if such a solution would have the desired result of giving woman equal dignity with man. Politics and economics have generally been man's domain, and in these areas he has made up the ground rules. Margaret Meade has pointed out that economic status always goes with the work which men do--even when women fish and men do the beadwork.² If this is true, woman by competing

¹"Deaconesses," ODCC, p. 377.

²"Woman, Position in Society," Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, XV (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1935), p. 440.

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with man on his terms may find the cards are stacked against her. On such terms she would become a copy of man and probably an inferior copy at that.

Depth psychology, religion, and literature provide woman with another alternative. Rather than compete with man, she can complement him and even excell in the very areas where he is weakest. The danger here, however, is that in an expanding and technologically oriented society, the traditional feminine qualities cease to be regarded as complementary or even relevant to technocracy. The feminine qualities become inferior attributes and the myth develops that this has always been the case. Only a careful study of the ideals of Western civilization can refute or sustain this claim. An examination of the thought of the Christian Church Fathers seemed the logical place to begin, for they more than any others formed the moral and intellectual models from which Western civilization gradually developed.

Before embarking on a discussion of the feminine images in the Christian Church, a definition of the feminine itself would be in order in historical, biological, psychological and theological terms. Femininity is not an absolute expression. Masculinity and feminity are both relative to each other. To be feminine is not to be masculine. To be masculine is not to be feminine. Each term is meaningless except in the context of the other. A few anthropologists have seen woman's social role purely as the result of cultural forces. They seem to deny that woman has any

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particular role of her own to play--a role determined by her biology or psychology. But in recorded history there does seem to be a certain pattern. The woman was found around the house. She bore and raised the young children. She tended to what have come to be called the domestic chores: cooking, weaving, sewing, housekeeping, tending the small garden and the smaller animals. As the centuries passed and technology changed the work patterns of people, the woman continued to be the heart of the home. Even after the industrial revolution when woman was forced to go outside her home to join the labor force, the housekeeping and child-rearing chores continued to be her primary responsibility. Mary Beard has written an interesting study of woman's role in history. She has come to the conclusion that the contention of American feminists that women have long been held in subjection by law and tradition cannot be substantiated by the facts. She fills page after page, chapter after chapter, with examples of women who have been active in religious, economic, social, intellectual, and even military fields. But she concludes after weighing the evidence that while woman has sometimes been engaged in barbaric atrocities, such as murder and war, in the main she has been the promoter and sustainer of the more humane and civilizing activities of mankind.³

³Mary R. Beard, Woman as Force in History: A Study in Traditions and Realities (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1946), p. 331.

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Some social scientists have recently begun to realize that there are two kinds of leadership in the family. They now distinguish between the instrumental leadership of the male and the expressive leadership of the female.⁴ Instrumental leadership is primarily concerned with the economic well-being of the family. Expressive leadership is leadership in nurture and social relationships. The nurture of the family and the relationships within the family as well as the social relationships between families are not only the domain of the woman, but here the male follows her lead. That this was the woman's domain has been generally acknowledged; that she exercised real leadership here was not always as self-evident. However, Pope Pius XI in 1930 stated this most clearly when he said that "the man has the primacy in ruling, the woman the primacy in love."⁵

Most obviously woman has a biology of her own. Many have underestimated the effect this biology has on the social and psychological functioning of the female. Even if this biological difference were confined to the reproductive function, the difference would still be significant. However, medical research has discovered that biological

⁴"Woman," NCE, XIV, 992 quotes. Morris Zelditch, "Role Differentiation in the Nuclear Family: A Comparative Study," Family Socialization and Interaction Process, ed. T. Parsons and R.F. Bowles.

⁵As quoted in "Woman," NCE, XIV, 992.

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differences of the male and the female are not limited to sexual characteristics alone. The woman has a different metabolism, a different chromosomal content, a different rate of reproducing white corpuscles. Her hormones function differently; she has a much greater viability and a more sensitive central nervous system. She is not physically as strong, nor can she work as many hours at strenuous activity as can the male. Every female cell can be recognized as female! The woman also has a different psychological make-up. Whether this is sex-linked, culturally determined, or a combination of these is outside the domain of this paper. But it is these psychological characteristics even more than the biological ones for which we generally use the term feminine.

The German psychologist C. G. Jung has done the pioneer work in the polarity of the human personality. Following in his footsteps and pursuing the feminine principle even further has been Eric Neumann. In a major work The Great Mother he has analyzed both the positive and negative elements which make up the female psyche and their projection into the symbolic or prototype. According to Dr. Neumann there are two fundamental traits which make up the feminine -- the elementary character of containment and the secondary character of development or transition. The elementary character is the womb; the Great Round; the conservative, possessive, stable container. The second character is the drive to development, movement, unrest;

it fascinates, sets personality in motion, and produces change. These two characteristics are sometimes antagonistic and sometimes interpenetrating, but both are basic to the female spirit.⁶ The basic feminine functions correspond to this spirit, for these functions are first to give life, nourishment, warmth, protection, and secondly to foster growth.⁷

Beyond these first two constitutions of the feminine which are omnipresent, is the feminine spiritual principle which has the function of spiritual transformation. This is the sphere of the religious mysteries. Fruit, birth, rebirth, immortality tend toward the Mother pole; wisdom, vision, inspiration, and ecstasy belong to the transformation character.⁸ Beyond this level is the mystical sphere where the feminine becomes concept and allegory⁹. This is the realm of Mary, Sophia, the Virgin-Mother.¹⁰

⁶Eric Neumann, The Great Mother, tr. Ralph Manheim (New York: Bollinger Foundation, Inc., 1963), facing p.24.

⁷Ibid., p. 43.

⁸Ibid., facing p.82.

⁹Ibid., p. 78.

¹⁰In the fourth circle polarity has been transcended and the negative characteristics have disappeared. This is the realm beyond good and evil, male and female, virgin and mother. In this sphere virginity symbolizes complete openness to God.

While the first feminine characteristic is so fundamental to the preservation of the race that its self-evidency needs no comment, the third or mystical or inspirational role of the feminine has been well attested to by both the Church and literature. Dante's Beatrice is the most obvious literary example. It is the second realm - woman as catalyst to growth - which is often overlooked. Because of this oversight she could be so easily underestimated. Woman not only bears life, she transforms it. It is a misplaced femininity which overprotects and smothers. The truly feminine also releases, encourages growth and development, and incites change in others. It is here that woman is a real contributor to history.

Perhaps because a psychology of woman had to wait until the twentieth century, a theology of woman has never been formulated. A theology of mankind has been the proper study of the Western Church since the fifth century when St. Augustine turned the attention of theology from an exclusive study of the Godhead to a theology also concerned with man-- a theology which sought to understand the relationship of psychology and grace. Yet, because vir and man can both be used interchangeably for either man or mankind, there has always been a certain ambiguity. However, from the beginning Hebraic-Christian theology has always acknowledged the sexuality of mankind and the resulting complementary natures of the male and the female. In Genesis we find: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God

he created him; male and female he created them".¹¹ And later: "Wherefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall be two in one flesh".¹² In the Christian dispensation St. Paul says: "Yet, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman - independent of man in the Lord."¹³ This is a theology which recognizes man's sense of incompleteness and alienation. This incompleteness is the source of man's restlessness, his spirit of adventure, his creativity. However, his most basic behavior pattern compensating for this lack of wholeness has always been marriage. Consequently, marriage was seen as the symbol of man's thirst for the absolute, his desire to be united to God. Also in marriage man perceived that he was to represent in union with woman all of humanity in submission and obedience to God. The Christian Church called marriage a sacrament. It also used marriage as an eschatological symbol of the union of man and God.

The Christian Fathers continued the theology of the New Testament and idealized the feminine in the theology of the New Eve, the Virgin-Mary, and the Church, but their critics would add that on the other hand these same Fathers humiliated woman. These critics would of course point to Tertullian's famous phrase that woman is "the gateway to hell." They would also indicate her lack of liturgical participation and function.

¹¹ Gen. 1.27.

¹² Gen. 2.24 (or Ibid., 24?).

¹³ I Cor. 11.11.

They would have us understand, too, that through faith woman must seek to transcend her sex, something the male in turn would not be asked to do. They would claim this has been a traditional misogynistic teaching of the Church. A careful review of patristic literature is necessary in order to substantiate or refute this claim.

While pursuing this study it should be born in mind under what condition these Fathers have become an authority in the Church. Johannes Quasten says that the authority of the Fathers in the Catholic Church is important because it preserves tradition.¹⁴ The unanimous consent of the Fathers is regarded as infallible if it concerns the interpretation of scripture. He quotes John Henry Cardinal Newman who says that Christians recognize the authority of the Fathers because they are witnesses. These doctrines have been received not here or there but everywhere in the Church. They are informants not authorities in themselves.¹⁵ Thus, isolated opinion of any Father remains a private opinion. It is only when their testimony shows universal agreement that this testimony is considered as official doctrine.

Quasten goes on to define the term "Father." Father is an ancient synonym for teacher. St. Paul says: "For although you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you

¹⁴Johannes Quasten, Patrology (3 vols.; Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press and Utrecht/Antwerp: Spectrum Publishers, 1950-60), I, 11.

¹⁵Ibid., 11-12. He notes his source as Discussions and Arguments II, 1.

have not many fathers. For in Christ Jesus through the Gospel, I have begotten you."¹⁶ Clement of Alexandria also remarks: "Words are the progeny of the soul. Hence we call those who instructed us fathers ... and everyone who's instructed is in respect of subjection the son of his instructor."¹⁷ In the primitive Church the teaching office belonged exclusively to the bishop, and at first the term "Father" was applied only to him. Later it came to be applied to ecclesiastical writers who were not bishops. During the fourth century for instance St. Jerome was called Father although he was not a member of the episcopacy. Teaching was a very masculine function. Since men were the teachers, the authorities, their works have been preserved. It is these masculine works that are the evidence for what were the feminine images in the ancient Church. There is little evidence of what the women themselves had to say, but only the women and the feminine functions as men perceived them.

We shall now turn to the writings of the Fathers themselves to see if the documents support the conclusion of the German Church historian Karl Bihlmeyer that:

It [Christianity] elevated woman and recognized her as the autonomous equal of man and explained

¹⁶ 1 Cor. 4.15.

¹⁷ Quasten I, 9 quotes Stromata I, I, 2-2, I.

the marriage bond in the light of the supernatural. In the writings of some ascetics of Christian antiquity . . . , views are sometimes expressed derogatory of woman and marriage; but these are the narrow views of individuals and not the official teaching of the church.¹⁸

Dr. Bihlmeyer's view shall be the thesis of this paper with the feminine being accepted as defined above.

¹⁸ Karl Bihlmeyer, Church History, Vol. I: Christian Antiquity, trans. Victor E. Mills (13th German ed. rev. Herman Tuchsle; Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1958), p. 377.

CHAPTER II

CHRISTIAN FEMININE IMAGERY

Because Christianity was a religion and not a philosophy, imagery was used initially to carry the Christian message; only later was a scientific, rational theology developed. Images appealed to the whole man--his intellect, his imagination, and his emotions, and he responded to them. Also analogy was the best way the Christian could find to communicate his experience of God.

Images were used by the Christian Fathers to express perfection. They also illustrated concepts and ideas in a concrete graspable form. On the other hand, images also served as archetype for human development and models for human behavior. There were three important feminine patristic images: the Church, Mary, and certain aspects of the Divinity--especially the Holy Spirit.

The Church was spontaneously described by all Christians in feminine metaphors, because in its very essence the Church was mystery. Mystery is a constituent element in all great religions because the deity is beyond the comprehension of man. For Christianity the central mystery was God's intervention in history. Through this intervention came the reconciliation or union of God and

man. It was within the community, however, that this mystical union was celebrated and realized. Christian mysticism was from the beginning a communal or sacramental mysticism. Woman, too, has always been associated with the mysterious so it was natural to describe the Church in feminine language.¹ Clement of Alexandria expressed the feelings of the Fathers on this particular facet of the Church by exclaiming; "O mystic marvel!"²

The mother symbol suggested other mysterious and transforming aspects of the Church. This image was omnipresent in patristic literature and can be found as early as the second century in the so-called Second Epistle attributed to Clement of Rome "Rejoice, O thou barren that barrest not."³ The Church was primarily mother because her children were born from her womb which was the baptismal font. Didymus the Blind spoke not only of the Church's motherhood,

¹An interesting piece of information confirms this point. Eusebius proposed a masculine name for the Church--Thaisos--which means "religious festival association." His suggestion was firmly rejected. Willi Moll, The Christian Image of Woman, tr. Elisabeth Reinecke and Paul C. Bailey (Notre Dame, Indiana: Fides Publishers Inc., 1967), p. 164.

²Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor in Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (entire), rev. A. Cleveland Coxe (ANF, Vol. 2), p. 220.

³Clement of Rome, The So-Called Second Epistle to the Corinthians, tr. Francis X. Glimm in The Apostolic Fathers (FC Vol. 1), p. 65.

but of a motherhood made productive through the Holy Spirit. "The baptismal pool of the Trinity is a workshop for the salvation of all those who believe. It frees from the serpent sting all those who are washed therein, and, remaining a virgin, becomes the mother of all through the Holy Ghost."⁴

Of all the ante-Nicene Fathers, Cyprian was probably the strongest advocate of the Mother-Church concept. He used the term mother in his writings many times. Writing On the Unity of the Church, he pictured her as holding her children in her bosom and in her womb.⁵ He also stated even more emphatically, "He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his Mother."⁶ For Cyprian the primary unity of the Church was feminine relatedness. Any masculine organization of the Church would not be the source of its unity, but only an external expression of an a priori unbreakable feminine bond.⁷

⁴Didymus the Blind, De Trinitate as quoted in Quasten, III, 97.

⁵Cyprian, On the Unity of the Church in Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian, Appendix rev. A. Cleveland Coxe (ANF, Vol. 5), pp. 428-29.

⁶Ibid., p. 423.

⁷Hans von Campenhausen, Men Who Shaped the Western Church, tr. Manfred Hoffman (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1965), p. 122. He is speaking here of St. Ambrose, but this is a general idea in the patristic literature.

If the Church was the mother of Christians, it soon became evident that she was also the bride of Christ. The Church was called the bride of Christ by the Fathers as early as the first century in The Shepherd of Hermas.⁸ Didymus the Blind called her the bride of Christ and his mystical body.⁹ Cyprian also called her Christ's bride and went on to say that she could never be an adulteress, but whoever separated himself from the Church would attach himself to one.¹⁰ This bridal imagery was finally carried to its ultimate conclusion in Spain by Aponius who called the union of Christ and the Church "the gloriosa copula."¹¹ Bride, union, obedience, and trusting intimacy have thus always been marks of the Church.

Other feminine appellations were used by the Fathers to describe the Church. In the theology of Methodius it was not Mary but the Church who was the second Eve.¹² To

⁸The Shepherd of Hermas, tr. Joseph M.-F. Marique in The Apostolic Fathers, p. 255.

⁹Didymus the Blind, In Psalm as quoted in Quasten, III, 97.

¹⁰Cyprian, On the Unity, p. 523.

¹¹Joseph Hugh Crehon, "Theological Trends," Theology in Transition: A Bibliographical Evaluation of the "Decisive Decade, 1954-1964", ed. Elmer O'Brien (New York: Herder & Herder, 1965), p. 25.

¹²Methodius, The Banquet of Ten Virgins quoted in Quasten, II, 132.

the Fathers the Woman clothed with the Sun in the Apocalypse also represented the Church.¹³ In the Shepherd of Hermas she was called pre-existent. She was "created first, before all things ... it is for her that the world was made."¹⁴ Ignatius of Antioch writing to the Ephesians said the Church was "predestined from eternity to eternal ... glory."¹⁵

Methodius called her queen. "For the prophet's word compares the Church to a flower-covered and variegated meadow adorned and crowned not only with the flowers of virginity, but also with those of child-bearing and of continence: for it is written: 'in embroidered garments with golden fringes the queen takes her place to the right of the bridegroom'".¹⁶ The inscription of Abercius taken from a second century tombstone also called the Church of Rome "a queen with golden robes and golden shoe."¹⁷

The respect, honor, and devotion that the Fathers showed to feminine qualities, as evidenced by their writing

¹³The communal response was emphasized by the Fathers, thus their preoccupation with the Church. The individual only gradually became singled out, for the initial teaching was that through the Redemption and one's incorporation into it through Baptism, one became a member of Christ's body and only in, with, and through this body did union with God take place. "Outside the Church there is no salvation." Cyprian, The Epistles of Cyprian in Fathers of the Third Century, Hippolytus, pp. 388-89.

¹⁴Shepherd of Hermas, p. 240.

¹⁵Ignatius, To the Ephesians, tr. Gerald G. Walsh in The Apostolic Fathers, p.87.

¹⁶Methodius, Banquet as quoted in Quasten, II, p.132.

¹⁷Quasten, I, 172.

on the Church, can best be summed up with the following quotation from Clement of Rome. There was no bias here against either the female or the flesh, but an acceptance of everything both human and divine.

Thus, brothers, by doing the will of God our Father, we shall belong to the first Church, the spiritual one established before the sun and the moon; but if we do not the will of the Lord, we shall verify the Scripture which says: "My house has become a den of thieves." Let us choose, therefore, to belong to the Church of life, that we may be saved. I do not think that you are ignorant that the living Church is "the body of Christ." For the Scripture says: "God made man male and female;" the male is Christ and the female is the Church. The sacred books, moreover, and the Apostles say that the Church is not of the present time, but existed from the beginning. For she was spiritual, as also our Jesus, and He was revealed in the last days to save us. And the Church being spiritual, was revealed in the flesh of Christ, showing us that if any of us guard her in the flesh and do not corrupt her, he shall receive her again in the Holy Spirit. For this flesh is an antitype of the Spirit; no one, accordingly, who has corrupted the antitype shall receive the reality. So, then, brothers, it means this: Guard the flesh, so that you may share in the Spirit. But if we say that the flesh is the Church and the Spirit is Christ, then he who has abused the flesh has abused the Church. Such a one, accordingly, will not share in the spirit, which is Christ.¹⁸

While devotion to Mother-Church existed from Apostolic times, appreciation of the Blessed Virgin developed more slowly. Her glory was not so firmly and uniformly established in antiquity. It took five or six centuries for her cult to mature. It also grew at a different rate in different areas. In Africa Tertullian believed in the

¹⁸ Clement of Rome, The So-Called Second Epistle,
p. 74.

virginal conception of Christ, while at the same time he felt that Mary had no faith in Christ's preachings.¹⁹ The Alexandrian school, emphasizing the divinity of Christ and allegorical, mystical exegesis, first took up the cause of Mary as Mother of God. Alexander of Alexandria explicitly calls her theotokos.²⁰ The Antiochian school, which emphasized the humanity of Christ and a literal sense of scripture, accepted Mary's virginity but found many moral faults in her. St. John Chrysostom was explicit on both points. "We are ignorant of many things, as for instance, ... how the Virgin gives birth and continues a Virgin." And concerning Mary's request at Cana: "For she desired both to do them a favor, and through her Son to render herself more conspicuous."²¹ It was in Syria that her cult grew most rapidly, though how it began remains undocumented. The extent of the cult can be seen by a warning of Ephanius that Mary was not to be accorded the worship which was due only to God.²²

There is no trace of a Marian cult in the Western liturgy before the fifth century. But after the Council of

¹⁹Edward Dennis O'Connor, The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception: History and Significance (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958), pp. 65-66.

²⁰Alexander of Alexandria, Letters, quoted in Quasten, III, 19.

²¹St. John Chrysostom, Homily 4 on Matthew 4-5, quoted in Quasten III, 476-77.

²²Hilda Graef, Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion, Vol. I: From the Beginnings to the Eve of the Reformation (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), p. 73.

Epheseus, holy days in honor of the Blessed Virgin begin to increase and multiply.²³ She took on the queenly, womanly, motherly functions which an increasingly celibate priesthood could neither perform nor signify.

Mary's theological significance was first noted by St. Justin when he called attention to the Christ-Adam parallel having a counter-part in the Mary-Eve comparison.

"Christ became man by the virgin in order that the disobedience which proceeded from the serpent's [disobedience] might receive its destruction in the same manner in which it derived its origin. For Eve, who was a virgin and undefiled, having conceived the word of the serpent, brought forth disobedience and death. But the Virgin Mary received faith and joy when the Angel Gabriel announced the good tidings to her, that the spirit of the Lord would come upon her, and the power of the highest would overshadow her; wherefore the holy Thing begotten of her is the Son of God; and she replied, 'Be it done unto me according to thy word'."²⁴

Irenaeus continued the parallelism by noting that giving birth or life to the new Adam--Christ, Mary became the true Eve or Mother of mankind. He called Mary mankind's womb, teaching her universal motherhood.²⁵ This theology gave a soterological character to Marian theology. Her recognition and significance came from the part that she played in the Incarnation, the first act in the drama of redemption.

²³O'Connor, p.67.

²⁴Justin, Dialogue 100 quoted in Quasten, I, 211-12.

²⁵Ireneus, Against the Heresies as quoted in Quastin, I, 299.

The fifth century saw a real flowering in Mariology and significant new insights were seen in the Mary-Eve contrast. Proclus, Patriarch of Constantinople, wrote that by being born of woman Christ "made gate of salvation her who of old was door of sin."²⁶ Cyril of Alexandria noted that when the Savior was born of a woman he removed the curse "in sorrow shall thou bear children."²⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem had previously noted that through Eve came death, but through Mary life.²⁸

Ephram of Syria was the first to call Mary the bride of Christ.²⁹ Proclus calls her "God's only bridge to man."³⁰ This is an insight into the psychological truth that the religious openness of mankind is towards the feminine pole. Probably Mary's most celebrated title in the early centuries was that of theotokos or Mother of God. This title was not a defense of Mary--although it proved to her honor. It was a succinct statement of the orthodox doctrine that in Christ

²⁶Walter J. Burghardt, "Mary in Eastern Patristic Thought," Mariology, ed. Juniper B. Carol (3 vols.; Milwaukee, The Bruce Publishing Co., 1955-1961), II, 95.

²⁷Ibid (Genesis 3. 16.)

²⁸Burghardt, II, 93.

²⁹Graef, p. 58.

³⁰Burghardt, II, 100.

there are two natures but only one person. This person is God and Mary is his mother. Though this title was a victory for the divinity of Christ in a Christological controversy, the people perhaps did not understand it that way. The crowds outside the Church at Ephesus in 431 cheered and carried torches shouting "Theotokos."

The Western Fathers took up Mary's cause in the fourth century. St. Ambrose accepted Mary as virgin, mother, morally perfect, and as the patroness of virgins. But he, too, warned against adoring her on the same level with God. St. Jerome's views on Mariology were brought out in a Scriptural dispute about Isaiah 7.14. This dispute centered around whether the feminine appellation in this verse should be translated virgin or young woman. Jerome argued not only should the word be translated virgin, but also this word carried the connotation of spiritual virginity as well as a biological one.³¹ To St. Augustine Mary's motherhood was a motherhood which was a type of the motherhood of the Church. Both Mary and the Church extend Christ to the individual Christian. "How do you not also belong to the child-birth of the Virgin when you are members of Christ?"³²

The Marian dogma of Christian antiquity was undoubtedly best summed up in a famous sermon of Cyril of Alexandria

³¹Graef, p. 88.

³²Ibid., p. 98.

after the Council of Ephesus. He gave her many beautiful appellations, the chief of which was "sceptre of orthodoxy."³³ Nothing could have been more appropriate because in all of the Christological controversies of the first four centuries the relationship of Christ to Mary had been brought into the dispute to clarify and protect the doctrines concerning the Son.

As asceticism gained ascendancy, the interest in Mary's virginity became more pronounced. Obedience had been linked to virginity in the Eve-Mary parallelism. Irenaeus noted:

"And if the former [Eve] did disobey God, yet the later [Mary] was persuaded to be obedient to God, in order that the Virgin Mary might become the advocate of the virgin Eve. Thus, as the human race fell into bondage to death by means of a virgin, so it is rescued by a virgin; virginal disobedience having been balanced in the opposite scale by virginal obedience."³⁴

From the beginning, then, Mary's virginity was neither sterile nor asexual, but was for the purpose of a spiritual motherhood. The desert Fathers extolled her virginity and made her an ideal to emulate.³⁵ The Council of Chalcedon in 451 recognized Mary's complete virginity at a time when virginity was becoming more and more equated with sanctity.³⁶ In the

³³Walter J. Burghardt, "Theotokos: The Mother of God," The Mystery of the Woman: Essays on the Mother of God, ed. Edward D. O'Connor (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), p. 5.

³⁴Irenaeus, Against the Heresies as quoted in Quasten, I, 298-99.

³⁵Graef, p. 51.

³⁶O'Connor, p.62.

writings of the very early Fathers, moral deficiencies had been regarded as incompatible with Mary's dignity. She was upbraided for her presumption at Cana and accused of a lack of faith during the passion.³⁷ The early centuries also produced mixed testimony about her virginity in partu and post partum. Several Fathers held she bore children to Joseph after the birth of Jesus; others denied it.³⁸ In the end however, both her holiness and complete virginity prevailed along with her motherhood.

Christianity had idealized the feminine under both collective and individual signs--Mary and the Church. But it did more than that. Heretofore the highest feminine characteristics were projected onto a goddess figure and honored there, but woman herself was often not so highly regarded; this was true particularly in the East. In Mary, these feminine ideals were incarnated into actual history in a real woman, and henceforth the human woman could identify with and lay claim to what before had been considered divine.

The third area where the feminine was idealized was in the deity itself. Feminine appellations for the godhead were first found in the apocryphal literature of the first two centuries. Although gnostic in character, this literature was still used by some of the early Fathers. Origen often

³⁷ Graef, p.45.

³⁸ Ibid.

quoted the Gospel of the Hebrews³⁹ in which Christ called the Holy Spirit his true mother.⁴⁰ In more orthodox writings Clement of Alexandria understood an androgynous God when he said: "the word is all to the child, both father and mother, and tutor, and nurse."⁴¹ And he says again: "Therefore, we fly trustfully to the 'care-banishing breast' of God the Father; the breast that is the Word, who is the only one who can truly bestow on us the milk of love."⁴² Syneus of Cyrene writing at the beginning of the fifth century sang a hymn to God-the Father and Mother of us all.

I sing your praises, O Father,
 Healer of hearts,
 Healer of bodies,
 Giver of wisdom,
 Remedy of evil, O Giver also
 Of a life without evil,
 A life not troubled
 By earthly fear--
 Mother of distress,
 Mother of sorrow--.
 Keep my heart
 In purity,
 Let my song speak
 Of the hidden source
 Of created things;⁴³

³⁹Quasten, I, 111.

⁴⁰Robert M. Grant, The Secret Sayings of Jesus. Collab. David Noel Friedman, The Gospel of Thomas tr. Wm. R. Schoedel (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1960), p. 75.

⁴¹Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor, p. 220.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Louis Boyer, The Spirituality of the New Testament and The Fathers, trans. Mary P. Ryan (New York: Burns & Cates Ltd. and Desclee & Co., Inc., 1963), pp. 451-52.

Christ, too, was linked with the feminine. In the Shepherd of Hermas virgins were symbolized as the powers of Christ.⁴⁴ Tertullian, commenting on the Lord's Prayer, wanted the catechumens to understand that when they prayed to their Father in heaven, the Son was also included. In the idea of Father, Mother cannot be precluded for it is in relationship to Mother that Father and Son have significance.⁴⁵ It can thus be observed that to the Fathers the Father and Son were not exclusively masculine.

In the mystery of the Trinity the feminine role is most often played by the Holy Spirit. St. Augustine having noticed this warned against a Mother-Father-Child family concept because of the great danger of the doctrine of the Trinity deteriorating into polytheism.⁴⁶ It was the Holy Spirit, however, who was present in man and who was the reconciler or intercessor between man and the transcendent God - a very motherly role. There was more devotion to the Holy Spirit in the East than the West and the East has been his chief defender against any subordinist tendencies. In the Syrian translation of the New Testament, the Holy Spirit was called consolatrix,⁴⁷ a deliberate use of the feminine form. The relationship of the Holy Spirit, the Church, and

⁴⁴Shepherd of Hermas, v. 330.

⁴⁵Tertullian, On Prayer in Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian, rev. A. Cleveland Coxe (ANF, Vol. 3) p. 682.

⁴⁶Moll, p. 69.

⁴⁷Ibid., p.17.

humanity was so close that Clement said that the flesh was a figure of speech for the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸ This again feminizes him. For flesh is warm and feminine (body) in contrast to intellect which is cold and masculine. To Irenaeus the Holy Spirit was the source of inspiration, another feminine function. It was the Holy Spirit serving the Logos who filled the prophets with charism under the direction of the Father.⁴⁹

The Holy Spirit was the conciliator between man and God. It was through the Holy Spirit that the human and divine were able to meet because man resembles God in the spirit. Tatian said in an address to the Greeks, "but further, it becomes us now to seek what we once had, but have lost, to unite the soul with the Holy Spirit and to strive after union of God."⁵⁰

The doctrine of the Spirit was never fully developed by the Fathers. Due to historical circumstances they were caught up in Christological controversies. The nature of Christ and his relationship to the Father were the first questions that were asked by philosophically oriented men. Another difficulty which prevented a clear theological

⁴⁸Clement, The Instructor, p. 220.

⁴⁹Quasten, I, 295.

⁵⁰Address of Tatian to the Greeks tr. J.E. Ryland, Fathers of the Second Century, p. 71.

definition of the third person of the Trinity was that the early Fathers in their exegesis of the Old Testament, bifurcated the Wisdom of the Hebrew Scripture. This Wisdom was sometimes associated with the Son and sometimes with the Holy Spirit. The weakness of this exegesis prevented definition and development of the theology and personality of the Paraclete. The development of Trinitarian dogma however did insure that the Holy Spirit could never be completely lost or forgotten. Strict monotheism is rigid, moral, and masculine. The God of the Christians was a God of moral action, but also one of mystical communion. The diversity of such actions and interactions with man could only be expressed by a fuller, more complex divinity. God's goodness had always been seen as coming from his perfection. The doctrine of three in one became the most sublime mystery of the Christian Church and revealed not only an androgynous God, but the God who surpasses all understanding and syntheses. St. Augustine thinking of the diversity of God writes: "et inhorresco-et inardesco." Sometimes I recoil in fear - sometimes I am drawn by love.⁵¹

It would seem then that feminine ideals and functions were an integral part of the early Christian Church. The mother functions of birth and nurture were expressed in the two most important sacraments--baptism and the eucharist. Church and Holy Spirit alike served as conciliator and

⁵¹Moll, p. 14.

mediatrix. Active passivity as evidenced in Mary's obedience was admired and emulated. Both fruitfulness and virginity were esteemed. The bride as proxy for all humanity, both male and female, represented the prerequisite disposition for an intimate union with God. Difference of sexuality was thus not only accepted, but seen as the very means by which was made possible the most intimate of unions. The feminine was balanced by masculine traits of authority, discipline, morality, a highly developed Church organization, and asceticism. One of Christianity's greatest appeals was that it met the needs and encouraged the response of all positive humanism.

CHAPTER III

VIRGINITY

The virginal state has always been regarded by many Christians as more perfect than the married one.¹ Christ was both born of a virgin and unlike the founder of any of the other major religions remained one. The immediate expectation of the end of the world added an additional impetus for Christians to remain celibate, but virginity endured because of its theological significance. An acute tension between marriage and celibacy persisted throughout the early centuries resulting in the Encratic heresy in Judaeo-Christian circles which forbade marriage altogether. Much of this Encratic teaching can be found in the apocryphal writings of the first two centuries, but the Shepherd of Hermas also bears witness to it.² This heresy finally was condemned by the Church leaders in the second century. Clement of Alexandria devoted a whole book of his Stromata to the defense of marriage.³

¹I Cor. 7.25.

²Shepherd of Hermas, p. 238.

³Clement of Alexandria, The Stromata or Miscellanies in Fathers of the Second Century, pp. 381-402.

At first virginal vows were private and personal. St. Ignatius cautioned against the publication of them. "If he is boastful about it he is lost; and if he reveals it to any other than the bishop, his purity is gone."⁴ Clement of Rome also cautions virgins to modesty and secrecy: "Let him who is pure in the flesh be so without boasting, knowing that it is Another who grants him this continence."⁵ Within the Christian community the virgins were often confused with the widows.⁶

Toward the end of the second century public recognition began to be given to virgins. They formed a special class within the community and received communion before the other laymen.⁷ The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus prescribed fasting and intercession for them as well as for the widows.⁸

⁴Ignatius, To Polycarp, p. 126.

⁵Clement of Rome, To the Corinthians, pp. 39-40.

⁶Ignatius, To the Magnesians, tr. Gerald G. Walsh, The Apostolic Fathers, p. 97.

⁷H.J. Schroeder, Disciplinary Decree of the General Councils: Texts, Translations, and Commentary (London: B. Herder Book Co., 1937), p. 22. Footnote 46.

⁸Hippolytus, The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus, tr. Burton Scott Easton (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1934), p. 50.

In the third century the Fathers praised virginity by word and example. Methodius wrote The Banquet of the Ten Virgins in which he praised virginity as the perfect imitation of Christ and a symbol of the purity of the Church.⁹ Cyprian extolled virgins with a parade of metaphors:

The flower of ecclesiastical seed, the grace and ornament of spiritual endowment, a joyous disposition, the wholesome and uncorrupted work of praise and honor, God's image answering to the holiness of the Lord, the most illustrious portion of Christ's flock, the glorious fruitfulness of Mother Church.¹⁰

Origen departed from the mystical style and praised virginity as a sacrificial offering.

We may understand from this what it is for a man to dedicate himself to God. If thou devotest thyself to God, thou must imitate the beast (offered in sacrifice) which must no longer serve human purposes, nor do anything whatsoever concerning men and the present life.¹¹

Origen himself lived a life of such extreme asceticism.¹²

⁹Methodius, The Banquet of the Ten Virgins, in Fathers of the Third Century: Gregory, Thaumaturgus, Dionysus the Great, Julius Africanus, Anatolius and Minor Writers, Methodius, Arnobius, rev. A. Cleveland Coxe (ANF, Vol. 6), p. 132.

¹⁰Cyprian, On the Dress of Virgins in Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, p. 431.

¹¹Origen, Homily to Numbers 24, as quoted in J.M. Perrin, Virginity tr. Katherine Gordon (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1955), p. 23.

¹²Eusebius, Church History in Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine (NPNF 2nd ser., Vol. 1), pp. 251-52.

It was also during the third century that the custom of Christian ascetics and virgins living together began to fall into disrepute. Some ascetics conceived of this arrangement as a spiritual marriage and the only marriage truly compatible with Christianity. Paul of Samosta, bishop of Antioch, was the first to reproach them. The pseudo-letter of Clement Ad Virgines, which was written in Syria in this century, also disparaged this custom. The Council of Ancyra was the first council to forbid these "marriages," but the custom must have continued, for censures were also made by later synods.¹³

By the fourth century the Church found it necessary to pass disciplinary decrees to regulate the virgins. The Council of Elvira (306) in Spain excommunicated virgins who had been unfaithful to their vows. The penalty was severe. They were received back into communion only when in danger of death. This synod also carefully distinguished between consecrated virgins and maidens. The Council of Ancyra (314) pronounced that consecrated virgins who later married committed bigamy.¹⁴ The civil code later followed Church law and legislated against the breaking of virginal vows. Under Christian influence a Roman law which had enjoined both

¹³Bihlmeyer, p. 139.

¹⁴"Virginity," NCE, XIV, 701-03.

marriage and children was repealed by Constantine.¹⁵ In 354 legislation was passed which made the rape of religious women a civil crime.¹⁶

The Fathers of the fourth century wrote many treatises in defense of virginity. Due to mass conversion there was a decline of morals among Christians, and virginity became both a reaction and a defense against this. St. John Chrysostom wrote a book On Virginity in which he gave a "detailed interpretation of the words of the Apostle (I Cor. 7.38) that marriage is good but virginity better."¹⁷ He wrote that "the root and flower of virginity is a crucified life."¹⁸ St. Gregory of Nyssa gave to Eastern asceticism a spirituality which was often lacking. He called virginity "a necessary door of entrance to a holier life."¹⁹ Gregory's model was the Blessed Virgin. "What happened in the stainless Mary when the fullness of the Godhead which was

¹⁵ P.R. Coleman-Norton, Roman State and Christian Church: A Collection of Legal Documents to A.D. 535 (3 vols., London: S-P-C-K, 1966), II, 78.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 234.

¹⁷ Quasten, III, 464.

¹⁸ Chrysostom, On Virginity as quoted in Perrin, p. 148.

¹⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, On Virginity as quoted in Quasten III, 270.

in Christ shone out through her, that happens in every soul that leads by rule the virgin life."²⁰ In the West St. Ambrose wrote four treatises on virginity. St. Jerome dictated several polemics in favor of the celibate state and St. Augustine composed a long work on asceticism.²¹ Neither St. Augustine nor St. Gregory were themselves celibates.

It was also in the fourth century that a rite for the consecration of virgins began to develop. Sometime between 352 and 354 Marcellina, the sister of St. Ambrose, took the veil.²² That the ceremony for the consecration of a virgin should resemble the marriage ceremony was appropriate because the virgin became a bride of Christ and the veil signified the mystical marriage. By the time of the Synod of Hippo (393) virgins were officially consecrated to God and were under the special protection of the Church.²³ It was also at this time that virgins began to live in communities.

Happy the virgin who places herself under a rule,
she shall be as a fruitful vine in a garden.
Unhappy is the virgin who will not follow a rule,
she is a ship that lacks a rudder.²⁴

²⁰Ibid.

²¹"Virginity," p. 702.

²²Ibid., p. 703.

²³Schroeder, p. 22, note 46.

²⁴Philip Hughes, A History of the Church, Vol. I: The Church and the world in which the Church was Founded (rev. ed.; New York: Sheed & Ward, 1949), p. 139.

This fourth century saying is evidence of a desire for many to find some stability and regularity in a century of moral and social tumult. The Empire was ready to absorb monasticism; monasticism would soon absorb the virgins.

The theological implications of virginity were well-thought out by the Fathers. In the first place they emphasized that virginity was never praised for its own sake but was a means for union with God. St. Augustine was very explicit:

It is not on its own account, but because it is consecrated to God, that virginity is held in honour ... It is not their virginity we extol in virgins but their consecration in plighted continence to God.²⁵

In the Shepherd of Hermas continence is already called the daughter of faith.²⁶ Always fearful that celibacy would be the source of spiritual pride, the Fathers emphasized that virginity was "a gift"²⁷ from God. St. Gregory of Nyssa called it "the method and the means for making life divine."²⁸

The intimacy between the virgin and Christ was suggested by the Fathers in their profuse use of the bride symbol. St. Ambrose states that "a virgin is one who gives

²⁵ Augustine, On Holy Virginity as quoted in Perrin, pp. 132-33.

²⁶ Shepherd of Hermas, pp. 248-49.

²⁷ Ambrose, On Virginity as quoted in Perrin, p. xi.

²⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, On Virginity, ibid., 16.

her hand in marriage to God."²⁹ St. Athanasius not only calls virgins brides of Christ, but argues that these brides are the sign that the Church possesses the true religion.

The Catholic Church has adopted the custom of calling those who possess this virtue the brides of Christ; when pagans see them, they admire them as temples of the Logos. It is certain, indeed, that this venerable and celestial condition is honored nowhere but amongst us. This is one of the great proofs that we have the true religion.³⁰

Although the term bride of Christ was used for celibates of both sexes, there can be no doubt but that women were given the greater preference when the Fathers extolled what they considered the highest virtue.

As brides, virgins were expected to be fertile.

Without doubt, from the embrace of Christ, she receives the seed of his word. Blessed is the fertility that results from this union of the soul with God's Word and from their mutual embrace. A noble offspring is born of it, modesty, justice, patience, sweetness and charity, followed by the sacred train of all the virtues.³¹

St. Augustine preached that Mary's virginity was no hindrance to her maternal fertility.³² St. Gregory spoke of the maternal qualities of his chaste sister. She was the spiritual mother first of her own brothers and sisters, and then later of her convent of nuns. To Gregory his sister's

²⁹ Ambrose, On Virginitv, ibid., 132.

³⁰ Athanasius, Apology to Constantinius, ibid., p. 38.

³¹ Origen, Homily on Numbers, ibid., p. 33.

³² Burghardt, "Theotokos," p. 24.

death was her crowning as the bride of Christ.³³ Also they were compared to the martyrs in courage and self-giving.

As with the martyrs there is no thought of the flesh of the world, no small and trifling, and delicate encounter; so also in you, whose reward is second in grace let there be the strength and endurance next to theirs.³⁴

Finally virginity was presented as an eschatological sign. The kingdom of God which will be realized by the many only at the parousia is already present for the virgin.

That which we shall be, you have already begun to be. You possess in this world, the glory of the resurrection. ... in that you continue chaste and virgins, you are equal to the angels of God.³⁵

While the Fathers were always careful to qualify their praise of virgins by insisting that marriage also was a holy estate, the tension between marriage and virginity continued. The feelings of the Fathers was perfectly summed up by Gregory Nazianzen who contrasted this tension thus:

Marriage is the key of moderation of desires,
The seal of unbreakable friendship,
... the unique drink from a fountain enclosed
That those outside do not taste;
It does not spread outside nor draw from without.
Those who are united in the flesh make but one soul
And they raise a like spire of their piety by their
mutual love
For marriage does not remove from God
But brings all the closer to him because it is God
himself who urges us to it ...

³³Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of St. Macrina in Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works, tr. Virginia Woods Callahan (FC, Vol. 53), p. 136.

³⁴Cyprian, On the Dress of Virgins, p. 436.

³⁵Ibid.

But virginity answers:

I leave to others what makes up the reward of this
life.
But for me
There is only one law, one thought: that, filled
with divine love,
I depart from this earth toward the God who reigns
in heaven, the author of light
... Carrying out the law of the king of all things,
to him alone
Am I bound alone and I have abandoned all earthly
love.³⁶

Marriage builds up the earthly city while virginity searches
for the heavenly one.

The exalted position given virginity by the Fathers
had both a positive and negative effect on the status of
women. In the positive sense it broadened and increased
her self-concept. Her sphere of activities were expanded.
Her biological motherhood was sublimated in order that she
might exercise a more spiritual and far-reaching one. She
nurtured and nursed the sick, the forelorn, and the abandoned.
She fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and instructed the
ignorant. All humanity became her child. But the
Encratic heresy sometimes persisted, and a bias against
marriage is a bias against the flesh with which woman is so
closely associated. The Fathers were often inconsistent due
to their masculocentric perspective. They called the virgin
the "bride of Christ," thus implying some recognition that
humanity's highest spirituality and deepest mystical relation-
ship with God is closest to the feminine side of mankind's

³⁶Gregory Nazianzen, Poem I as quoted in Bouyer,
pp. 346-47.

nature, but they also often implied that woman reached the peak of perfection by transcending her own sexuality and becoming spiritual like man!

A great reward awaits you, a great recompense of virtue, the immense advantage of chastity.
... With that of men your lot and your condition is equal.³⁷

³⁷Cyprian, On the Dress of Virgins, p. 436. HIS ITALICS.

CHAPTER IV

MARRIAGE

In the beginning Christian converts were adults and already married. This, combined with an immediate expectation of the Second Coming, discouraged any analysis of how the married state contributed to the building of the Kingdom. Marriage continued to follow secular forms. Gradually, customs and Church laws began to gather about this institution so as to protect it and give spiritual insight into its mystery. But this development was very gradual and even to this day has not reached complete fruition. Two factors mitigated against the development of a mature theology of matrimony. One, was an unorthodox but persistent bias against the flesh, the other was that celibacy, replaced martyrdom as the supreme act of heroic sacrifice. Thus virginity was both the interest and the state of Christian theologians.

The Roman-Hellenistic forms which Christians first used in their marriage ceremony had themselves undergone an evolution and had become decadent. Originally the marriage ceremony was a religious act in the early family cult of the

4. [illegible]

hearth.¹ Each household had its own gods and each family was a self-contained religious unit. Legitimate sons were necessary to carry on the cult, care for the aged, and honor the dead. The only proper mother for such progeny was a woman who herself had been received into this cult. The marriage ceremony then was really an initiation rite into her husband's household cult. She took leave of her father's household gods and joined herself to her husband's hearth, the community of water and fire.² As tender of the fire she became the materfamilias.³ The religious significance of the family served to elevate the woman and fortified monogamy. The woman was co-priestess with her husband, the paterfamilias, and administered the household and educated the children. When the wife died the husband lost his priestly function.⁴ Nevertheless, legally she was considered to be "in his hand;" the husband was the sole guardian of the children and held the power of life and death over his wife. Her status was based on religious principles, not human laws.⁵

¹E. Schillebeeckx, Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery, tr. N.D. Smith (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), p.234.

²Ibid., p. 235.

³Ebe Minerva White, Woman in World History: Her Place In The Great Religions (London, Herbert Jenkins Ltd., 1924), p. 272.

⁴Schillebeeckx, p. 235.

⁵Ibid., p. 237.

As the old religion lost ground during the waning days of the Republic and the beginning of the Empire, the family began to disintegrate and woman lost much of her significance. Also in a more complex society economic activity began to move outside the home and again there was a deterioration of the wife's influence and function. Set loose from meaningful activity, woman became more independent and marriage became a civil contract. Consensus replaced the religious confarreatio.⁶ Divorce became easy to obtain; there was no moral bond. Offspring was no longer as highly esteemed as religious outlook declined, and many men began to shun marriage for they no longer needed a helpmate.

Stoicism was one factor which continued to influence a man to take to the altar. This highly ethical philosophy confined sex to marriage. Stoic philosophy contained a much higher sexual standard than that provided by the mores of the Empire. But philosophy can never be the impetus nor the constraining force that a transcendental religion can be. This particular philosophy was also very logical and unemotional and as such had little appeal for most women.

In the beginning of the Christian era Roman marriage was a two stage ceremony - the betrothal and the marriage itself. In connection with the betrothal often an engagement ring was exchanged. Marriages were performed without any real judicial formula. Mutual consent was the basis of

⁶Ibid., p. 239.

marriage and this could either be with or without accompanying religious ceremonies. Eventually the mutual consent sufficed; even consummation was not considered necessary. This mutual consent established a contract which could be broken again by mutual consent with no other grounds. Human nature, and especially feminine human nature being what it was, more often than not religious and traditional ceremony continued to accompany the legalistic compact. The consent was asked in the form of the question "Did she (he) wish to become a mother (father)?" This was followed by the joining of hands.⁷ Often an animal was sacrificed and the pagan priest pronounced a prayer over the couple.

A marriage document came into use during the Empire period which stated that the marriage was undertaken in order to bring forth children.⁸ Augustus Caesar also tried very hard to reestablish the old solid ties of religion and family in order to stabilize the social structure of the Empire. To do this, he revived the old tax uxorium, on the unmarried and childless. In the Christian era this law worked hardship on those who elected celibacy. The law was finally rescinded by Constantine I.

The ceremonies in the Eastern empire were quite similar except that the bridal contract was between the

⁷Ibid., p. 242.

⁸Ibid.

bride's lord or master, usually her father, and the bridegroom. Semitic and Grecian women never had obtained the status of their Roman sisters. The wedding feast was of central religious importance. These ceremonies took place in the home within the confines of the family with friends as witnesses.⁹ When the parousia did not come and Eastern Christians began to marry, they, too, continued to follow the pagan customs leaving out some of the more superstitious traditions. Christians in the East always insisted on the necessity of a priestly blessing for a valid marriage in contrast to the more legalistic Romans.

Even though the Christians used secular marriage form, St. Ignatius of Antioch pointed out very early in the Christian era that it was fitting for Christians to enter a marriage only "after the bishop's approval."¹⁰ This statement, however, stands in isolation in the early Christian literature. The Synod of Elvira (306) not only accepted that Christians were married in ceremonies similar to those of the pagans, but also that Roman law had jurisdiction over Christian matrimonial affairs.¹¹ Christian families were the chief instigators of marriage as were pagan families

⁹ Ibid., pp. 242-43.

¹⁰ St. Ignatius, To Polycarp tr. Gerald G. Walsh, The Apostolic Fathers, p. 126.

¹¹ Schillebeek, p. 245.

although as more time went on the bride and groom took more of the initiative.¹² The father of the Christian family was responsible for his family's religious training as had been the father in the pagan household. The Syrian Didascalia assigns the responsibility of choosing a Christian mate for his children to the father.

Special Christian doctrines began to mutate the secular and pagan marriage practices from the beginning. We have Tertullian's testimony that from the very first clandestine marriages were held in low regard by the Church.¹³ The special problem of slaves contracting a valid marriage led to what has been called "marriages of conscience." Since a large majority of the early Christians were women, there were not enough Christian men to go around. The shortage was particularly acute among the upper classes. Many Christian women preferred to have a slave for a mate rather than either to marry a pagan or remain a virgin, but according to Roman law marriage with a slave was forbidden. The woman in such a union was thus a concubine. Pope Callixtus (217-222) recognized these unions as valid marriages for Christians.¹⁴ When Christianity became the religion of the Empire, the civil law followed the

¹²Ibid., p. 245.

¹³Ibid., p. 236. The Montonists viewed such marriage as prostitution.

¹⁴Ibid.

ecclesiastical. This papal action was consequently a significant step in raising the dignity of all women and a step away from all forms of human bondage. Marriages of the clergy and the catechumens were special cases which required explicit approval from the bishop. The only part of the pagan ceremony which the church perpetually felt was a danger to the faith of her children was the sacrifice of the animal. The wearing of the garland or crown gradually was accepted, however, for its ancient religious significance had been lost and a Christian one began to supplant it.¹⁵ It was again Tertullian who first referred to the Christian practice of using the engagement ring¹⁶ and the marriage contract.¹⁷ The bishop signed this document when he was present at the family ceremony.

It was not until the fourth century that we find any evidence of what could be truly called liturgical practices growing around the pagan-civil ceremony. Prayers and blessings by the bishop or priest became traditional in recognition of the holiness of marriage. It was not usual for a bishop or priest to come to a second marriage, and the blessing was never given in such a case.¹⁸ Marriages with pagans

¹⁵Ibid., p. 247.

¹⁶E. Schling, "Marriage," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, ed. Samuel M. Jackson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book Hse., 1950), p. 196.

¹⁷Schillebeeckx, p. 247.

¹⁸Ibid., 255. The Council of Ancrya in canon 19 forbids the clergy to honor second marriages by partaking of the festivities. Bihlmeyer, p. 138.

were condemned by the Church.¹⁹ By the fourth century a papal decree insisted that the lower clergy have their marriages solemnized. For the laity it still remained a privilege--a reward for good conduct.²⁰ By the beginning of the fifth century there was evidence of true Church weddings. Paulinus of Nola described this liturgy. It consisted of the veiling of the bride and groom by the priest. There is no reference to a nuptial mass.²¹

Thus, for the first five centuries Christian marriage continued to be a secular and family affair. Only in a few very special cases did the Christian hierarchy consider it necessary to intervene in these ceremonies. But it was becoming more and more the custom for the people to ask the bishop to bless their union.²²

Positive Catholic theology on marriage was precipitated as a reaction to rigorist and Gnostic heresies which plagued the Church. Some of these views were even voiced by otherwise orthodox clergymen. Origen, generally suspected

¹⁹ Tertullian, To His Wife in Fathers of the Third Century; Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe (ANF, Vol. 4), pp. 47-48.

²⁰ Schillebeeckx, p. 255.

²¹ Ibid., p. 261.

²² Blunt, p. 444. The Synod of Carthage (397) ordered parents to present the bridal couple to a priest for the benediction (13th Canon).

of Gnostic leanings, said that marriage was permitted only because of human weakness.²³ Especially in Syria unorthodox views that the baptized should not marry persisted until the middle of the fourth century.²⁴ Dionysus of Corinth rejected this view. He stressed that marriages should be allowed and the Church should not insist on continence.²⁵ Manichean tendencies were probably corrective by forcing the Fathers to compensate for these extreme leanings. The Church had to teach that heresies against the flesh were heresies against both Christ and humanity, for it is the flesh which makes man human and distinct from the angels.

Prejudice against second marriages were in part due to rigorist tendencies which persisted in the Church, but also due to the respect Christians had for the permanence of marriage. Athenagoras testifies to this. "A person should either remain as he was born or be content with one marriage; for a second marriage is only a decent adultery. ... For he who deprives himself of his first wife, even though she be dead is a cloaked 'adulter', resisting the

²³ Origen's Commentary on Matthew ed. John Patrick in The Gospel of Peter, The Diatessaron of Tatian, The Apocalypse of Peter, The Visio Pauli, The Apocalypses of the Virgin and Sedrach, The Testament of Abraham, The Acts of Xanthippe and Polyxena, The Narrative of Zosimus, The Apology of Aristides, The Epistles of Clement (Complete Text), Origen's Commentary on John, Books I-X, and Commentary on Matthew Books I, II and X-XIV, (ANF, Vol. 9), p. 510.

²⁴ Schillebeeckx, p. 248.

²⁵ Eusebius, Church History, p. 200.

hand of God, because in the beginning God made one man and one woman."²⁶

In theory divorce has always been condemned by the Church. In The Shepherd of Hermas it is pointed out that while in the case of adultery a man may put away his wife if she refuses to repent, he must remain unmarried and chaste in order that he will be free to accept her back and forgive her if she is sorry.²⁷

The Christian Church by rejecting both divorce and concubinage and by not encouraging re-marriage even after the death of one of the partners raised marriage from a civil contract to an unbreakable moral bond. By confining sex to marriage for both man and woman and putting fornication on the same level as adultery, the double standard was broken and the highest sexual morality was expected from all.²⁸ Woman was now secure in her relationships with men, and freed from the fear of being shoved aside she was able to devote her energies to becoming a lifelong companion to her husband.

²⁶ Athenagoras, Apology in Fathers of the Second Century, pp. 146,47 .

²⁷ Shepherd of Hermas, p. 262.

²⁸ Cf. Didascalia Apostolareim, ed. R. Heigh Connolly (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929) Chapters II and III, 8-28. The sexual norms for men are identical to those for women.

Feminist critics of Christian marriage are always most nettled about the subordination of women in marriage which was clearly stated by St. Paul.

"Let wives be subject to their husbands as to the Lord. Because a husband is head of the wife just as Christ is head of the Church being himself savior of the body. But just as the Church is subject to Christ so also let wives be to their husbands in all things."²⁹

Subordination was not introduced by the Christians; it was the marriage state of both Semitic and Greek women. Paul had merely taken things as they were and uplifted them and spiritualized them. Christianity was not a social revolution but a moral one.

St. John Chrysostom spoke most beautifully and elegantly on this verse. In his homily on Ephesians St. John said that it is through the love of man and woman that the whole human race is to be joined. Through marriage the family is constantly enlarged until someday it will be but one interlocking giant clan. And not only is marriage going to be the source of the unity of the whole human race, but it will be the source of the harmony of society also. For when there is harmony in the home it extends out into the neighborhood.³⁰ Thus, the wife should be subject to her husband for order and peace.

²⁹ Eph. 5. 22-24.

³⁰ St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, in St. John Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Phillipians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon (NPNF, 1st ser., Vol. 13), p. 143.

Hence he places the one in subjection and the other in authority that then may be peace. For when there is equal authority there can never be peace. Neither when a house is a democracy nor where all are rulers, but the ruling power must of necessity be one.³¹

He went on to tell husbands how they were to rule their wives not lording it over them but guarding them with their love.

But the partner of one's life the mother of one's children, the foundation of one's every joy, one ought never to chain down by fear and menaces, but with love and good temper. For what sort of union is that where the wife trembles at the husband? And what sort of pleasure will the husband himself enjoy, if he dwells with his wife as with a slave, and not as with a free-woman? Yea, though thou shouldst suffer anything on her account, do not upbraid her; for neither did Christ do this.³²

In another homily St. John Chrysostom spoke about another dictum of St. Paul's that marriage partners have mutual authority over each other's bodies. He said: "there is great equality of honor, and no prerogatives."³³

St. Basil pointed out that marriage is as much a necessity to man as to woman, for it is in marriage that man

³¹Ibid., p. 147.

³²Ibid., p. 144.

³³St. John Chrysostom, "Homilies on First Corinthians" in The Homilies of Saint John Chrysostom Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, The Oxford Translation, rev. Talbot W. Chambers (NPNF, 1st Ser., Vol. 12), p. 105. Italics mine.

becomes civilized and humanized.³⁴ St. Augustine is attributed with saying that Eve was taken from the side of Adam to be his partner. She received Adam's bone for strength, and Adam in return received her flesh to obtain her tenderness.³⁵ So not only were man and woman equal in dignity, but they were mutually dependent upon each other for psychological completion. Sex differences were recognized as of divine origin as an impetus to carrying out the divine plan for mankind. Clement of Alexandria also spoke of woman as man's helpmate, his helpmate in both procreation and the management of the household. He said that man is by nature active while woman is by nature passive--again complementary functions.³⁶ He held that woman is not a detriment to man's rational life as many other authors taught, for if she loved him she would be his "faithful reflection."³⁷

So throughout the writings of the Fathers, the idea of the head-heart concept was found. The wife as the heart of the home was subordinate to the husband as head, and she

³⁴ Basil, Hexaemeron in The Treatise de Spiritu Sancto, The Nine Homilies of the Hexaemeron and the Letters of Saint Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea, tr. Bloomfield Jackson (NPNF, 2nd Ser., Vol. 8), p. 93.

³⁵ Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol. II: Ante-Nicene Christianity: A.D. 100-325 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959), II, 363.

³⁶ Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor, p. 276.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 231.

strove to carry out his orders. On the other hand, the husband as the head of the family endeavored to carry out his wife's wishes. This subordination was necessary not only for peace, harmony, and order in the home, but it took society and marriage as it existed, and sanctified it. Conversely, the Fathers were quick to point out that the husbands hardly had it all their way. Responsibility can be a burden. Those who love are bound much more securely than those who only fear. It is the woman after all who is held in the greater respect for it is she who is the beloved one.³⁸ And treating her maliciously does not dishonor her; it dishonors the one who is being ruled by his lower passions. "And I say not this for a wife to be beaten; far from it; for this is the extremest affront; not to her who is beaten, but to him who beatest."³⁹ "Since thy wife is to thee both a harbor, and a potent healing charm to rejoice they heart."⁴⁰ The female was called woman (companion) before she was called Eve (mother).

This subordination never was applied to the moral or spiritual nature of the wife. St. Clement said: "As far as respects human nature, the woman does not possess one nature, and the man exhibit another, but the same: the same

³⁸Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, p. 147.

³⁹Ibid., p. 155.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 156.

also with virtue.⁴¹ He also said that woman was given to man as a help. A good wife will try by her common sense to help her husband, but if he does not yield to her moral persuasion, she is to live in accordance with her own reason and God will be her helpmate and associate--her true defender and savior.⁴² So in an unhappy marriage where the husband could not or would not provide moral leadership, God was her guide. Man had abdicated his right.

"None of the Church Fathers acknowledged that differences in sex affected salvation."⁴³ That a Christian marriage is also a union on the spiritual level has been well put by that so-called misogynist Tertullian. In a famous letter to his wife he writes:

Whence are we to find (words) enough fully to tell the happiness of that marriage which the Church cements, and the oblations confirms, and the benediction signs and seals; (which) angels carry back the news of (to heaven), (which) the Father holds for ratified? For even on earth children do not rightly and lawfully wed without their fathers' consent. What kind of yoke is that of two believers, (partakers) of one hope, one desire, one discipline, one and the same service? Both (are) brethren, both fellow servants, no difference of spirit or of flesh; nay, (they are) truly "two in one flesh." Where the flesh is one, one is the spirit too. Together they pray,

⁴¹Clement, Stromata, p. 419.

⁴²Ibid., p. 432.

⁴³Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of the Expansion of Christianity, Vol. I: The First Five Centuries (3rd ed. New York: Harper & Bros., 1937), p. 260.

together prostrate themselves, together perform their fasts; mutually teaching, mutually exhorting, mutually sustaining. Equally (are they) both (found) in the Church of God; equally at the banquet of God; equally in straits, in persecution, in refreshments. Neither hides (ought) from the other; neither shuns the other; neither is troublesome to the other. ... Between the two echo psalms and hymns; and they mutually challenge each other which shall better chant to their Lord. Such things when Christ sees and hears, He joys. To these He sends His own peace. Where two (are), there withal (is) He Himself where He (is), there the Evil One is not.⁴⁴

Clement was one of the earliest Fathers to state explicitly that desire of the flesh was more than that, for it really was the desire for the union with God. He told the story of St. Peter rejoicing when his wife was led to her martyrdom because she soon would join the Lord. He quoted St. Peter as saying: "The love of one's wife is inseparable from one's love of the Lord."⁴⁵ Clement had such a high regard for marriage that he said that "the married man is superior to the single." For the married man must find the strength to withstand so many more distractions: children, wife, house and possessions. He admitted however, to being alone in this opinion.⁴⁶

Theophilus's exegesis on the Genesis account of God making Eve out of Adam's rib also stated the equality of

⁴⁴Tertullian, To His Wife, p. 48.

⁴⁵Clement, Stromata, p. 541.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 543.

woman to man. He said that God did this so that man would never think that one god made man and another god made woman. He also made woman in this way so that "their mutual affection might be greater."⁴⁷ He said that when the two became one flesh they were mutually fulfilled and that this fulfillment was so great that men often sacrificed themselves to death out of love for their wives.

The dignity for both the male and the female is continually stressed by Clement. In The Instructor he insisted that both men and women were to be given the same education, because "their food is common, marriage an equal yoke; respiration, sight, hearing, knowledge, hope, obedience, love all alike."⁴⁸ Sexuality was seen as the very basis for the social life of the world. Conjugal union produced both social life and the spiritual one. The fruits of this conjugal union would be rewarded in the next life, but sexual desire which haunted men in this life will be removed. Yet, man through his sexuality imitated God. For "man becomes an image of God insofar as man cooperates in the creation of man."⁴⁹ Agraphon in his Second Letter to Clement said that the parousia will not come while mankind is sexually divided.

⁴⁷Theophilus, To Autolycus, in Fathers of the Second Century, p. 105.

⁴⁸Clement, The Instructor, p. 21.

⁴⁹Clement, The Instructor, as quoted in Quasten II, p. 34. This passage is in Latin in ANF, II.

when two people will become one and the outer like the inner and man one with woman, when there is neither masculine nor feminine.⁵⁰

This is when the kingdom will come.

St. John Chrysostom commenting on "for the unbelieving husband is sanctified in the wife,"⁵¹ says that even though there is no spiritual meeting of minds as such, still through the mixture of the bodies communion does exist, and the physical union with the woman will save the husband. Marriage was the epitome of the sacramental principle that through the stimulation of the senses the spirit can be aroused. For this reason virginity had no exclusive possession of the Christian virtue of purity. Sex was of divine institution and thus holy. Chastity was the guardian of this sacred institution.⁵²

In the marriage of God and man God was always the man. He took the initiative and to him belonged the power. Humanity was womanly. It was only through her active receptivity that the fruitful union with God occurred. This imagery could not help but raise the status of women as well as the feminine principle. Man for all his great organizational ability, his tremendous feats of logic, his physical

⁵⁰Moll, p. 77.

⁵¹I Cor. 7.14.

⁵²St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on First Corinthians, p. 107.

strength, and self discipline could never reach God. He had to turn to his wife, his own recessive feminine psyche, the Church, or the Blessed Virgin to learn how to be responsive when God sought him. In doing so man admitted his incompleteness. He found that the sacred marriage was the human marriage, not the marriage of the gods. God was complete, it was man who was sexual. It was only through living marriage and learning from it that the conflict of eros and logos could be harmonized. This was true of every natural human marriage and in the Christian marriage both were finally lifted up into agape. Could a woman have felt inferior to either her husband or her virgin sister when she has been given such a magnificent role in such a tender union?

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CHAPTER V

WOMEN'S MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH

Before embarking on a discussion of women's ministry in the early Church, we must try to delineate some workable definition of the Christian ministry in general. It has been pointed out by K.S. Latourette that the Christian ministry, while including the priestly function which it inherited from the Levitical tradition of the Old Testament, expanded upon it and "embraced a purpose which seems to have been derived directly from the example of Jesus himself, that of pastor or shepherd."¹ The Christian ministry joins cult worship and social service. The priesthood of Christ was a true sacrificing priesthood when he offered himself as victim in a bloody manner upon the cross. His followers were commanded to represent this sacrifice in the offering of bread and wine and continued their priesthood. But Christ's sacrifice was different from the Old Testament sacrifices in that the priest and victim were the same. Thus self-sacrifice was wedded to the love of others. Love, concern and care for others was demonstrated by Christ in his role as good shepherd. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, brought peace to the demented.

¹K.S. Latourette, I, 252.

From the first it was this aspect of the ministry which the women spontaneously performed. They visited the sick, gave consolation to the bereaved, made funeral arrangements, assisted in baptism, took over the upbringing of orphans, and did other charitable acts. There has never been any evidence, though, that woman ever performed any priestly functions. The offering of the sacrifice was reserved to the man. Men like Christ have always performed both roles.

In the New Testament, women were already performing three different functions; those of prophetess, deaconess, and widow. The role of prophetess probably has been the most disquieting to the masculine hierarchy for prophets both male and female often operate outside the cultic structure. Prophetesses were known in the Old Testament. Besides Miriam, the sister of Moses, Deborah and Hilda² performed this role of one called to communicate divine revelation. In the New Testament the daughters of Phillip were explicitly mentioned.³ St. Paul, while not allowing women to teach publicly with authority,⁴ did allow women to prophesy, but he wanted them subject to regulation and

²1 Sm. 9.9.; Ex. 15.20.; 4 Kgs. 22.14-20.

³Acts 21.8.

⁴1 Cor. 14.34-35.

insisted that when they engaged in this activity they should have their heads veiled.⁵ In Christianity while the charisma of prophecy is shared by all, it is left to the hierarchy to discern what is truly from the Holy Spirit.

Tertullian strongly stated that women were excluded from the sacerdotal ministry. "Women are not permitted to speak in the church, but equally they are forbidden to give the official teaching, to baptize, to make the Offering or to lay claim to any function (munus) of men, or of the sacerdotal ministry (officium)."⁶ But he admitted with the apostles that they were allowed to prophesy. So in some sense woman was allowed an active liturgical part, although this has never been definitely linked with Eucharistic service.

Women were very active in the first and second centuries. Unfortunately, in their zeal, they often were carried away and the early heresiarchs were usually surrounded by such women. In the Gnostic sect women were the bearers of secret revelation. Mary Magdalen in Pistis Sophia, and Salome in the Egyptian Gospel, and Mary in the Gospel of Mary were all sources of esoteric teaching in the apocryphal literature.⁷

⁵1 Cor. 11.5.

⁶Jean Danielou, The Ministry of Women in the Early Church, tr. Glyn Simon (London: The Faith Press, 1961), p.16.

⁷Ibid.

Montanus and his women prophetesses thought of themselves as instruments of the Holy Spirit.⁸ Their enthusiastic new prophecy was the speedy approach of the Kingdom. Their ecstatic pronouncements were accompanied by extreme rigorism. Their greatest convert was Tertullian who, after joining this sect, held that "ecstasy is the only proper form of revelation."⁹ The Marcionites were another heretical sect which allowed the women complete freedom of action. Tertullian before his schism raged against them. "The very of these heretics, how wanton they are! For they are bold enough to teach, to dispute, to enact exorcisms, to undertake cures - it may be even to baptize."¹⁰

After the Montanist controversy, prophetic theology bifurcated into two streams: the mystical and the rational. In the West prophetic mysticism can be traced through the writings of the contemplative saints. In the East only mysticism without charism survived. It is the rational prophetic theology which has had the greatest impact on the orthodox. In this school charism becomes associated with understanding the canonical texts and is restrained.¹¹

⁸Hans von Campenhausen, Men Who Shaped the Western Church, tr. Manfred Hoffman (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 30.

⁹Tertullian, Against Marcion in Latin Christianity, p. 446.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 263.

¹¹"prophecy," NCE, XI, 862.

Another way woman was able to express her Christian calling and teach the faith was by giving her life for Christ. Martyrdom was never reserved for men. In fact, the women martyrs have been among those most highly extolled in the legends of the Church. There was a slave girl Blandina, one of the several martyrs of Lyons who died in the year 177. Her living body was enmeshed in a net and then tossed to the horns of wild bulls.¹² St. Agatha, a woman of Sicily, died in prison in about 250 after having been brutally mutilated.¹³ St. Agnes, a young girl of twelve died in Rome during the persecutions of Diocletian.¹⁴ St. Cecilia who is listed in the canon of the mass has been honored since the fourth century. The legends surrounding her death, however, are not reliable.¹⁵ The martyrdom of St. Perpetua and Felicitas is one of the most touching stories in all Christendom. St. Perpetua, a young matron of high social position, left in her own diaries an account of her trial. Her brother continued the diary which may have been edited by Tertullian.¹⁶

¹²The Book of Saints: A Dictionary of Persons Canonized or Beautified by the Catholic Church, compiled by the Benedictine Monks of St. Augustine's Abbey, Ramsgate (5th ed. rev.; New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, Co., 1966), p. 578.

¹³Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁶The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas, tr. R.E. Wallis in Latin Christianity, pp. 697-700.

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The missionary field was another area in which women were able to play a very active part in the primitive church community. Hippolytus calls Mary Magdalen "the apostle of the apostles."¹⁷ Adolph Harnack reiterates this point many times in his Church history.¹⁸ Christianity particularly appealed to the women, and they played a leading role in its spread. Unlike Mithraism which spread through the Roman army, Christianity spread quickly through the women's chambers. Licinius, the author of the last persecution, issued a decree, which was especially harsh on the women, forbidding them to worship publicly. Harnack induces from this that the emperor considered them the stronghold of Christianity.¹⁹

Nevertheless from the beginning certain cultic functions and roles were reserved for men. The sacrificial priesthood was masculine. St. John Chrysostom clearly stated that the sacrificing priest is Christ himself.²⁰ Yet, feminine qualities were stressed in St. Polycarp's advice to the presbyters, "the presbyters also must be sympathetic,

¹⁷ Danielou, Ministry, p. 16.

¹⁸ Adolf Harnack, The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries, II vols., trans. and ed. James Moffatt (2nd ed., New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1908), I, 368.

¹⁹ Ibid., II, 64-65.

²⁰ St. John Chrysostom, Homily 50 on Matthew as quoted in Quastin, III, 481.

merciful to all, guiding back the wanderers, visiting all the sick."²¹

Another role which the men coveted strongly for themselves was that of teacher. The Didache stated, "we do not allow women to preach in the church, but only to pray,"²² The rationale was that the Master had women whom he could have sent, but he did not send them.²³ Tertullian was equally vehement on this point. Women were not to speak in church, officially teach, baptize, or to make the offering.²⁴ St. Clement spoke of men being the successors to the apostles,

Our apostles, too, were given to understand by our Lord, Jesus Christ that the office of the bishop would give rise to intrigues. For this reason, equipped as they were with perfect foreknowledge, they appointed the men mentioned before, and afterward layed down a rule once and for all to this effect; when these men die, other approved men shall succeed to their sacred ministry.²⁵

It would be difficult to argue that the men here mentioned meant mankind. Women were allowed, however, to teach privately and St. John Chrysostom coupled this with

²¹ Polycarp of Smyrna, Letter to the Philipppians, tr. Francis X. Glimm in Apostolic Fathers, p. 138.

²² Didascalia Apostolorum, p. 133.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., p.

²⁵ Clement of Rome, The Letter to the Corinthians, tr. Francis X. Glimm, The Apostolic Fathers, p. 43.

the fact that they exceeded men in good works.²⁶ Not being allowed to teach, however, did not lessen their obligation to learn. St. Basil said that women should keep silence in church, but be zealous at home to inquire about the manner of pleasing God.²⁷ In The Shepherd of Hermas, Grapte, a woman, was sent to teach the widows and orphans, the shepherd himself would teach the Elders.²⁸

It can be seen in the early centuries, that the ministry of women was spontaneous and unstructured. As the hierarchy became established, it viewed this anarchy as less and less desirable. Spontaneous enthusiasm made a good beginning, but organized, sustained thrust was necessary to consolidate the original gains. In the third century the Church began to regulate the women. It first tried to absorb them into an order instituted by the apostles--the widows. There were two orders of widows from ancient times. The first class were those who were dependent upon the Church, like the orphans. The second class were ministers of the church. They assisted at the baptism of women and performed other nonliturgical functions similar

²⁶ John Chrysostom, The Epistle to the Romans in The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom Archbishop of Constantinople on The Acts of the Apostles tr. J. Walker et al. (NPNF, 1st ser., Vol. XI), p. 554. My italics.

²⁷ Saint Basil: Asectical Works tr. Sr. M. Monica Wagner (FC, Vol. 9), p. 191.

²⁸ Shepherd of Hermas, p. 240.

to those of the deacons. Until the end of the third century, they constituted the ordo viduarum. While their exact position is difficult to ascertain, it was probably more honorary than clerical.²⁹ These women were aged. Originally, they could not be enrolled before they were sixty. They could be married but once and must have proved their worth by their good works. Their purpose was to seek perfection, to be intercessors for the Church, and to teach the young women.³⁰ St. Polycarp called them the altar of God.³¹ Clement of Alexandria listed them with the chosen persons along with bishops, priests, and deacons.³² Tertullian and Origen spoke of them as enjoying ecclesiastical honors also.³³ They were placed after the deacon in the enumeration of order. That they were truly an order was witnessed by several of the Fathers. Origen said: "Not only fornication, but also second marriage, are a bar to ecclesiastical dignities. Indeed, neither bishop, priest, deacon, nor widow, is allowed a second marriage." He spoke of the ministerium of widows in his commentary on the Romans and of their "ecclesiastical honors" in his homily on Isaiah.³⁴

²⁹H.J. Schroeder, p. 54, note 124.

³⁰Danielou, Ministry, pp. 13-14.

³¹Ibid.

³²Schroeder, p. 54.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Danielou, Ministry, p. 17.

The pseudo-Clementine listed the order of widows after the three male orders. Tertullian bore testimony that a widow could not be enrolled in the order if she had been married twice. He called them a guild - secta. He mentioned them alongside the presbyters in the congregation.³⁵ In the Didascalia of the third century, there is evidence of the decline of the office of widows and the rise of deaconesses. "And thou also has need of a deaconess for many things; for a deaconess is required to go into the houses of the heathen where there are believing women, and to visit those who are sick, and to minister to them in that of which they have need, and to bathe those who have begun to recover from sickness."³⁶ And more explicitly "and the deaconess shall be honored by you in the place of the Holy Spirit; and the presbyters shall be to you in the likeness of the Apostles; and the orphans and widows shall be reckoned by you in the likeness of the altar."³⁷

By the end of the fourth century the status of widows was ambiguous. Canon 11 of the Council of Laodicea (ca. 380) suppressed the presbytides--that is the higher rank of widows but not the lower.³⁸ This lower rank needed

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Didascalia, p. 148.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 88.

³⁸ Danielou, Ministry, pp. 26-27.

no ordination for they had been instituted for prayer and fasting which was really the function of all Christians.³⁹

The diaconate was another female order established by the Apostles along with the widows.⁴⁰ It didn't reach its zenith, however, until the fourth century. The first post-Apostolic reference to deaconesses came from a secular source. Pliny the Younger writing to Trajan in about 112 spoke of torturing two serving women who are called deaconesses (ministrae) by the Christians.⁴¹ Clement of Alexandria does not refer to deaconesses by name but spoke of how the Apostles took "sisters" to share in their ministry to women.⁴² In a listing of the Roman clergy under the pontificate of Cornelius in about the year 251, no deaconesses were enumerated, so their status was not universally the same.⁴³ The first general council of Nicaea (325) did take

³⁹Hippolytus, The Apostolic Tradition, p. 40.

⁴⁰Rom. 16.1.

⁴¹Josef Jungmann, The Early Liturgy To the Time of Gregory the Great, tr. Francis A. Brunner (South Bend, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959), p. 62.

⁴²Clement of Alexandria, Stromata p. 391.

⁴³The term diaconissa did not come into use until the fourth century. Diacona, vidua, and virgo canonica were terms used for female ministers. The distinction between widows and deaconesses has always been obscure; deaconesses probably formed the upper ranks of the widows, and they at least definitely received a laying of hands, ODCC, p. 377.

up the orders of widows and deaconesses. Canon 19 attempted to deal with the return of lapsed Catholics from heresies. The question was whether ordinations and baptisms of these sects should be considered valid. In the case of deaconesses the canon read "the same holds good in the case of their deaconesses, and, in general, this rule is to observe in regard to all who have been enrolled among their clergy." But again: "We have mentioned the deaconesses who have been found in this state, that since they have not been ordained, they are to be accounted among the layity."⁴⁴ Church historians are divided on whether women were then counted as members of an ordained clergy. In part the problem is one of denotation. Clergy like presbyter is often used ambiguously, sometimes in a broad sense and sometimes in a narrow technical one.

In the third century Syrian Didascalia the duties of deaconesses were listed. Deaconesses were to go to heathen homes where deacons would not be allowed; they were to anoint women catechumens with holy oils before their baptism, and after baptism they were to further instruct these women in matters of faith. Their ministry was also to the sick. They were to bathe those who were recuperating. In general they were to confine themselves to the ministry to women as deacons confined themselves to the ministering

⁴⁴Schroeder, p. 52.

to men.⁴⁵

The Apostolic Canons from the fourth century listed the deaconesses' duties as doorkeeper, intermediary between women and the clergy, and as the deacon's assistant.⁴⁶ These are all rather inferior positions. It would seem she was a combination usher and union-steward, but as a steward she would perhaps have had some influence with the clergy. Whether or not she was continuing her teaching duties with the women of the congregation cannot be ascertained from this passage. These same Apostolic Constitutions implied that the deaconess did have a clerical position for it mentioned the laying of hands for the deaconess.

CONCERNING THE DEACONESS--THE CONSTITUTION OF
BARTHOLOMEW.

XIX. Concerning a deaconess, I Bartholomew make this constitution: O bishop, thou shalt lay thy hands upon her in the presence of the presbytery, and of the deacons and deaconesses, and shalt say;--

THE FORM OF PRAYER FOR THE ORDINATION OF A
DEACONESS.

XX. O Eternal God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator of man and of woman, who didst replenish with the Spirit Miriam, and Deborah, and Anna, and Huldah; who didst not disdain that Thy only begotten Son should be born of a woman; who also in the tabernacle of the testimony, and in the temple, didst ordain women to be keepers of Thy holy gates,--do Thou now also look down upon this Thy servant, who is to be ordained to the office of a deaconess, and grant her Thy Holy Spirit, and "cleanse her from all filthiness of flesh and spirit," [2 Cor. 7.1.] that she may worthily discharge the work which is committed to her to Thy

⁴⁶Danielou, Ministry, p. 23.

glory, and the praise of Thy Christ, with whom glory and adoration be to Thee and the Holy Spirit for ever. Amen.⁴⁷

A fifth century document the Testament of Our Lord gave the deaconess a more eminent place than the Canons. She was mentioned right after the deacons and she sat on the bishop's left--the deacons on his right. She received communion before the laity and assisted at baptism. But she was ordained without the imposition of hands.⁴⁸ The Council of Chalcedon in 451 testified that ordination of women still was being practiced. Canon 15 stated that a woman may not be ordained under forty years of age,⁴⁹ but in the West the Council of Orange 441 had stated: "Deaconesses should not be in any way ordained".⁵⁰ There have always been divergent practices between the East and West. Deaconesses are another case in point. Most of the documentation concerning them comes from the East. It was there in fact that they were invested with both the stole and chalice.⁵¹ In contrast in the West Tertullian, Hippolytus

⁴⁷ Apostolic Constitutions, in Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries: Lactantius, Venantius, Asterius, Victorinus, Dionysius, Apostolic Teaching and Constitutions, Homily and Liturgies, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe (ANF, Vol. 7), p. 492.

⁴⁸ Danielou, Ministry, p. 20.

⁴⁹ Didascalia, p. 22.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 23.

⁵¹ ODCC, p. 377.

and Cyprian were earnestly extolling virginity. No virgins are even mentioned in the Didascalia.⁵²

Danielou interprets the divergence between the Didascalia and the Apostolic Constitutions over the status of widows, as an attempt on the part of the bishops to gain more control over their women helpers. They did this by elevating deaconesses, who were more under their control, over the widows, who were not as well regulated.⁵³ In the Didascalia quite bitter complaints were made against widows taking advantage of their position and not tending to their duties.

But let a widow know she is the altar of God;
and let her sit ever at home, and not stray or
run about among the houses of the faithful to
receive. For the altar of God never strays or
runs about anywhere, but is fixed in one place.⁵⁴

While the deaconess survived in some places in both the East and West until the tenth or eleventh centuries, in general, this office was absorbed by the convents and evolved into the great medieval abbesses who were both leaders of religious women and administrators of huge fiefs. They even sat in great councils and the parliaments of kings. They were Church invested with the ring, the pectoral cross, and the crosier.⁵⁵ Feminine liturgical functions had

⁵²Didascalia, p. xxxi.

⁵³Danielou, Ministry, p. 20.

⁵⁴Didascalia, p. 133.

⁵⁵"Abbesses," NCE, I, 6.

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become defunct with the rise of infant baptism, so it had become much more common for the deeply religious woman to now seek out a monastery and find her ministry there.

The tremendous influence of women on the development of monasticism has seldom been properly told. Saints Anthony, Basil, and Benedict are familiar names to most liberally educated Christians, but there were women who were also of great importance. Christian monasticism can be traced back to the desert of Egypt and the magnetic personality of St. Anthony. It was, however, St. Pachomius who gave communal celibacy its first rule and started monasticism along lines peculiarly Christian. It is seldom known, however, that Pachomius had a sister Mary who also founded a monastery--a nunnery--in 328.⁵⁶ But even before monastic life was regularized by Pachomius and Mary, communities of women had formed in the deserts during the persecutions of Diocletian. Many of these women suffered grotesque tortures and death for their faith. One of the most beautiful and heroic of these virgins was St. Fabronia. From her infancy a member of a community of women in Mesopotamia, she had never seen a man until she was dragged naked before the Roman magistrate. Savagely dismembered, her courage held out until she was finally beheaded. The

⁵⁶ Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of Christianity (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), p. 328.

legend of her martyrdom was preserved by an eyewitness and she became a model for future generations of nuns.⁵⁷

St. Basil the Great was probably in many ways the mightiest of the Greek Fathers. He is the acknowledged founder of Eastern monasticism, renowned as an administrator, admired as a writer and preacher, a liturgist of such repute that his devotions are still the main stay of the Orthodox Church. He was also an apostle of Christian humanism. His brother, Gregory of Nyssa, was almost as illustrious. Together with their friend Gregory of Nazianzus they formed the three great Cappodocian Eastern Fathers. Gregory was a philosopher and a mystic. His "Great Catechism" was a systematic ordering of Christian doctrines. But praised and honored as they were, both Basil and Gregory bowed before and acknowledged the direction they had been given by the women of their family--especially their grandmother and their sister, both called Macrina.

Gregory wrote two treatises in which he honored his sister. "On the Soul and the Resurrection" was written in the form of dialogue with Macrina. Although the thoughts are undoubtedly his, his sister is put in the role of teacher. He so desired her greatness to be remembered by posterity that he also wrote a short monograph on her life.

⁵⁷ The Count de Montalembert, The Monks of the West from St. Benedict to St. Bernard, intro. F.A. Gasquet (VI; London: John C. Nimmo, 1896) I, 221-24.

In a letter To the Neocaesareans Basil acknowledges his religious dependence on his grandmother, Macrina. He says:

What clearer evidence can there be of my faith, than that I was brought up by my grandmother, blessed woman, who came from you? I mean the celebrated Macrina who taught me the words of the blessed Gregory; which as far as memory had preserved down to her day, she cherished herself, while she fashioned and formed me, while yet a child, upon the doctrines of piety.⁵³

His brother Gregory relates how it was another Macrina, this time his sister, who was most influential at one of the turning points in Basil's life. Besides the sound orthodox education he received from his grandmother, he also received one of the finest secular and liberal educations that could then be had. After school in Caesarea, he went to Constantinople to study rhetoric and philosophy. Finally, he arrived at the intellectual capital of the world, Athens. When he returned home, already famous and successful, the doors to all the great secular careers were open to him. "But Macrina took him over and lured him so quickly to the goal of philosophy that he withdrew from the worldly show and began to look down upon a claim through oratory and went over to this life full of labors for one's own hand to perform, providing for himself through his complete poverty, a mode of living that would without impediment lead to virtue."⁵⁹

⁵³ St. Basil, Letters, The Treatise, p. 245.

⁵⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of St. Macrina, pp. 167-68.

The eldest of ten children, Macrina had always taken it upon herself to be a second mother to the family and a faithful companion and helpmate to her own mother. Especially after the death of her father, Macrina was more and more of an aid to her mother in the running of the household and the teaching of the younger children. Though betrothed while very young, she was spared from marriage by the death of her fiance before their union took place. She dismissed any further talk of another marriage alliance by saying this would be unfaithful to the first vow which she had accepted as the will of her father and the will of God. She led her mother more and more along the lines of philosophy. When the younger children were grown, Macrina and her mother began to live on the same level with their maid-servants, in poverty, continence and humility. Prayer and unceasing singing filled their day. Macrina's youngest brother, Peter, was born about the time of the death of their father. Macrina raised him from infancy.

She became all things to the boy; father, teacher, attendant, mother, the counselor of every good, and she held him in check so that, even before his flowering in the tenderness of youth, he was raised to the high goal of philosophy and by some good fortune of nature, he had skill in every form of handicraft, that without instruction he arrived at a complete mastery of skills upon which most people expend much time and energy. ⁶⁰

When he reached maturity he was her chief aid in maintaining the convent she had established for women. Her example and

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 172.

teaching on the ascetic life was such a strong influence on Basil that he himself turned his attention to monasticism, founded a monastery like hers for men, and wrote his Rule. With this in mind, Macrina can be called the true foundress of Eastern regularized monastic life.⁶¹

In the West where women had even fewer opportunities for an official function they nevertheless exerted a tremendous personal and private influence. Perhaps this is because in the West women had traditionally played the part of co-worker as wife and were accepted more equally by the men. It is hard to see why anyone could ever say that St. Jerome was an anti-feminist. His misogynistic writings concern sex and marriage, but his dependence on women for encouragement is well-known. In Rome he came in contact with a group of wealthy, devoted women already dedicated to asceticism. He became their spiritual director, but they had a reciprocal influence on him. Marcella was their leader--one of the first foundresses of a Western convent.⁶² It was at her instigation and suggestion that he wrote many of his commentaries on difficult scriptural passages. She herself was such an exegete that Jerome has called her his

⁶¹Robert Payne, The Holy Fire: The Story of the Fathers of the Eastern Church (New York: Harper & Bros., 1956), p. 115.

⁶²St. Jerome, Letter CXXVII in The Principle Works of St. Jerome, tr. W.H. Freemantle (ANF, Vol. 6), p. 253.

judge rather than disciple. It was at Marcella's request that he undertook the exegesis of Ephesians which he considered perhaps his best work.⁶³ Her intellect and moral courage were responsible for Pope Anastasius condemning the Roman defenders of Origen's heresies. "Of this glorious victory, Marcella was the origin."⁶⁴

Another sister who made her influence felt in the field of monasticism was St. Marcellina. With the establishment of Christianity as the state religion in the fourth century, virgins sought a common life together. Information about such convents in the East had been infiltrating the West for some time. At the request of Marcellina, Ambrose synthesized these teachings on virginity. These were consolidated into three books. Marcellina, then, like Paula and Marcella, Macrina and others was among that influential group of women who point out the new directions, horizons, and activities towards which man should direct his intellect.

Of all the Christian mothers, St. Monica is undoubtedly the most famous due to the esteem that many generations have had for her son. In his confessions St. Augustine's only deviation from his own introspection was to interrupt himself to recount the life of his mother

⁶³ Ibid., p. 498.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 256-57.

and to relate the effect that she had had on the development of his soul.

"As a boy then I had already heard of an eternal life, promised us through the humility of the Lord our God, stooping to our pride; and even from the womb of my mother, who greatly hoped in Thee, I was sealed with the mark of His Cross and salted with His salt."⁶⁵

That he wondered and deviated from these primeval, maternal teachings is the story of his Confessions, but his mother never ceased hoping and praying for his eventual baptism into the faith of his youth.

"For she by that faith and spirit which she had from Thee, discerned the death wherein I lay, and Thou heardest her, oh Lord; Thou heardest her, and despoiled not tears, when streaming down, they watered the ground under her eyes in every place where she prayed, yea Thou heardest her."⁶⁶

She was the epitome of the Christian woman, strong but tender.

Augustine said how God used her to speak to him even though he did not know it at the time.

"These seem to me womanish advises, which I should blush to obey. But they were thine, and I knew it not; and I thought Thou wert silent and it was she who spake; by whom Thou wert not silent unto me; and in her was despised by me, her son, the son of thy handmaid, thy servant, But I knew it not."⁶⁷

Her whole life, then was devoted to the conversion of her son. I can think of no man who has gained a brighter star

⁶⁵The Confessions of St. Augustine, trans. Edward B. Pusey, Vol. VII. The Harvard Classics (New York: P.F. Collier & Son Co., 1909), p. 13.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 42.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 25.

for Christendom by either his pleading, his rhetoric, or his example as did this woman by hers.

So many other women by the gifts of their money, their time, and by their example gave the Church a bright and holy light, that the Christian women were an amazement to the pagans.⁶⁸ St. Melania the younger, a cousin of Paula the friend of St. Jerome, was one of these marvelous Christian women. She was married in 397 to Pinianus when she was only fourteen. She led such a holy life that she attracted thirty different families, along with many virgins and widows to her villa so they could live near and follow the example of such a pious woman. She had vast estates and over eight thousand slaves. With the advent of the Goths, she went to Carthage where she founded two monasteries, one for men and one for her former female slaves. She wrote a very mild rule for her virgins, but she herself ate only every other day. Her work was to transcribe books, both in Greek and Latin, and her influence on her husband was such that he too was canonized.⁶⁹ While this story is perhaps not typical, her way of life was a pattern that certainly does

⁶⁸The pagan Libanius said about the mother of St. John Chrysostom: "What women have these Christians!" Schaff, II, 363.

⁶⁹Butler's Lives of the Saints, ed. & rev. Herbert Thurston and Donald Attwater (New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, 1956), IV, 646-48.

not stand in isolation among the wealthy matrons of the late fourth century.

The final way in which woman could have exercised her influence and her ministry in the church was by participating in Church politics. For the first millennium, bishops were elected by the clergy and the people. Women often participated and voted in these elections. In the Apocostolic Tradition of Hyppolitus, written about the turn of the third century, ordinances are given for the consecration of a bishop. It begins, "Let the bishop be ordained after he has been chosen by all the people."⁷⁰ Women were not precluded from this election. But even when a woman could not vote, her influence was not thereby precluded. A certain fourth century Spanish lady, Lucilla, was among the first women of record to use her wealth to bribe the way of her men into Church offices.⁷¹ Woman was not always an influence for good; but she did have some influence.

⁷⁰Hyppolitus, Apocostolic Tradition, p. 33.

⁷¹A dictionary of Christian Biography, Literature, Sects, and Doctrines, During the First Eight Centuries. Being a Continuation of the Dictionary of the Bible, ed. William Smith and Henry Wace (4 vols; London: John Murray, 1882), III, 751. Cf. Jean Danielou and Henri Morrou, The Christian Centuries, Vol. I: The First Six Hundred Years, tr. Vincent Cronin (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), p. 240.

The early Christian Church used and recognized woman's talents, both officially and unofficially. In the Apostolic and sub-Apostolic era, she performed as a prophetess, and she was an active and effective missionary. Her sincerity, fortitude, and bravery were proven by martyrdom. The reciprocal concern that women and the Church had for each other is best evidenced by widows. Widows and orphans were supported and cared for by the Church. In return the widows prayed and fasted for the whole congregation and often performed functions which overlapped those of the diaconry. As deaconess, woman was often ordained into major orders and assisted officially at the sacraments. Women also instructed the children and other women and in conjunction with men helped care for the poor and the sick. In her social roles she exercised leadership by stimulating men to undertake new activities at either her request or as the result of her example. She never shared in the offices of public teacher or sacrificing priest, however, as these were always felt to be masculine roles and incompatible with the feminine virtues. She exercised her spiritual apostolate in a motherly or supporting role in which she complemented and stood next to the man in his apostolate as father (priest). Her apostolate was usually one of silence; she was hidden within the Church. If woman is to identify with the Holy Spirit, perhaps the lack of any definite form to her work is the one note of her ministry. From time to time she has exercised other liturgical prerogative such

as the preparation of the chalice, pouring wine into it, and distributing the host to women and children.⁷²

She performed where and when she was needed. She went where the official hierarchy could not penetrate and did things they were unable or unready to perform. What she lost in honor or status, she gained in freedom.

⁷²Danielou, Ministry, p. 29.

CHAPTER VI
ANTI-FEMINISM IN THE CHURCH

Historical evidence concerning the status of woman in any one period has never pointed in only one direction, and the Patristic era is no exception. To be a complete misogynist would be unChristian. Yet, neither Christians nor the Church itself, have ever so far been found without spot or wrinkle. Christianity was an attempt to make one people out of the nations by providing a universal goal and harmonizing individual differences with love. It preached a brotherhood where there was neither Jew nor Greek; slave nor freeman; male nor female."¹

Christian psychology accepted man as a creature at war with himself. He sought to be perfect but was always less than that. He often tried to love his neighbor before he had learned to love himself. Bias, prejudice, misunderstanding, ignorance, pride, and unbridled passion occasionally creep out in even the best of men. Consequently, as a result patristic literature does contain some anti-feminine viewpoints. Even the most converted of Christians still carried the imprints of their own biology, psychology, and

¹Gal. 3.23.

historical prejudices. Traces of anti-feminism could be found in St. Paul.² It appeared early in the post-Apostolic Fathers. Athenagoras, a second century bishop of Athens found woman's sexuality to have had only one positive end - childbearing.

Having the hope of eternal life, we despise the things of this life, even the pleasures of the soul, each of us reckoning her his wife, whom he has married according to the laws laid down by us, and that only for the purpose of having children. For as the husbandman sowing seed into the ground awaits the harvest, not sowing more upon it, so to us the procreation of children is the measure of our indulgence and appetite.³

In another work he stated that a second marriage was nothing more than specious adultery because God made one man and one woman for the strictest union in the intercourse of the race.⁴ To him those who would truly live a God-centered life would reject sexuality and marriage and remain a virgin.

In the Alexandrian school Clement has the highest regard for women in the realm of spiritual things. "Women are therefore to philosophize equally with men, though the males are the best at everything unless they have become

²1 Tim. 2.11-12.

³Athenagoras Apology quoted in Quasten I, 234.

⁴Athenagoras, A Plea for the Christians in Fathers of the Second Century, pp. 146-47.

effeminate."⁵ But a difference in nature is acknowledged by Clement who thought how improper it is for man who is endowed with reason to do anything disgraceful but it is even worse for women to whom it brings shame even to reflect of what their nature is. Because of her biology he believed woman was destined for child-bearing and house-keeping, but he had a very lofty conception of woman's relation to her husband, elevating her to a place of equality, a sister in reality, after she had borne him children. Clement saw procreation as the lawful end of marriage. He believed a woman was subordinate to her husband and yet gave her high honor within the family. This idea was Jewish rather than Greek or Roman. He made no references to any official status of woman in the Church.⁶ He gave very detailed descriptions of how a woman should act and dress. He carried this to the extent of saying, "fornication in a woman is the raising of the eyes."⁷ His theology of man, however, coincided with the highest Biblical theology: "The soul of man is confessedly the better part of man, and the body the inferior. But neither is the soul good by nature, nor on the other hand, is the body bad by nature."⁸

⁵As quoted in Charles Cladwell Ryrie, The Place of Woman in the Church (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1958), p. 106.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Clement, The Instructor, p. 263.

⁸Clement, The Stromata, p. 439.

Here there is no evidence of Manichean or Gnostic tendencies.

Tertullian calls woman the "gate of Hell" and the cause of man's fall. And yet he equates truth with the feminine: "Truth knows that she is a stranger on earth and easily finds enemies among men of another allegiance, but she knows that her race, home, hope, recompense, and honor are in heaven."⁹ And finally he exclaims: "Oh handmaidens of the living God, my fellow servants and sisters, the law that sets me, most unworthy, in your ranks, emboldens me as your fellow-servant to address you."¹⁰ "Not animus but anima is 'naturaliter Christiana' that is Christian by nature says Tertullian so rightly."¹¹ The heretical sect in which Tertullian spent his last days allowed women into its upper clergy. His gate of hell statement obviously is more forceful out of context.

Anti-feminism was most strongly expressed in the African Church by the desert fathers. While the more moderate monasticism even appealed to women, and sister convents grew up in conjunction with monasteries, the more extreme

⁹ Tertullian, The Apology as quoted in Quasten II, 256.

¹⁰ As quoted in Harnack, Missions II, p. 71.

¹¹ Tertullian, The Apology as quoted in Moll, p. 54.

forms of the ascetic life, such as the hermits who were dwelling in the deserts of Egypt, were the antithesis of the feminine spirit. It was at this masculine extreme where irregularities and deformities crept into the monastic system. This life was often more similar to athletic training and bizarre practices of circus performances than anything that resembled a contemplative life. Shunning all men, these Anchorites particularly abhorred women and feared even their own mothers and sisters.

The Eastern fathers were more Platonic in philosophy and less legalistic and rigid than their western counterparts. Nevertheless, certain distaste for women appeared also in their writings. St. Basil the Great had a tendency towards Stoicism, legalism, and moralism. He encouraged continence in all things. In his zeal for virginity, he replaced the Christian family with the monastery as the ideal Christian community.¹²

Gregory of Nyssa also an apostle of virginity, though he himself was married, spoke of perfect virginity as the virginity of the soul. This virginity consisted of disengagedness of the heart and lofty aspirations. And yet he did not "deprecate marriage," and believed that virginity of the soul could be practiced by all.¹³ Basil also affirmed

¹²Basil, Letter IV in The Treatises, p. 113.

¹³Gregory of Nyssa, On Virginity in Gregory of Nyssa, v. 51.

that celibacy does not solve human concupiscence for "all in the world whether married or virgin have cares and appetites."¹⁴

The writings of St. John Chrysostom contain perhaps the strongest bias against women that can be found among the Eastern Fathers. Louis Bouyer attempts to reconcile this with other writings of St. John which contain some of the most beautiful treatises written on marriage. Bouyer's interpretation is based on circumstances in St. John's life. Early in his career, St. John Chrysostom embraced monasticism. But the asceticism he practiced was an asceticism based on moralism, and it lacked mystery. Built on such a foundation, this asceticism was destined to become arid and brittle. St. John's misogynistic writings were writings that not only lacked an appreciation of woman but even a real appreciation of the monastic life. In a letter to a certain Theodore who was tempted to marry rather than to continue a vocation of virginity, St. John tries to dissuade him with the analogy that loss of virginity would be like physical beauty which loses its life and buoyancy and decomposes. He also argued that marriage brings only heartaches and concerns-- children, illness, a nagging wife. None of this shows much depth of thought. In his treatise on virginity he goes on to say that if marriage is not continued in the next life, it is absurd to spend any part of this life with such cares

¹⁴Basil, Letter II in The Treatise, p. 110.

as marriage brings. He even says that the help that God promised man by the creation of a woman has been refused to him by woman's sin.¹⁵

After St. John returned to civilization and became a priest and then a bishop, his pastoral letters reveal a reservoir of charity which had been lacking in his writings as a cenobite. His letter to a young widow profoundly penetrates the feelings and emotions of matrimony. He would have a Christian suitor write:

"A girl who is prudent and generous, who applies herself to devotion, is worth more than the whole universe. It is for this reason that I have chosen you, and I love you more than myself. The present life is nothing: I ask you then, and I abjure you by every means in my power, that we should spend the time of the present life in such a way as to merit being reunited in the life to come, without any fear of them being separated. The time is short and strewn with difficulties and failures! If here we have been pleasing to God then we shall find one another together in eternal happiness. I prefer your life to everything and I could have no more mortal pain than to have to be separated from you. If I had to lose everything, to fall to the lowest depths of poverty, to suffer anything, all this would be bearable if only your feelings remain for me, and even children seem desirable to me only if you love me in this way. ... The man who takes a wife with all this in mind is hardly inferior to the solitaires."¹⁶

St. Ambrose tolerated woman but lacked a mature appreciation of her worth. He considers her good and yet

¹⁵Bouyer, pp. 440-47.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 447.

inferior to man.¹⁷ Her main purpose and salvation is pro-creation.¹⁸ In a discussion of the Soul, St. Ambrose says that the feminine parts of the soul are pestilence, malice, sensuality, and immodesty. The masculine parts embrace chastity, wisdom and the four cardinal virtues.¹⁹

St. Jerome has a high regard for women in spite of himself. In his Preface to Zephaniah he defends himself for writing for women. He uses examples from both Scripture and the classics to show the capacities and worth of the feminine sex.²⁰ But he is not always so profuse in his praise. Sometimes he equates women with simpletons.²¹ His condemnation of marriage, however, is much more precise. He says that he would "cut down with the axe of virginity, the wood of Marriage."²² He does realize however where his virgins come from. "I praise wedlock, I praise marriage, but only it is because they give me virgins."²³

¹⁷St. Ambrose, Paradise tr. John S. Savage in St. Ambrose: Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel (FC, Vol. 42), p. 301.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 400.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Jerome, Preface to Zephomiah in Principal Works, p. 502.

²¹Louis Duchesne, Early History of The Christian Church (3 vols; New York: Longman's, Green & Co., 1920), III, 120.

²²White, p. 323.

²³Jerome, Letter XXII in Principal Works, p. 30.

St. Augustine summed up the feelings of most of the ancient Fathers that original sin was connected with sex. In fact Augustine said that the original sin in the offspring was due to the concupiscence of the parents. In fact the marriage act could never be performed without sin.²⁴ It is difficult to see how a mind as great as Augustine's especially in one so disposed to introspection could have failed to have noted the positive goodness that results from man's sexuality. Augustine's lack of perception in this area and all the anti-feminism latent in the patristic world is best summed up by Father Bouyer.

With the young Chrysostom, still more with Jerome, we have seen an asceticism introduced that tended to justify itself by a disgust of the world, of the body, and, what is even more serious, of woman seen simply as the intermediary by which the religious man finds himself wholly absorbed in the body and as it were nailed to the world. Augustine should be given the credit for having tried as well as he could, and increasingly so, to react against the Manicheanism latent in this way of looking at things. Unfortunately, neither his own temperament nor his experiences as a young man, nor, above all perhaps, grafted on all this his tendency to lift introspection to the very heart of wisdom, help to make his reaction on this point a very effective one.²⁵

Introspection produced the greatest masculocentricism of all. Justification of asceticism rather than production of a positive theology of celibacy could not help but serve the cause of the deprecation of the female.

²⁴"Original Sin," NCE, X, 780.

²⁵Bouyer, p. 494.

An even greater force against woman and against an appreciation of her dignity was the heresies. Mithraism was not strictly a heresy but more a parallel and rival to Christianity. This religion was strictly masculine. Women were only given an auxiliary membership. The Gnostic movement also had a detrimental effect on women, for as women assumed more and more important positions in Gnostic circles, the Church reacted by excluding women from orders. By the middle of the second century feminine subordination, borrowed from marriage, was prevailing in the Church. In the New Testament which was read at Rome, Aquila was now named before Prisca who was the more influential of the two, but the wife.²⁶ The heresiarch Manes and Marcion were both horrified at the thought that the Lord had been born of a woman. "Perish the thought," said Manes, "that our Lord Jesus Christ should have descended through the womb of a woman."²⁷ Marcion cried: "He descended, but without touching her or taking ought from her."²⁸

Philosophic rationalism also contributed to the lack of appreciation of the womanly. Neo-platonism and Stoicism,

²⁶Harnack, II, 76.

²⁷John Henry Newman, An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine, new edition, ed. Charles Frederick Harrold (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1949), p. 377.

²⁸Ibid.

were both anti-feminine, the first for its intellectualism and the second for its extreme moralism. Gnosticism also attempted to make knowledge out of faith. Mystery is known by the initiate through an esoteric teaching rather than mystically experienced by the complete person.

Arianism was a different form of rationalism. It ignored the question of the inner life of the Trinity, saw the Son as the first creature of the Father and the Holy Spirit as the first creature of the Son. The Son did not become flesh but became the soul only of Jesus Christ. The Father created, he did not beget. This is a denial of the feminine function with a much more mechanistic and masculine theology.

Within the Church three separate tendencies had tended to deprecate the role and status of women. First, there was asceticism as described above. Celibates must always be on their guard against the temptations of Eve, and therefore fall into the error of thinking that there is virtue in deprecating womanhood.

Secondly, the highly developing church structure and organization along with a complex penitential system tended to displace women from key roles. By her nature, woman was neither an organizer nor a disciplinarian. These were masculine roles and talents. The third mitigating factor was the elevation of the sacerdotal nature of the priesthood. Roots in Judaism and the example of Christ himself suggested that sacrifice was performed by the man. Roman paternalism

and Greek customs reinforced all these tendencies.

In summary it can be said that the Fathers were anti-feminist or afeminist to the extent that they did not develop an adequate theology of woman. But this was partly due to the fact that they did not have an adequate psychology of woman to build upon.

It was futile for theologians to know and proclaim the equality of man and woman as human persons in relation to grace and salvation, morality and especially marriage rights and duties, before the special psychology of woman had been developed; it was difficult for them to break with an age-old habit of taking man (the male) as the standard and pattern of everything human, of evaluating woman by a comparison with him and not preferably with her own type, and of appreciating her mind from the point of view of her aptitude for reasoning, without taking into account the admirable compensations for her lack of logic that are furnished by her faculties of intuition. That barrier has been passed.²⁹

²⁹B. Lavaud, "Toward a Theology of Woman," The Thomist, II, 4, Oct. 1940, p. 470.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

This thesis was an outgrowth and continuation of some graduate work done in the religion department on the Old Testament. In studying the development of the strongly masculine ethical monotheism of the Hebrews, it soon became evident that in spite of the prophets, feminine religious undercurrents were never completely eradicated. The advent of Christianity was like the breath of spring for woman, for no longer were these feminine qualities hidden and submerged, but were openly accepted and embraced in Mother-Church and the comforting, mediating role of the Holy Spirit. It would seem to follow that honor for the woman and the womanly would follow the Christian religion as it spread throughout the world. Feminists shouted that this had not been the case. If this were true what had happened to women and the feminine in the Patristic Church may have been critical events in the history of the status of woman.

In seeking to understand any period in history it is difficult to recreate it without modern viewpoints creeping in. The study of woman has even greater difficulties. History has suffered for many millennia from a potent dose of masculocentrism. Henry Adams stated:

The study of history is useful to the historian by teaching him his ignorance of women; and the mass of this ignorance crushes one who is familiar enough with what are called historical sources to realize how few women have ever been known.¹

The early Church accepted woman on an equal basis; she also accepted woman with a particular role to play. That this role was regarded as of equal importance with the masculine one can be inferred from the fact that male clerics often tried to usurp it. The teachings of the Church on the role and dignity of woman has had a far reaching effect on her history. But what is not as frequently mentioned is that what woman is and becomes has a reciprocal effect on the Church (and perhaps on society, too), for the Church must look to woman for the image of herself.

In Patristic theology universal original sin resulted in depraved passions or concupiscence for all, both male and female. Woman, usually equated with feeling and passion, suffered from this. Saints Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, and John Chrysostom felt if there had been no fall there would not have been any distinction of sexes.² For them sexuality was the result of sin. St. Augustine rejected this, but he was distrustful of the delight which accompanied sexual union, and he felt before the fall this delight would have been absent. But he, too, can find no

¹Henry Adams, The Education of Henry Adams as quoted in Beard, p. 274.

²Lavoud, p. 478.

value in the feminine sex except for procreation. He felt another man would have been a better helpmate.³ Yet, he had noted the very feminine role played by the Holy Spirit! In spite of this woman was never completely equated with evil as she was in Gnosticism; in Christian theology the devil or pure evil has always been male. The Fathers' extreme preoccupation with asceticism did serve to bifurcate each woman's role as both virgin and mother. But there was never any confusion in Christian theology that through the sacrifice of the cross woman had now been elevated to the status of divine daughtership and that this was indeed a dazzling height.

Christianity of the first five centuries also lifted woman in her social human role. Admirers of Rome and Roman civilization point with pride to the Roman emancipated women. Yet most Roman women were humiliated by the moral breakdown in family life. They were subjected to divorce, encouraged in infanticide and abortion, and were expected to accept concubinage as an approved institution. It wasn't until Christianity became a dominant force within the Empire that lower class women were freed from public servitude and cohabitation with their masters.⁴ Institutional change, however, came slowly, for Christianity brought not revolution but a moral and religious uplifting. Woman's social

³Ibid., p. 480.

⁴Coleman-Norton, p. 360.

status was not immediately affected, but the Church's teachings on the sacredness of human life and matrimony could not help but to oblivate these customs.

The respect for family and family life is truly indicative of a woman's status in a society, legal status notwithstanding. It is in family life that the beginnings of morality towards persons is developed. It is in the family where a woman is best able to exercise her civilizing role. The Christian Church through the Fathers not only re-established woman's family role, but extended her role to a universal spiritual motherhood. In a sex-satiated society the Church gave woman other feminine social functions to perform in the areas of contemplation and social service. Christianity uplifted womanhood by stressing the feminine attributes of purity, gentleness, humility, care of others, and love. Woman's qualities were accepted as both different and necessary. Masculinity no longer was the only standard for the total human community.

More research is needed before the role and influence of the Christian woman during the Roman Empire can be truly presented in all of its facets. Christians live in two worlds; the spiritual realm, the Church; and the earthly realm, the secular city. To present woman's place in the Church is only half of the story. The interaction between Christian, Roman, Greek, Jewish, and German mores and ideals will have to be studied before woman's real place can be ascertained and the truly original contribution

of Christianity can be assessed.

Research, at least in English, is particularly deficient concerning the origins and development of feminine monasticism. It appears to me that this is a crucial area. Woman's official status within the Christian community changed a great deal during the fourth century especially in the Western Empire. Deaconesses and the order of widows disappeared as monasticism developed. Was this a deliberate attempt by the males to monopolize every single official function? Or did the double threat of German barbarism and Roman moral degeneration drive the women themselves to seek refuge in the convents? A careful contrast with the Eastern Empire where the female deaconate had more vitality and invasions were not the same threat might throw some interesting lights on these questions.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

As source material The Ante-Nicene Fathers (10 vols., Grand Rapids, 1950-51) and The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (9 vols., Grand Rapids, 1956) are most useful to the English reader because they are the most comprehensive. They are American reprints of the nineteenth century Edinburgh Editions and are consequently outdated in the commentaries, and the translations as literature leave much to be desired. The fifty eight volumes of The Fathers of the Church (New York, 1947-56) have smoother prose, but they lack breadth concentrating mostly upon St. Augustine. Johannes Quasten in his Patrology (3 vols., Westminster, 1950-60) supplies what the source books are lacking. He combines the latest scholarly findings with comprehensive bibliographies, capsule biographies, a discussion of the literary output of each Father, and a discussion of the significance of each author in the development of Christian doctrine. He also provides generous excerpts, many of which are otherwise unavailable in English. His volumes are the most helpful ones in the field. Another source book which was of great help in determining the influence of the Church and the Empire was P.R. Coleman-Norton's Roman State and Christian

Church: A Collection of Legal Documents to A.D. 535 (3 vols., London, 1966).

As for Church histories, Adolf Harnack's The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries (2 vols., New York, 1903) still supplies the basic information on woman's role in the founding of Christianity. An excellent supplement to this is Father Jean Danielou's The Ministry of Women in the Early Church (London, 1961)--an invaluable up to date source. Karl Bihlmeyer's Christian Antiquity, revised by Herman Tuchle (Volume I of Church History, Westminster, 1958) is a bibliographical cache with a straightforward commentary based on sound scholarship.

E. Schillebeeckx, a prominent theologian, has published Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery (New York, 1965). This book combines the first two volumes of a projected four volume work on the theology of marriage. His treatment of the historical development of marriage during the Patristic era is very extensive.

Articles and monographs were also of value. Two monographs by Walter J. Burghardt in Mariology (3 vols., Milwaukee, 1955-61) edited by Juniper B. Carol were particularly illuminating. "Mary in Eastern Patristic Thought" and "Mary in Western Patristic Thought" are both scholarly treatments of the Fathers' Mariology. The "Virginity" article in the New Catholic Encyclopedia was written by the

French scholar P.T. Camelot who has published a monograph on the same subject in French. This article is probably the best treatment of virginity in a historical perspective in English. "Woman" presents the traditional Catholic position on women slightly liberalized by Vatican II.

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