

# **Women's Studies of the Christian and Islamic Traditions**

**Ancient, Medieval and  
Renaissance Foremothers**

**Kari Elisabeth Børresen and Kari Vogt**

**WOMEN'S STUDIES OF THE CHRISTIAN  
AND ISLAMIC TRADITIONS**



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**Ancient, Medieval  
and Renaissance Foremothers**

by

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## PREFACE

Our purpose in presenting this volume on Women's Studies of the Christian and Islamic Traditions is to point out their converging trends, based on the common Mediterranean culture. Like Judaism, both are monotheistic religions, with correlated theocentrism and androcentrism. Correspondingly, male humanity is considered normative, whereas female humanity is derived and therefore subordinate. In consequence, both traditions define women's *raison d'être* in the sense of their specific instrumental role for men's procreation of offspring. In Western European and North American Christianity, this shared androcentrism is superseded only in the 20th century, with the acceptance of women's legal equality in society. Nevertheless, men's precedence is upheld in Catholic and Orthodox ecclesiastical legislation, by excluding women from cultic functions as priests and bishops. In the Christian Tradition, this *impedimentum sexus* results from women's lack of creational Godlikeness *qua* female human beings. It follows that the non-Protestant majority of Christendom considers women incapable of performing sacramental mediation between God and humankind. In traditional Islam, women cannot act as legal councillor or religious judge and are moreover excluded from performing all official functions. Strict division of male and female roles with asymmetrical complementarity results in social segregation of women.

Although their theology and theological anthropology differ, the Christian and Islamic traditions share a common basic androcentrism, with corresponding legal and cultic incapacity for women. This convergence of gender models, where specific femaleness is defined without correlated specific maleness, is still unexplored by Women's Studies in Religion. We believe that research using human genderedness as main analytical

category will prove especially fruitful in studying the Christian and Islamic Traditions, which today influence the lives of approximately one and a half and one milliard human beings.

Brian McNeil C.R.V. and Albert Raulin O.P. have congenially supervised our English and French. Kari Horn has prepared the camera-ready manuscript with graceful efficiency.

Oslo, December 1992

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# I

## SURVEY OF RECENT RESEARCH

## Women's Studies of the Christian Tradition\*

The term Women's Studies refers to research covering female existence, with women being studied both as acting subjects and described objects. Using bio-social femaleness as the main analytical category, Women's Studies focus on human genderedness. This interaction between biologically determined sex and culturally expressed gender is equally valid for women and men. Women's Studies thereby correct two basic fallacies in traditional scholarship: 1) androcentrism, whereby men's gendered experience and thinking are valued as normatively human; 2) asexualism, or the belief that scientific activity is unaffected by the researcher's male or female genderedness. During the past twenty years, Women's Studies have proliferated in many fields, including research on late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Works connected with philosophy and theology are quite heterogeneous, both in terms of perspective and content. In order to systematise this variety, I have concentrated on the following topics: theological anthropology, sexology, canon law, history, hagiography and women writers. I do not pretend to review all the studies I have been able to investigate; this article will relate only those I have found of special value and/or of particular interest. The following colleagues have provided friendly help: Sofia Boesch Gajano, Caroline Walker Bynum, Jane Dempsey

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\* Considerably enlarged version of article in G. Fløistad, R. Klibansky (Eds.) *Contemporary Philosophy. A New Survey* 6, 901-1001. Dordrecht, Boston, MA, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990.

Douglass, Romana Guarnieri, Tore Nyberg, Miri Rubin and Kari Vogt.

## 1. Theological anthropology

The traditional paradigms of androcentrism and asexualism correspond to basic themes in patristic and medieval anthropology. Considered part of the created order, female subordination is understood as God-willed and consequently normative both in church and society. Women's salvational equivalence is obtained in spite of inferior femaleness and does not therefore imply social consequences in this world. According to early doctrine, women can achieve exemplary maleness by becoming Christlike in the order of redemption, thus reaching fully human status. The later patristic definition of *imago Dei* in terms of an incorporeal and consequently sexless intellectual soul permits the inclusion of women as Godlike already from creation, but not *qua* females. This interplay of creational male dominance and redemptional genderfree equality is verbalised in men's discourse on women's nature and role, in creation, through sin and towards salvation.

Already in 1964, Elisabeth Gössmann analysed the concepts of male and female humanity in her work on the *Summa Halensis* [199]. She underlines women's asexual Godlikeness as a prerequisite for salvational equality, contrasted with their sociological subjection *qua* inferior females. This conflict is further explored in a later article on 13th-century material [200]. A basic survey of man-made theories on women's natural subservience in this world, in contradistinction to eschatological equivalence, is provided by Marie-Thérèse d'Alverny [10]. Covering 12th-century exegesis of Gen. 1-3, this article is the main contribution among several from a congress held in 1976 on "La femme au Moyen Age" [175]. Abélard's male-centered feminism is thoroughly explored by Mary Martin McLaughlin

[326]. Exhorting Héloïse, he emphasises women's redemptional parity with men, which presupposes more abundant grace for the weaker sex. McLaughlin explicitly refers to Abelard's androcentric denial, rather exceptional for the 12th century, of women's creational *imago Dei*, according to Gen. 1,27a combined with I Cor. 11,7 (*Expositio in Hexaemeron*, PL 178, col. 760-761). This initial disadvantage can be overcome, as far as it is possible in this world, by anticipating the salvational order through monastic life.

The principal constructors of Western theological anthropology are Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. As early as 1961, I started an investigation of their doctrine on women's nature and role, a work which later appeared in updated translations [75]. Thomas retains Augustine's scheme of human history, unfolding from *ordo creationis*, through *poena peccati* towards *ordo salutis*, but their descriptions of created, fallen and redeemed humanity differ in terms of their philosophical anthropology, respectively neo-Platonic and Aristotelian. Nevertheless, what I call their theological sexology remains rather similar, since the fundamental paradigms of creational androcentrism and salvational asexualism are shared. Patristic new-Adam/new-Eve typology is fundamental to traditional gender symbolism. Eve's instrumental function as Adam's helpmate is here reenacted by the new Eve, figuring as Mary or the church. Creational male precedence is thus transposed to the order of redemption, where womanly subjection corresponds to humanity's relational dependence on divinity [78]. This typological gender hierarchy is still invoked to justify women's so-called specific role in church and society [93].

The formation of Marian doctrine is a particularly transparent case of interaction between androcentric anthropology and man-centered Godlanguage. In 1971, I presented a study on the medieval debate which leads up to the dogmatic formulations of 1854 (*immaculata conceptio*) and 1950 (*assumptio*) [76]. Both the Dominican and Franciscan schools reason from currently

accepted gynecology and embryology, but invoke different masters, namely Aristotle and Galen. Mary's exemption from original sin, normally transmitted through the parents' sexual intercourse (*infectio carnis*), is in medieval discussion considered from a Christocentric perspective. According to the Franciscan two-seed model, Mary provides a secondary but active element in the *generatio temporalis* of God's incarnate Son. He avoids contamination with Adam's guilt, *reatus*, through his supernatural conception on the paternal side, but given Mary's instrumental cooperation, she has to be purified to impede her child's infection. According to the Dominican variant, Mary passively provides only corporeal matter; her status in terms of original sin is consequently without Christological impact. The doctrine of Mary's bodily assumption into heaven presupposes a dualistic anthropology where the soul is immortal, persisting as *anima separata*, and death strikes the body alone. The scope is here to escape Mary's carnal dissolution during her waiting for bodily resurrection, but her glorification as the new Eve equally implies the church's triumph as Christ's bride. Nevertheless, the dogmatic Mary remains her divine incarnated Son's human mother; these privileges do not preclude the basic incompatibility between divinity and femaleness, expressed in Christian tradition by andromorphic or metasexual concepts of God [82].

When atypical Godlanguage describes God's condescending mercy as maternal, or Christ's acting as mother by lowering himself from preexistent Godhead through his humanity, this use of female metaphors does not correct androcentric gender symbolism [79, 80]. The womanlike qualities invoked are all defined according to patriarchal sex roles and tend like mariology to reinforce gender hierarchy, since male metaphors are correspondingly used to verbalise the divine. The traditional connection between andromorphic or metasexual Godlanguage and theomorphic man or asexual *imago Dei* is surveyed in my article on Augustinian and pseudo-Augustinian motifs in the early medieval exegesis of Gen. 1,27 and I Cor. 11,7 [81].

Recently, I have emphasised Augustine's innovative effort to include women as being created in God's image, notwithstanding their derived femaleness [83].

The gradual insertion of women in Godlikeness is realised by interpretation of Scripture through Christian tradition. Conforming to biblical androcentricity, early exegesis affirmed that men are exclusively created in God's image, whereas women attain Christlike maleness in the order of salvation. From the 3rd to the 5th century, this andromorphic privilege was backdated to the order of creation by defining God's image as asexual, so that women were considered Godlike despite their non-theomorphic femaleness. This concept of sexless *imago Dei* became normative during the Middle Ages and persisted through the Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment. A new holistic definition of human Godlikeness, pertaining to women and men *qua* male or female human beings, becomes prevalent in 20th-century Western theology. This shifting doctrinal inculturation is investigated in a basic collection of articles on the image of God and gender models [94]. Treating both biblical texts and scriptural interpretation, this volume covers: Genesis creation texts by Phyllis Bird [42], early Jewish religion by Anders Hultgård [253], Pauline gender models by Lone Fatum [176], tradition of *enkrateia* by Giulia Sfameni Gasparro [474], early Christian anthropology by Kari Vogt [520], patristic and scholastic interpretations of Gen. 1, 27 and I Cor. 11, 7 by myself [84, 85], *imago Dei* in Luther and Calvin by Jane Dempsey Douglass [156], and a concluding survey by Rosemary Radford Ruether [444]. Biblical interpretation concerning women in Calvin, his predecessors and contemporaries are now surveyed by John Lee Thompson [499].

Richard A. Baer, Jr. has provided a study on Philo's use of the categories male and female, important because of his seminal impact on patristic exegesis [20]. Dorothy Sly's thorough analysis of Philo's perception of women demonstrates that human autonomy is *a priori* reserved for Adam and his male progeny

[479]. In consequence, theomorphic mind, *nous*, is represented by the first human male, whereas Eve represents *aisthesis*: "as the lower, sense-centred part of Everyman, and as the person Everywoman" [479, p. 109].

In this context, the early Christian motif of women's salvational maleness is significant. Kerstin Aspegren's posthumously published work provides a useful survey of ancient androcentrism, as exemplified by Platon, Aristotle and Philo [274]. The subtitle is misleading, since women's becoming male is an ideal of defeminisation. This Christomorphic maleness is clarified by Ragnar Holte's appendix on the Thecla figure in Methodius of Olympus. Kari Vogt's analysis demonstrates that women's redemptive transformation into perfect male humanity is a basic theme in early Christian anthropology, as expressed in Eph. 4, 13 [520, 524]. I find it essential to stress the Christological rationale of this promotion into Godlike maleness, which persists in patristic praise of the virile prowess displayed by female martyrs, holy virgins and widows [90].

Prudence Allen's work on what she terms "history of philosophy of sex identity" focuses on Aristotle's androcentric biosociology [9]. She traces his precursors and follows the influence of Aristotelian "sex polarity" through the scholastic period. Allen considers Plato the founder of what she calls "sex unity", in the sense of transcending sexual diversity. I would prefer the term "sexless unity", since this motif corresponds to the traditional Christian definition of genderfree, and therefore inclusive, *imago Dei*.

## 2. Sexology

An indispensable background for medieval sexology is offered by Erna Lesky's work on classical Greek and late Antique theories of reproduction and embryology [300]. Also useful are

the surveys on Greek androcentric socio-biology by Silvia Campese, Paola Manuli and Giulia Sissa [102], and Suzanne Said's condensed report on the concept of femaleness in Aristotle [451]. Ann Ellis Hanson has presented and translated a central part of Hippocratic gynecology, *The Diseases of Women* [227]. She also analyses the Antique belief that a child born after eight months of pregnancy dies, whereas a seven month's child may be viable [228]. Hanson interprets this judgment as relieving parents from guilt and exonerating birth attendants from charges of negligence, in view of high infant mortality. The medical treatment of women in ancient Rome is studied by Danielle Gourevitch [211].

Paul Diepgen's account of medieval gynecology demonstrates the survival of classical and late Antique theories through Byzantine and Arabic sources [146]. Monica H. Green illustrates this by her survey and translation of a gynecological treatise, *De genitalibus membris*, attributed to a late 11th-century Benedictine monk of Monte Cassino, Constantine the African [213]. Claude Thomasset emphasises the empirical character of 11th- to 13th-century sexology, where Aristotle and Galen are complemented with Arabic material [498]. Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset also display the impact of medical knowledge on sexual praxis and ideals, as exemplified in courtly literature [257]. Albertus Magnus' embryology is discussed by Luke Demaitre and Anthony A. Travill, pointing to his use of Galen transmitted *via* Avicenna [144]. In consequence, Albertus differentiates between a material and a nourishing element in the female contribution, while upholding the Aristotelian theory that only the male sperm acts with formative power. Egidio Romano's defence of Aristotle's embryology, against Galen's theory of both male and female seed, is studied by M. Anthony Hewson [241]. In her analysis of the 15th-century gynecology of Anthonius Guainerius, Helen Rodnite Lemay notes the influence of folk practice on academic medicine [297]. Grethe Jacobsen reconstructs women's experience of pregnancy and childbirth in



medieval Scandinavia from a variety of sources, including archaeological findings, laws, sermons, folk ballads, theological and scientific literature [256]. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski presents an interdisciplinary study on caesarean delivery in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, based on medical, canonical, literary and hagiographical texts, and including iconographical material [44]. She notes that around 1400, midwives were displaced by male surgeons to perform this operation on women who died during childbirth, in order to baptise the still living infant.

Widely used treatises on women's hygiene and diseases were during the 13th to 15th centuries attributed to the learned Trotula. John F. Benton provides an interesting assessment of her historicity, in the context of female exclusion from medicine as this became a university trained profession [35]. Benton concludes that *Cum auctor*, *Ut de curis* and *De ornatu* were given female authorship to ensure clinical credibility, since male doctors were not permitted to perform gynecological examinations. Probably written in Salerno or influenced by Salernitan masters, these works express late 12th- or early 13th-century medical theories formulated by men. Benton accepts a woman physician, named Trota, as author of the 12th-century empirical treatise *Practica*, which is referred to in *Ut de curis*, but which is rarely copied later. In a recent bibliographical essay, Monica H. Green gives a comprehensive survey of women's medical practice and health care in medieval Europe [214]. She underlines that female practitioners were not limited to midwifery and that male physicians also attended women patients.

The continued impact of medieval sexology during the Renaissance is demonstrated by Ian Maclean [310]. Consequently, earlier anthropological presuppositions were rekindled in 16th- and 17th-century debates on women's superiority, equality or inferiority as compared to men.

The intersection of biological and moral sexology in classical Rome is demonstrated by Robert D. Brown's thorough

analysis of Lucretius' theories on sexuality and love in *De Rerum Natura* IV [62]. Tracing his philosophical and literary context, Brown notes that he shares Epicurus' definition of sexual activity as natural but not necessary for human well-being. Lucretius' condemnation of passionate love as being contrary to human happiness sharpens the Epicurean pattern. In any case, the discourse is androcentric, since sexuality is mainly considered in terms of male drive towards boys and/or women. The medical and legal prerequisites for Christian asceticism, as emerging from the 2nd to the 4th century, are surveyed by Aline Rousselle [442]. Traditional exhortation to virginity is usually aimed at upper-class young women, whereas sermons addressed to men advocate sober monogamy. Rousselle connects the Christian evaluation of marriage, as a legitimate but inferior state of life, to Greek men's reluctance to assume marital responsibility and to Roman women's aversion to social dependence when being married off. She demonstrates that Christian admonition to chastity is rooted in this earlier rationale. Insistence on sexual restraint as favorable to health is invoked to divert men from homosexuality, in order to direct them towards less strenuous heterosexual activity within marriage to ensure legitimate offspring. Correspondingly, the praise of frigidity in married women serves to guarantee the legitimacy of family heirs.

Peter R.L. Brown's new study of permanent sexual renunciation in early Christianity is amply documented and includes female asceticism [61]. His main concern is to clarify the notions of humanity and society implied in encratite and monastic practice, from the 2nd through the 5th century. Brown underlines that human freedom is understood to be actualised by means of sexual abstinence, in order to identify with the risen Christ. This connection of freedom and asceticism is also explored by Elaine Hiesey Pagels in her recent book, which is based on more scholarly articles [387]. She compares early Christian, Gnostic and patristic exegesis of the first couple's

creation and fall, concluding with Augustine's emphasis on human bondage, as expressed in his doctrine of original sin. I would add that Augustine is here more eager to defend divine sovereignty than to damage human freedom. If the Creator is good, evil has to be blamed on humanity. Augustine's typology, where Christ as the new Adam repairs the old Adam's fault, makes Eve and Mary purely instrumental figures. Original sin is therefore propagated only through male generative seed, correspondingly absent in Christ's supernatural conception. Pagels understands the differing views of human freedom as related to Christianity's changing status from a persecuted to an imperial religion. She also explains Augustine's doctrinal impact by the need to justify human suffering in terms of collective guilt.

Giulia Sfameni Gasparro concentrates her work on the theological arguments for sexual continence [473, 474]. She defines traditional Christian asceticism as a mitigated form of *enkrateia*, where abstinence from sexual activity restores the original perfection of mankind. Since this is understood as either all-male, presexual or asexual, different stories of human degradation focus on sexual differentiation, or more precisely femaleness, as cause or consequence of the first sin. Gnostic gender models are displayed by Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley, with twofold estrangement of female humanity [66]. Women can attain redeemed fulfilment by transformation into male or genderfree perfection. A new collected volume edited by Karen L. King illustrates the various images of the feminine in Gnosticism [276].

Differing from so-called heterodox protology by rejecting a divine or supra-human evil principle, the Christian variants place the causality of empirical suffering in humanity itself. Virginity or sexual abstinence remain the necessary condition for restoration to pristine innocence. Patristic doctrine on legitimate marriage for the sake of procreation, surpassed by second-best widowhood or third-best marital continence appears here as a

liberal compromise, where the state of virginity remains preeminent but is not obligatory for all Christians. In his study of moral sexology in Clemens Alexandrinus, Jean-Paul Broudéhoux provides an instructive example of intertwining trends, where moderate *enkrateia* is elaborated with Stoic ethical theory, a mixture which became dominant in traditional doctrine [60].

Augustine's defence of carnal fertility against Manichaean dualism becomes another main factor in Christian sexual ethics. He stresses the primeval unity of soul and body; sexual differentiation is consequently part of the order of creation and not connected with the original fall. In this perspective, carnal fertility is a *bonum originale*, a God-willed device to propagate humankind. Nevertheless, Augustine enforces encratite shunning of sexuality by defining sexual *libido* as *malum originale*, a penal result of the first sin. In this double framework, Augustine's moral adage is *bene uti malo*, where bad orgasm is neutralised by good procreative intent. The influence of Augustine's deformed *enkrateia* in Western moral theology is displayed by Jean-Louis Flandrin's survey of canon law and penitentials from the 6th to the 11th century [180]. Sexual activity is only permitted in legal marriage and restricted to procreation. In addition, periodic continence is imposed by the liturgical calendar. The traditional cleavage between love of God and sexual gratification is here a self-evident premiss. The perpetuation of Augustine's concupiscence is equally illustrated by Pierre J. Payer's study of penitential manuals, from the 6th to the 9th century and canonical collections from the 10th to the 12th century [397]. The ensuing collusion between ecclesiastical norms and empirical sexual behaviour is clarified in a collection of articles edited by Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage [67]. Brundage outlines canonical regulations of prostitution, tolerated as a necessary evil [64]. He also provides a thorough survey of law, sex and Christian society in medieval Europe, ranging from Constantine to the council of Trent [63]. All

deviations from married and procreative intercourse are deemed irregular and consequently sinful. The restrictive consequences of Augustine's originally holistic validation of creational fruitfulness is amply demonstrated by the basic work of John T. Noonan, Jr., republished in an enlarged edition [375]. Ethical and legal condemnation of contraceptive means is here traced from Roman and Jewish beginnings, in anti-gnostic Fathers of the church and Augustine, through the Middle Ages and into modern times.

In spite (or because) of the constant emphasis on generation and childbearing as sole legitimate motivation for sexual activity and gratification, children are not particularly cherished. It is evident that the scholastic *bonum prolis* provided no benefit for exhausted mothers and supernumerary children. A volume of historical demography presents articles on medieval treatment of children [172]. The sources available seem to indicate that the majority of killed or abandoned new-borns were females. A later article of Emily Coleman on infanticide among 9th-century French peasantry shows a greater toll on female infants [119]. John Eastburn Boswell has studied the development from the late Antique exposure of offspring to the medieval custom of offering superfluous children, often physically or mentally defective, to monasteries [50]. In a recent work, Boswell analyses further alternatives to infanticide, with focus on the innovative monastic *oblatio*, less hazardous than exposure and better suited to circulate human resources [51]. A rather reassuring picture of surviving childhood is provided in a well-documented study by Mary Martin McLaughlin, based on material from the 9th to the 13th century [325]. The sources available mainly concern ecclesiastical personages from aristocratic families, and consequently sons' attitudes towards mothers are more visible than the feelings of fathers or daughters. Y.-B. Brissaud's survey of 14th- and 15th-century French legal procedures, mainly against illegitimate mothers accused of killing their new-born, is quite heart-breaking [54].

It is to be noted that having performed baptism of the infant before killing it enhanced the mother's chance to avoid capital punishment. Shulamith Shahar now provides a comprehensive survey of childhood in different social strata of Western Europe, from the 12th to the 15th century [476].

Jean-Louis Flandrin's study of sexual behaviour and parental attitudes demonstrates changing patterns from late medieval to modern times [179]. He points out the significant decrease of infanticide and indirect baby-killing by resorting to negligent wet-nurses. The corresponding increase of contraception is interestingly connected to clerical concern about infant mortality. Flandrin notes that from the 15th century onwards, moral theologians became aware of the conflict between marital sexuality allowed as *remedium concupiscentiae* and the health of already born or future offspring. He interprets the emerging use of contraceptive devices as having been induced by preachers' insistence on parental responsibility, the faithful wisely ignoring concomitant exhortation to continence.

### 3. Canon law

In canon law women are classified according to marital status, as wives, widows or virgins, but all females are uniformly subordinate in accordance with God-given, creational male priority. This androcentric synthesis is mainly elaborated from biblical and Roman sources. Studies concerning women in Judaism are therefore relevant. Inger Ljung outlines the attitudes of the Hebrew Bible [304], Léonie J. Archer analyses material from Graeco-Roman Palestine [13] and Günther Mayer presents a survey of Jewish women in Hellenistic-Roman Antiquity [322]. Angelo Tosato's study of Jewish marriage is also useful [504]. In her important work on women's status in the Mishnah, Judith Romney Wegner concludes by considering the anomaly of femaleness from a perspective of feminist theory [529]. Suzanne

Dixon surveys womanly weakness in Roman law, the so-called *infirmitas sexus* [152]. A detailed study of Roman women's legal position is provided by Jane F. Gardner [192]. She gives special attention to the possible purposes of the male makers of the law, and shows how legal structures affected women's lives in practice, both in family and in society. Michel Humbert's work on remarriage in classical Rome elucidates the ideal of female monogamy, realised as *univira* [254]. Augustus' legislation concerning marriage and adultery is analysed by Leo Ferrero Raditsa [419]. Susan Treggiari now provides a thorough study of Roman marriage law in the period from Cicero to Ulpian [505]. Firmly based on legal, historical, philosophical and literary sources, she clarifies the interaction of law and practice.

Charles Munier has presented a basic collection of texts concerning marriage, remarriage, continence and virginity, ranging from the 1st to the 3rd century, with introduction and translation [361]. The volume includes New Testament, apostolic, apologetic, apocryphal, Gnostic and early patristic sources, as background for 4th-century conciliar legislation. Moderate *enkrateia* is generally endorsed in terms of clerical celibacy and monogamous lay marriage, but Munier documents canonical variance. Married bishops, priests and deacons must abstain from sexual intercourse (Elvira ca. 306, c. 33). Remarriage after divorce is tolerated in special circumstances, though less for women (Elvira, c. 8, 9), than for men (Arles 314, c. 11). Further discussing this material, Munier points to the early church's pastoral concern towards divorced and remarried lay members, with examples of readmission to the eucharist after penance [362, 363].

Roger Gryson has studied the development of clerical continence and celibacy in both Eastern and Western sources, from the 1st to the 7th century [217]. In his assessment of reactions to this work, Gryson reaffirms the importance of ritual purity as the main causal factor [219]. Enforced in the Western church by Gregorian reform from the late 11th century, the

obligation of clerical celibacy presupposes a basic opposition between sexual and cultic activity. Anne Llewellyn Barstow surveys the ensuing debate, with focus on 11th-century defence of clerical marriage [21].

The correlated rift between femaleness and sacrality is fundamental in Christian doctrine. Women are consequently excluded from ordained priesthood both in the Eastern and the Western churches. Roger Gryson has studied the non-sacerdotal functions of widows and deaconesses up to the 6th century [218]. He concludes that female deacons (virgins and *univira* widows) were ordained in the Eastern church from the end of the 4th century, thus being part of the clergy. An enlightening comparison with Jewish tradition can be drawn from Bernadette J. Brooten's account of women leaders in the synagogue, with evidence from 27 BCE to the 6th century [59]. Nineteen Greek and Latin inscriptions give titles like: head and mother of the synagogue, leader, elder and priestess. Brooten interprets this material, coming from Italy, Asia Minor, Egypt and Palestine, in a functional rather than honorific sense. The exclusively male character of Christian priesthood is surveyed by Haye van der Meer, referring to scriptural sources and patristic exegesis [333]. Ida Raming discusses this exclusion of women with special focus on medieval canon law [421]. Both studies demonstrate the fundamental impact of creational gender hierarchy, but the fundamental incompatibility between Godhead and femaleness, as displayed in traditional Adam-Christ typology, is less explored. In her survey of canonical and scholastic argumentation, Elisabeth Gössmann is well aware of the doctrinal connection between theomorphic maleness and Christlike male priests [204]. I find it important to emphasise that the typological rationale, which persists in contemporary Catholic and Orthodox documents against women's ordination, presupposes men's exclusive possession of *imago Dei* [87]. In fact, the Adam-Christ/Eve-church typology was elaborated between the 2nd and 4th centuries, that is before women were attributed sexless



Godlikeness. Consequently, women's exclusion from sacramental priesthood is doctrinally incoherent with 20th century-definition of holistic *imago Dei*.

Concerning Christian marriage, Basil Studer has recently surveyed the elaboration of Western liturgy in the context of Roman law and ritual, covering the first six centuries [491]. Korbinian Ritzer has studied scriptural, doctrinal, legal and liturgical elements of the marriage celebration in Eastern and Western rites, with sources from the 1st to the 11th century [436]. Pietro Dacquino's history of marriage from scriptural and Graeco-Roman beginnings, through the late Antique and medieval periods, in both Eastern and Western culture, significantly demonstrates women's constant subordinate status [133]. Jean Gaudemet provides a comprehensive survey of marriage legislation in the Catholic church, from early Christianity to the *Codex Iuris Canonici* of 1983 [193]. He shows the influence of Roman and Germanic laws during the formative periods of late Antiquity and Middle Ages. Two volumes from a 1976 congress on early medieval marriage provide ample documentation, including both legal and doctrinal theory and historical practice [317]. Christopher N.L. Brooke outlines medieval ideas on celibacy and marriage, mainly according to literary sources [57]. In 1184, Lucius III defined matrimony as a *sacramentum* in terms of canon law. Georges Duby has studied the influence of sacramental indissolubility on the marriage patterns of French aristocracy in the 11th and 12th centuries [162].

The seminal articles of René Metz concerning women and children in medieval canon law are now conveniently published together [335]. His account of rules for receiving children in monasteries as oblates is noteworthy, since most women writers and many female mystics started their monastic careers before puberty, often around the age of seven. Metz points to a growing awareness of the necessity for voluntary engagement, leading to canonical abolition of this system in 1430. The extensive survey

of women's status as legal minors, in accordance with their creational subordination to men, was first published in a volume of collected essays on "La Femme," among several other contributions concerning women's position in European civil law [175]. Metz also presents articles on the consecration of nuns, where nuptial symbolism places the virgin as Christ's bride, and the bridegroom's authority is represented by the bishop.

The expansion and decline of Frankish and Anglo-Saxon female monasteries, from the 6th to the 12th century, is outlined by Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg [469]. Michel Parisse describes the foundation of women's religious communities in 9th- to 11th-century Germany, including the abbey of Gandersheim [390]. He also presents a rapid but useful survey of cloistered women's life and canonical status, mainly from the 11th to the 13th century [389]. Micheline Pontenay de Fontette's study remains valid, covering the female branches of main orders, both monastic and mendicant [414]. She describes the situation during the 12th and 13th centuries with focus on spiritual and material supervision of nuns, *cura monialium*. Since females were both legally inferior and sacramentally incapable, economic and religious responsibility for the growing number of nuns was more or less forced upon the male branches, often by the papacy. It is significant that ecclesiastical and monastic superiors alike never did consider independent female orders as a desirable or possible solution. The same pattern of male governance is displayed in a recent article by Colette Friedlander [185]. She notes that the abbess is established in *quasi* marital dependence *vis-à-vis* the superior of the order's male branch or in relation to the local bishop. Sally Thompson has analysed the canonical status of 12th- and 13th-century Cistercian nuns [500]. Her recent study of English nunneries founded after the Norman Conquest demonstrates the new orders' reluctance or refusal to incorporate female branches [501]. Penelope D. Johnson's analysis of twenty-six women's monasteries in 11th- to 13th-century France shows both socio-economic and canonical causes of decline

[263]. John B. Freed has surveyed the repartition among male Cistercians and mendicant friars in supervising nuns in 13th-century Germany [184]. Gerhard Rehm has studied women's communities in Northwestern Germany, linked to the late medieval *Devotio moderna* [424].

The exceptional abbess-ruled order of Fontevraud is treated by Jacqueline Smith [480]. Jacques Dalarun provides fresh insight as to the motivation of its founder Robert d'Arbrissel (died 1116) [135]. Dalarun has also rediscovered and edited the dissimulated ending of Robert's *Vita altera*, probably both commissioned and amputated by the abbess Petronille de Chemillé [136]. Together with other women in Robert's company, she is described in Dalarun's recent account of his life and subsequent lack of hagiographical success [137]. Sharon K. Elkins relates the 12th-century expansion of female religious life in England, including the significant double order founded by Gilbert of Sempringham (died 1189), who acted as its first master general [171]. Elkins notes a general decline in women's leadership as compared to that in earlier female monasticism. Nuns became dependent on male superiors or bishops both economically and administratively, in addition to the sacramental services performed by priests.

#### 4. History

The contemporary shift in historical research, from a mainly political to a more sociological perspective, has favoured studies concerning female existence. Due to the persisting androcentric approach, women's history is still seen as an additive to general, that is men's, history, and not as in fact pertaining to a half of humankind. The scarcity of available sources, usually from the upper classes of society, is more marked than in material concerning male existence. This bias can partly be overcome by demographic and hagiographic information, but the fact that

nearly all documentation has been produced by men presents the main barrier. The importance of gender as an analytical category in historical research is well exposed by Joan Wallach Scott [470]. According to most feminist historians, this term denotes a socio-cultural construct, where sex roles are assigned to women and men. The interdependence between biological sex and sociological gender is often ignored or obscured and even denied. In my opinion, the impact of traditional androcentric bio-sociology here prevents a fruitful connection in terms of both female and male genderedness. Some feminist scholarship seems to repeat the traditional fallacy of defining human wholeness as exemplary sexless, in order to confute the equally false definition of humanity as exemplary male.

Research concerning women's history in classical Antiquity is a necessary prerequisite to studies of the medieval period. Sarah B. Pomeroy has surveyed women in Greece and Rome [411], as well as in Hellenistic Egypt [412]. Pomeroy has recently edited a collection of articles concerning women's public influence and private lives in Greece and Rome [413]. She concludes that women's history cannot be subsumed under social history, but should also be included in political and economic research. Claude Vatin's work on the female condition in marriage covers both classical Greek and Hellenistic society [510]. Nicole Loraux [305] and Claude Mossé [353] provide shorter but useful accounts of Athenian womanhood. Women's legal status in classical Greece is surveyed by Raphael Sealy [472]. Roger Just analyses Athenian law in order to clarify women's place in the social structure of the *polis*, their economic status and family role [267]. He shows the connections between this androcentric framework and gender ideology in art, literature and philosophy. Synnøve des Bouvrie has studied eight Greek dramas with central female heroines [53]. She interprets this contrast to women's social invisibility in terms of the symbolic function of tragedy, as reversing the norms of society. Susan G. Cole's discussion of female literacy in Greek speaking regions

from the 7th century BCE to the 4th century, points to an increase from classical to late Antiquity [118]. Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant present a basic collection of commented texts concerning women in ancient Greece and Rome, covering literature, social history, law, medicine and religion [295]. Various aspects of sexual asymmetry resulting from female subordination in these societies are surveyed by Dutch scholars [43]. Beryl Rawson has edited collections of articles on family, marriage, divorce and children in ancient Rome [422, 423]. A recent congress volume on kinship and marriage strategies in Roman Antiquity presents relevant material [11]. The position of Roman mothers and their relationships with sons and daughters is described by Suzanne Dixon [153]. She also presents a survey of current research on the family in ancient Rome, with assessment of legal and historical sources [154]. Judith P. Hallet's study on aristocratic Roman daughters, sisters and wives describes patriarchal "filiafocality", where fathers determine and act through daughters to achieve their own political and economic goals [224].

Mary R. Lefkowitz also presents a survey of women in Greek myth, arguing that these imply a more balanced view of female experience than found in subsequent, early Christian texts [295]. A pioneer of feminist exegesis, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, seeks to reconstruct the "her-story" of Christian origins [178]. She traces women's equal discipleship in the Palestinian Jesus movement and uncovers women's influence as rich sponsors and leaders of house churches in the missionary movement of Graeco-Roman urban centers. According to Fiorenza, late 1st- and early 2nd-century texts reveal the ensuing effort to curb female autonomy by enforcing gender hierarchy in Christian communities. In a recent study, Lilian Portefaix analyses the impact of Greek culture, exemplified through 1st-century women's conversion to Christianity in Philippi [415]. An extensive study of the preserved texts concerning women in ancient Christianity, from the 1st to the 5th century, is now

provided by Anne Jensen [259]. Carefully analysing church historians and surviving female writings, Jensen demonstrates that the importance of female martyrs, prophets and ascetics in the early church is followed by decreasing influence of holy women. This regression is visible both in canonical sources and in doctrinal exhortations to submissive widowhood and virginity.

A volume on women in Graeco-Roman Antiquity, edited by Averil Cameron and Amelie Kuhrt, presents Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Celtic material, leading up to the early Middle Ages [100]. Two volumes of a new "Histoire des femmes" edited by Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot cover women's history through Graeco-Roman Antiquity and European Middle Ages [163].

Concerning regal women, Grace Harriet Macurdy's earlier study of Hellenistic queenship in Macedonia, Syria and Egypt, has recently been reprinted [311]. Hildegard Temporini has investigated powerful Roman *Augustae*, exemplified by Trajan's consort Pompeia Plotina (died ca. 123), posthumously divinised by his successor Hadrian [496]. Jan Willem Drijvers analyses the historical and hagiographical sources concerning Helena (died ca. 329), who was Constantius' concubine from around 270 until his marriage to Maximian's daughter Theodora in 289 and mother of the emperor Constantine (157 a). Drijvers shows that the legend of Helena's finding of the Holy Cross was produced in the second half of the 4th century, in order to establish a connection between Jerusalem's bishopric and the imperial house. Kenneth G. Holum's work on Theodosian empresses illustrates their influence on secular and ecclesiastical politics [250]. The role of 8th- and 9th-century iconophile empresses, like Irene and Theodora, is discussed in Judith Herrin's article on Byzantine women's faith in icons [239].

The thorough work of Evelyne Patlagean on poverty in Byzantium, from the 4th to the 7th century, includes a survey of family structure and fertility control [393]. She finds that all levels of society shun procreation and therefore interprets various

forms of asceticism more as a consequence of this mentality than as a cause. Patlagean notes that the means to reduce offspring vary among social classes, since the poor resort to infanticide or sell children as slaves, whereas the rich prefer marital continence to rudimentary contraception or risky abortion. Several articles by Patlagean relevant for female existence in 4th- to 11th-century Byzantium are now conveniently published together [395]. Joëlle Beaucamp has studied women's *infirmetas sexus* in Roman legal documents from the 3rd to the 6th century [24]. Her survey of the legal status of 7th- to 11th-century Byzantine women shows their gradual exclusion from public affairs [25]. Beaucamp now provides a thorough study of legislation and social practice concerning women in 4th- to 7th-century Byzantium [26]. She notes that Christianity does not result in marked improvement of women's socio-cultural condition. In 1981, the 16th International Byzantine Congress had a section dedicated to women's role in society, ranging from empresses to ascetics [438]. Angeliki E. Laiou explores legal cases involving women, from the 11th to the 14th century [286]. She notes that their rising economic activity and political influence are in contrast to the prevalent ideal of female seclusion, in the family or monastery. This interplay between social practice and ideological framework is further illustrated in a sample of articles on Byzantine women and monasticism [549]. Here Laiou treats the self-image of aristocratic nuns, showing the impact of class relationship as they identify with the leading political role of their families [287]. These articles are reprinted in a new volume, where Laiou also presents studies on the Byzantine family [288].

Suzanne Fonay Wemple's work on women in Frankish society, from the 6th to the 10th century, illustrates the ambivalent consequences of Christianisation [531]. Compared to Roman and Germanic times, women achieved considerable legal rights in Carolingian society, but Wemple finds that their power and influence decreased in comparison with the Merovingian

period, where both royal and ecclesiastical authorities were feeble and decentralised. She notes that scholarship blossomed in earlier female monasteries, whereas the later strict enclosure of nuns impeded their share in the so-called Carolingian Renaissance. Correspondingly, the autonomy of abbesses was gradually curtailed through episcopal control. Janet L. Nelson displays the political efficiency of Merovingian queens [367], aptly interwoven in hagiographical accounts, as shown by Jo Ann McNamara [331]. The importance of elite women in ecclesiastical politics is clarified by Franca Ela Consolino's survey of letters from pope Gregory the Great to Byzantine empresses and Merovingian queens [127]. The glorious Anglo-Saxon women, described by Beda Venerabilis and other 7th-century sources, among them royal abbesses such as Hild of Whitby (died 680), are surveyed by Joan Nicholson [371]. Stephanie Hollis outlines women's status in the Anglo-Saxon church, according to 8th- and 9th-century sources [248]. Both Anglo-Saxon and Frankish queens and royal concubines ensured their own influence and their sons' power by intrigues within and through the patriarchal establishment, as shown by Pauline Stafford [484]. She later elaborated this theme in a study of the king's wife in the early Middle Ages [485]. Another outlet for female dominance was the founding and endowing of monasteries, as described by Marc Anthony Meyer [336, 337]. Dowager queens and aristocratic widows were influential in 10th-century monastic reform, a trend which survived the Norman Conquest in 1066. Marion F. Facinger's study of Capetian queens demonstrates a sort of participation in the king's governance up to the middle of the 12th century, with significant loss of formal political functions performed by the *regina Francorum* at the end of the century [174].

Susan Mosher Stuard has edited a collection of bibliographical essays on women in medieval history and historiography [490]. This survey covers England, Italy, France and Germany, including material from before the 19th century. A



useful commented bibliography concerning women in the early Middle Ages is now provided by Werner Affeldt and his collaborators [5]. Katherine Walsh presents an extensive bibliographical survey of recent research concerning medieval women's biology, sexuality, social conditions and religious culture [526 a].

Eileen Power accurately formulated the distorted character of man-made medieval ideas about women: "In the early Middle Ages what passed for contemporary opinion came from two sources - the Church and the aristocracy. In other words, the ideas about women were formed on the one hand by the clerical order, usually celibate, and on the other hand by a narrow caste, who could afford to regard its women as an ornamental asset, while strictly subordinating them to the interest of its primary asset, the land. Indeed, it might with truth be said that the accepted theory about the nature and the sphere of women was the work of the classes least familiar with the great mass of womankind" [416, p. 9].

The ensuing incoherence between ideological patterns and existential reality is clarified through Edith Ennen's work on women in Europe from 500 to 1500 [173]. She focuses on social history in order to correct the androcentric bias of sources and displays female activity in various areas of society. Margret Wensky has presented solid research on women active in textile industry and various commerce in 14th- and 15th-century Cologne [532]. Martha C. Howell's study of women's work in late medieval cities, like Leiden and Cologne, shows that female exclusion from high-status positions in market production cannot be sufficiently explained by the development of capitalism [252]. Howell points to the need for further research to explore the connection between sexual division of labour and ideology of gender roles. According to Régine Pernoud, the position of women was stronger between the 10th and 13th centuries than in earlier or later periods [404]. She finds a main cause of decline in the exclusion of women from university education.

The story of a young woman who managed to study for two years at the university of Krakow by disguising herself as a man is quite significant [478]. In an article on women's learning, Joan M. Ferrante also concludes that the emergence of exclusively male universities arrested female monastic culture [177]. This was already noted by Eileen Power in her pioneering work on late medieval English nunneries [417]. On the other hand, Herbert Grundmann has stated that the rise of vernacular literature is connected with the literacy of noble ladies [216]. In the 13th century, they were usually more expert readers than their belligerent husbands, and courtly literature was not only consumed but also produced by women [48]. The same holds for 14th-century devotional literature, often read in female monasteries and religious communities, and partly written or dictated by women. Susan Groag Bell's article on aristocratic women book owners equally displays their role in lay piety and culture [30].

In her survey of women's history from the 12th to the 15th century, Shulamith Shahar argues that the conventional division of men in three classes (*oratores, bellatores, laboratores*), is inapplicable to women; a fourth estate is required to include female gender [475]. Margaret Wade Labarge describes medieval women according to a combined functional and class division [282]. As queens and noble ladies they substituted men's rule, as nuns, recluses and Beguines they prayed, but the majority toiled on farms or worked in towns. Labarge illustrates the minor but persistent female intrusion into "male-stream" medieval culture by quoting Hildegard von Bingen's certainly too modest characterisation of herself as God's instrument: *velut parvus sonus tubae a vivente lumine* (Ep. 45, PL 197, col. 217-218). Harry Kühnel has edited a congress volume on late medieval female existence, with rich material ranging from iconography to law and medicine, also including articles on Eastern Europe [281]. Here Geneviève Hasenohr explores 13th- to 16th-century devotional literature and sermons, demonstrating that women are

categorised according to degree of chastity, just as in doctrinal and canonical sources [232]. Dagmar Thoss points to declining female monastic culture and restricted education for girls, where innocence is guaranteed by lack of literacy [502]. A solid study of medieval prostitution, based on material from Languedoc, is presented by Leah Lydia Otis [386]. She clarifies the combined impact of urban economic growth and ecclesiastical control of sexual activity. Several articles concerning medieval womanhood are presented in a collection edited by Benedetto Vetere and Paola Renzi [519].

The impact of Christianisation on Nordic culture is studied by Nanna Damsholt in her work on images of women in sources from Denmark around 1200 [140]. Written in Latin, these historical and hagiographical texts are all produced by monks or clerics, rehearsing current theological anthropology. Women are thus creationally subordinate and prone to tempt men, but equal in redemption. Damsholt also points to declining female influence in political and cultural life, as compared to the Nordic sagas [139]. Although the church used powerful women in the early missionary stage, subsequent ecclesiastical institutionalisation pushed them into the background [138]. The same trend is visible in Birgit Strand's study of gender roles in the *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus [488]. She concludes that this text yields more information about ideological attitudes towards women than knowledge pertaining to their actual existence during the 12th century. Strand also compares Snorri Sturluson (died 1241) and Saxo, finding that women appear stronger and more powerful in stories concerning the pre-Christian period [489]. In a recent article, Birgit Sawyer (formerly Strand) surveys literary sources and archeological evidence in order to clarify the consequences of Christianisation for Scandinavian women [453]. She observes a twofold result: Since women could give their property to the church, this new financial independence was opposed by male family leaders by restricting women's former freedom of action. It is noteworthy

that only a few Icelandic women sought religious autonomy by entering nunneries. Jenny M. Jochens has analysed family structure in Iceland according to the sagas [260], and changes resulting from canon law's requirement of female consent in contracting valid marriage [261]. The gradual enforcement of legitimate male progeniture in Norwegian kingship reduced the influence of royal concubines [262]. Gro Steinsland emphasises that Nordic conversion to monotheistic Christianity erased female deities from divine power [486]. In consequence, women were excluded from cultic function as priestesses.

The recent emphasis on social history has also proved fruitful for women's studies. David Herlihy's articles relevant to female existence are now conveniently published together [235]. Herlihy describes medieval family structure and the consequences of a longer female life expectancy. From the 11th century onwards, the former and prevailing male sex *ratio* is balanced and gradually reversed, resulting in a surplus of women throughout the 14th and 15th centuries. With Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, Herlihy presents a demographic study based on the 1427 taxation documents from Florence, thereby throwing light on women's living conditions [236]. Klapisch-Zuber's articles on family patterns, wet-nursing, childhood, the dowry system and marriage rituals in 14th- and 15th-century Italy are now collected in English translation [277]. In a recent survey of household structure, from late Antiquity to late medieval times, Herlihy explores both ecclesiastical and secular sources [237]. He notes that the shift from shortage to surplus of marriageable women was disadvantageous to them. In the early medieval period, the groom provided the costs of establishing a new family, later a considerable dowry was offered with the bride. Scarcity of eligible males made fathers marry their daughters off below their own social rank. The normal age difference between spouses increased the number of widows, with few prospects of remarriage. Herlihy also presents an overview of women and work in medieval Europe, showing that increasing guild restric-

tions limited female productive functions [238]. Barbara A. Hanawalt's study of peasant families in medieval England illustrates the life of lower class women [226]. Analysing the manorial records of Bridgstock in Northamptonshire before the Plague, Judith M. Bennett is especially attentive to gender relations [32]. Heath Dillard examines the experience and legal rights of women with varying social status who were born or moved into towns of Castille between 1100 and 1300, during the Reconquest [147].

Surplus daughters of the nobility were usually placed in monasteries already as small girls, where they avoided the risks of childbirth and could enjoy some intellectual pursuits, but at a cost of sexual abstinence. In his survey of 12th- and 13th-century female monasticism, Jean Leclercq notes the strict enforcement of enclosure, made obligatory for all nuns in 1298 [293]. A main reason was the lack of voluntary recruitment. Many nuns had entered without monastic vocation, female chastity had, therefore, to be protected from worldly appeal. Leclercq also points to the corresponding control over abbesses, since being enclosed they were unable to manage their monasteries' legal and economic affairs. Concerning Italy, Adriana Valerio has studied female monasticism from the 10th to the 12th century, including the exceptional double monastery of Goleto, where the Benedictine abbess also ruled the auxiliary community of monks [507]. This and another abnormal case, the female Benedictine abbey of Conversano, where the abbess enjoyed both temporal and spiritual jurisdiction (abolished in 1810), are surveyed in a congress volume edited by Francesca Marangelli [314].

Following the 12th-century insistence on poverty and penance, Franciscan preaching included the middle and lower classes of society. The resulting surge of pious women, who were unable to enter existing monasteries, mainly reserved for the dowered nobility, led to growth of the Franciscan tertiary movement. The expansion of female tertiaries and enclosed

Clarisses during the 13th century is surveyed by Roberto Rusconi [450]. A congress volume edited by Raffaele Pazzelli and Lino Temperini covers the origin and development of male and female communities attached to the Franciscan third order [399].

From the end of the 12th century the Beguine movement spread in the Netherlands, Germany and France, recruiting mainly from the growing number of devout women. Lacking the social status and dowry necessary for entering regular monasteries, they lived in groups or individually. Many well-to-do women also became Beguines, probably to avoid monastic enclosure. Their independence from ecclesiastical control, although they were usually supervised by mendicant friars like Franciscans and Dominicans, caused apprehension. The council of Lyon tried to curb their expansion (1274), and the council of Vienne condemned deviant Beguines and their male counterparts, Beghards, as heretics (1311). Ernest W. McDonnell has studied the Beguine movement, focusing on the Belgian scene [324]. Carol Neel argues for a connection between Beguines and female monasticism, especially Cistercian and Premonstratensian [366]. Robert E. Lerner describes the Beguines and Beghards in the context of the so-called heresy of the "Free Spirit" [299]. Raoul Manselli has surveyed Beguines and Spirituals in Provence, giving an account of inquisitorial trials [313]. The socio-economic structure of Dutch Beguine settlements is studied by Otto Nübel [376]. Jean-Claude Schmitt shows the decline of the movement in 14th- and 15th-century Germany, caused mainly by church persecution [463]. Joyce Pennings has recently studied non-cloistered religious women, more or less loosely affiliated with mendicant orders, in 15th-century Rome [401]. Mostly tertiaries, these often well-to-do widows and virgins lived together in *case sante* or in their own homes. Although not suspected of heresy, the ecclesiastical authority made serious efforts to re-channel these *semi-religiose* into controlled monastic enclosure. This Roman case-study illustrates the strategies used

by the church to restrict female religious observance uniformly within the monastic system, as imposed throughout the whole of Europe during the 16th century [292]. Inversely, female strategies for preserving a certain autonomy despite canonical institutionalisation is described in K.J.P. Lowe's article on the successful Benedictine convent of Le Murate in Florence [306].

A recent survey by Romeo De Maio on women's status in church, society and literature during the Renaissance illustrates the basic interplay of male-centered anthropology and female subordination, with significant examples of women's coping strategies [143].

## 5. Hagiography

No written testimonies about or by late Antique and medieval women challenge creational gender hierarchy. How did they perceive themselves in this androcentric framework of doctrine and symbolism, where women's salvational equivalence is affirmed in spite of inferior femaleness? Hagiographical accounts are mainly written by ecclesiastical dignitaries or confessors, and if formulated by women or based on female witnesses, the texts are usually filtered through male editing. The selection and transmission of sources are nearly always determined by the clerical establishment to further their own interests. Nevertheless, careful reading of hagiographic material can yield some information about women's experience and self-image, particularly when their varying degrees of internalisation of man-made ideology are discussed. Social historians have recently become much interested in hagiography, as a source for so-called popular religious attitudes and behaviour, thereby counterbalancing the aristocratic bias of other available sources. Used intelligently, hagiography can also correct the androcentric character of doctrinal tenets by exploring traces of women's thinking and experience of God. In her innovative research, Caroline Walker

Bynum has introduced female and male "genderedness" as a fundamental analytical category: "It is no longer possible to study religious practice or religious symbols without taking gender - that is, the cultural experience of being male or female - into account" [71, pp. 1-2]. Introducing her new volume of articles on late medieval mysticism and theological anthropology, Bynum states succinctly: "The study of gender is a study of how roles and possibilities are conceptualized; it is a study of one hundred percent, not only fifty-one percent, of the human race" [74, p. 17].

Since traditional Christian anthropology defines the male as the normative, Godlike human being, woman's redemptional equivalence is to be realised in two different, but often intertwined ways: by becoming Christomorphic through virile perfection or by sharing man's sexless *imago Dei* by defeminisation. Umberto Mattioli has explored the classical Greek, Roman and subsequent Christian theme of manly strength, *andreia*, as applied to women who surpass their properly female weakness, *astheneia* [318]. This salvational becoming male is evidenced in Clementina Mazzucco's study of women in 1st- to 3rd-century Christianity [323]. Elena Giannarelli has analysed the concept of virtuous womanhood in 4th-century biographies, with accent on the *mulier virilis*, an ideal realised through sexual abstinence in virginity and widowhood or through continence in marriage [195]. A crown example is Gregory of Nyssa's description of his sister Makrina [315], studied by Ruth Albrecht in the context of the Thekla tradition, to clarify the roots of 4th-century female monasticism [8]. Thekla is an important model of ascetic feminism, actualised through spiritual maleness. Willy Rordorf sums up current scholarship concerning the *Acts of Thekla*, written in Asia Minor around the end of the 2nd century [440]. He has also described the use of Thekla by Latin church Fathers [439]. Gilbert Dagron has edited the Greek 5th-century *Life and Miracles of Thekla*, with a survey of literary sources [134]. Birte Carlé has traced the Thekla legend, together with an assessment



of research from the 19th century onwards [103]. In an article she compares Thekla to other early legends of holy virgins [104], a theme later supplemented with Norse hagiographic material [105].

Sebastian P. Brock and Susan Ashbrook Harvey have recently translated *Lives* of Syrian holy women from the 4th to the 7th century, with an introduction [55]. Varying in historical accuracy, this material reveals ideological models of female sainthood, with accent on martyrdom, virginity and penitent courtesans. Harvey's recent work on 6th-century Syrian asceticism as reflected in hagiographical sources contains a chapter on women in Syriac Christianity [231]. She notes that female ascetics gained greater influence in times of ecclesiastical crisis, but remained barred from institutionalised church leadership. Eva Maria Synek's study of holy women of the Christian Orient explores historical and hagiographical sources from various Eastern churches in late antiquity [494]. Kari Vogt surveys female ascetism in 4th- to 6th-century Egypt [523], and she has analysed the theme of spiritual authority achieved by means of self-debasement, exemplified in the apparently insane nun of Tabennisi [522]. Her femaleness underlines the fact that divine power is revealed through human frailty, a trend to become standard among medieval women mystics.

In a collection of articles on late Antique Christian asceticism, Elizabeth A. Clark discusses its influence on women's social advancement [114]. By opting for virginity or widowhood, women distanced themselves as far as possible in this world from creational subordination, linked to bio-social femaleness. This liberatory device is illustrated in the lives of aristocratic ladies, like Olympias [312] and Melania *junior* [209, 113]. Clark has earlier studied the relationship between John Chrysostom and his widowed sponsor Olympias [111]. Nicole Moine presents a thorough effort to ascertain the biographies of the two Melanias, grandmother and granddaughter [343]. She points to the impact of claims for orthodoxy on family relations,

since Melania *senior* becomes invisible (*damnatio memoriae*) in texts concerning the younger, due to her Origenist connections. Anne Ewing Hickey interprets the ascetic choice of female aristocrats, associated respectively with the rivals Jerome and Rufinus, in terms of deviant social behaviour [242]. Collusion of Roman and Christian norms for virtuous womanhood motivates these pious matrons to seek release in monasticism. Nevertheless, Hickey notes the resemblance between the classical *univira* ideal and Christian preference for female continence and virginity. In this sense, ascetic widows re-enforce Roman *pudicitia* and thereby promote Christian inculturation.

The Christocentric ideal of manlike perfection is substantially actualised by female transvestite hermits and monks. The 5th-century legend of a former dissolute actress Pelagia, who turned into a crossdressed and penitent recluse, is presented by Pierre Petitmengin and his collaborators, with a survey of its textual history and literary influence [409]. John Anson has followed up this theme in early Eastern monasticism, tracing the origin of andromorphic prowess to the Thekla legend [12]. Evelyne Patlagean has studied ascetic suppression of femaleness, in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (actually including several Mothers) and in Byzantine hagiography, up to the 11th century [392]. She demonstrates that the prestige of transvestite *andreaia* tended to diminish from the 9th century, where holy women are honoured also in terms of connubial motherhood, although virginity persists as superior value. Patlagean notes that since sources are elaborated by men, they do not express female transvestites' experience and self-image, but rather male ideals about women promoted to virile strength. Patlagean's article on Theodora of Thessalonica (died 892) illustrates the later feminisation of sainthood [396]. A priest's daughter and a notable's widow before entering the cloister, this saint exemplified the monastic form of female obedience which here is valued more than ascetic virginity. In an article concerning saints and social power, based on hagiographic material from the

9th to the 11th century, Patlagean finds a majority of formerly married aristocrats and empresses among the small female sample, seven women to twenty-seven men [394].

In the Western church, male monastic and clerical preponderance determines what Pierre Delooz calls "sociologie de canonisation" [142]. He relates that from the 11th century up to 1634 only 14 women achieved canonical canonisation, whereas the cult of 111 men was thus confirmed. Holy women were in a corresponding minority also among locally venerated saints. Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg has described the androcentric selection of female sainthood from 500 to 1200, with an average at ca. 15%, these mainly royal or aristocratic foundresses of monasteries and abbesses [466]. In another article on female sanctity in the early Middle Ages, Schulenburg shows that from the 9th century onwards women's declining political power is followed by a decreasing number of female saints [468]. Schulenburg also provides a vivid account of heroic self-mutilation, like cutting off the nose, practised by Frankish and Anglo-Saxon virgins and nuns to escape enforced marriage or Viking rape [467]. The corresponding ideal of forceful virginity in Old English literature is treated by Jane Chance [110].

The standard work on ecclesiastically approved sainthood in the late Middle Ages is presented by André Vauchez [511]. He documents that between 1198 and 1431, 18.3% of canonisation processes and 14% with a successful outcome concern women. The interaction between papal politics and canonised holiness is significant, as in the case of Birgitta of Sweden. She was canonised in 1391, and had to be sanctioned both in 1415 and 1419. Equally revealing is the lack of final approbation, as in the case of Hildegard von Bingen. Her process between 1233-37 was abandoned unfinished, with eventual new attempts in 1243 and 1317. Her cult was recognised for Germany in 1940. Several women from the Franciscan orbit remained unapproved, like Chiara da Montefalco with a process in 1318-19, finally canonised in 1881 [334]. Widows also had difficulties, like

Dauphine de Puimichel with process in 1363 [98], in spite of her self-determined unconsummated marriage and saintly husband, Elzéar de Sabran [96]. His process in 1351-52 ended with canonisation in 1369 [97]. The former burgher's wife, pilgrim and recluse Dorothea von Montau had her process in 1404-06, but the case is still left pending [483]. Her cult was recognised for Germany in 1976. In contrast, the rapid canonisation of Chiara d'Assisi in 1225, two years after her death, was certainly not unrelated to her obedient, but probably reluctant, acceptance of monastic enclosure. The male Franciscans proved uninterested in Chiara's canonical success, to say the least. Such was not the case of Caterina da Siena, who deliberately opted for tertiary status in order to avoid being enclosed. Her approval was laboriously obtained by male Dominicans, with a process in 1411-16 and canonisation in 1461, under her compatriot from Siena, Pius II.

Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell published their study of Western sainthood from the 11th to the 17th century shortly after Vauchez [530]. Covering both canonised and locally venerated saints, they consider the pursuance and perception of holiness as a reflection of contemporary social values and concerns. In this perspective, hagiographical sources can shed light on broad ranges of society, where popular piety and clerical preaching interact. Weinstein and Bell are attentive to the differences in male and female sainthood, which affected number, activity and cult. They note an overall share of 17.5% women, with a marked increase from the 13th to the 15th century, followed by a decline in the 16th and 17th centuries. The rise of mendicant orders expanded the class base of venerated holiness, which reached the middle and lower *strata* of society. Both men and women strove to gain supernatural power through asceticism, but female saints excelled in penitence and austerity. Barred from ecclesiastical functions and preaching, women were especially favoured by visions and the gift of prophecy, thereby channelling divine might through female

feebleness. It is noteworthy that God was not deemed androcentric. On the contrary, women were chosen as the instruments for his condescending love. In a work on medieval visionary literature, Peter Dinzelbacher shows that from the middle of the 12th century onwards, women visionaries were in the majority, having mainly short experiences of an abstract and intellectual character [148]. Dinzelbacher now provides a solid survey of medieval texts concerning visions and revelations, with extensive listing of sources [150]. In the earlier period, men were in the majority, usually with only one or few visions, of a strongly emotional and concrete type. Michael Goodich analyses female behaviour in his study of 13th-century sainthood [207]. The larger recruitment to holiness with its resulting democratisation complements the former ideal of aristocratic cloistered virginity. Imitation of Christ through poverty and penitent suffering is supplemented by caring for the sick and poor. Goodich also points to holy women opposing heretics. Richard Kieckhefer surveys 14th-century hagiography, with accent on Dorothea von Montau, Pierre de Luxembourg, who was made cardinal in Avignon at age sixteen, and the widowed Dominican reform prioress Chiara Gambacorta, all uncanonised [275]. Due to the sober tone of her biography, written by a fellow Dominican nun, Chiara appears as a fairly reasonable person. Kieckhefer relates the period's main devotional features, namely patience, penitence, meditation on Christ's passion, rapture and visions, but without special attention to gender difference.

Claudia Opitz uses 13th- and 14th-century hagiographical sources to clarify female existence in marriage and widowhood, finding acts from canonisation processes more informative than the respective edifying biographies of saintly women [384]. Opitz also discusses the hagiographical insistence on female chastity, in terms of virginity, widowhood, and connubial continence or frigidity [385]. A pathetic piece of inverted hagiography is analysed by Giles Constable, concerning the 12th-century nun of Watton, who was placed in a Gilbertine

monastery at about age four and evidently lacked a vocation to holy maidenhood [129]. In contrast, Christina, a 12th-century Anglo-Saxon recluse and later prioress of Markyate, displayed manlike strength in fighting to preserve her virginity [495]. Female recluses are investigated by Anna Benvenuti Papi, based on hagiographic material from 12th- to 14th-century Italy [37]. Benvenuti Papi notes an increase of women hermits living enclosed in or near cities from the 13th century onwards, and being supported by the local inhabitants in order to protect them from evil by penance and prayers. She has recently presented a comprehensive collection of articles concerning holy women in late medieval Italy, based on diligent study of historical and hagiographical sources pertaining to various social *strata* [38]. In a volume dedicated to the secluded activist and later enforced Augustinian abbess Chiara da Montefalco (died 1308), Edith Páztor describes her influence on female piety, coloured by the Franciscan focus on Christ's suffering humanity [398]. Romana Guarnieri compares Chiara's spirituality with Brabantian Beguines, thus placing her in a wider European context [221]. Claudio Leonardi has surveyed the hagiographical construction of Chiara's sainthood [298]. Gabriella Zarri's studies concerning religious women's culture and political influence in 15th- to 16th-century Italy are now conveniently collected [550].

The problematical intersection of male narrative on female holiness is discussed in Karen Glente's study of 13th- and 14th-century Latin biographies [197]. She compares the *Vitae* written by the bishop, and later cardinal, Jacques de Vitry and the Dominicans Thomas de Cantimpré and Petrus de Dacia with the *Vita Sororum* from Unterlinden, written by a Dominican nun. Here Glente explores the difference between men's female imagery and women's self-image, with synopsis in a recent article [198]. Glente observes that male biographers do not describe holy women in terms of their actions, but as instruments for divine power which acts through female weakness. In contrast, Sister Katharina relates her predecessors' and fellow

nuns' virtuous lives as an imitation of Christ, stressing the women's active performance. Without explicitly envisioning the impact of female authorship, Siegfried Ringler provides a valuable study of 14th-century German "Nonnenliteratur," written for and mainly by monastic women [434]. He points to the need for critical editions, to clarify both the sociological and psychological implications of these writings. In a later article, Ringler treats the hermeneutical problem raised by the actual study of medieval female mysticism [435]. Using the *Engelthaler Schwesternbuch* written by the Dominican Christine Ebner (died 1356) as an example, he notes the disparity between her presuppositions and our perspective. Christine Ebner is also analysed by Ursula Peters [407]. Recently, Peters presents a literary study of female mystical literature, covering Beguines and German nuns [408]. Debra L. Stoudt surveys the correspondence of 14th-century Dominican nuns in Germany, mainly adressed to male confessors [487]. Peter Dinzelbacher's articles on female mystics and writers are presented together in a new volume [151]. Otto Langer's study of Eckhart's German sermons compares his doctrine with the female mysticism of 14th-century "Nonnenviten" [289]. Langer emphasises Eckhart's different understanding of *unio mystica*, transcending the nuns' eucharistic *Brautmystik* by a divinising unification, "Einheit mit Gott im Sein."

Caroline Walker Bynum has studied women's religious experience, displayed in hagiographical accounts and female writings. Discussing Victor Turner's theory of liminality as applied to metaphoric gender reversal in medieval texts, Bynum states that this applies only to men's writings [70]. They identify with Christ's incarnation and suffering by depicting themselves as womanlike, since his human nature is metaphorically female by its inferiority in relation to the divine nature. Bynum underlines that according to this imagery, women can imitate Christ precisely through their femaleness, without becoming salvationally male. The complexity of symbols is manifest in

nuptial analogy, where men's souls are feminine to God in subordinate love and women evade gender reversal since Christ's brides are female. Bynum has surveyed 12th-century Cistercian abbots' use of female metaphors to describe their imitation of maternal Christ in relating to their monks [68]. This theme of Christ's womanlike humanity is also analysed in devotional texts from the 12th to the 15th century, written by both men and women [72]. Here Bynum points to the significant differing of male and female self-image as expressed in their Godlanguage. Men tend to perceive the two sexes as dichotomous, stressing male power and reason *versus* female weakness and lust. Women display more concern with female physicality as instrumental to identifying with Christ's humanity. Bynum's recent work on female eucharistic piety and fasting explores this motif further, based on material concerning women mystics from the 13th and 14th centuries [73]. Since most available sources are formulated, edited, translated, controlled, selected or transmitted by men, women's gendered experience and thinking tend to be obscured and even distorted. In order to elucidate female Godlanguage and self-conception as far as possible in spite of these barriers, Bynum focuses on a theme which is preponderant both in hagiographical accounts about saintly women and in their own dictated or written texts. In imitating Christ, men renounce wealth and authority, whereas women renounce the domain which they control in medieval society, namely food. Becoming Christlike through suffering, fasting and by unification with Christ's humanity through the eucharistic feast, female physicality is inserted into the salvational order. Through this perspective, Bynum corrects the current interpretation of female asceticism as internalised misogyny, in terms of castigating their lustful flesh. On the contrary, she explains women's ascetic body control, realised through fasting, in the sense of physical identification with Christ's suffering, gynecomorphic humanity. I would stress that this Christology severs the earlier traditional connection between exemplary maleness and Christomorphic



human perfection. Women no longer have to become salvationally male but can imitate Christ in their female humanity, since his redeeming physicality is described as womanlike and maternal. Nevertheless, the fundamental man-centered gender symbolism persists, since divine supremacy is still andromorphic. Christ's humanity is gynecomorphic precisely in terms of lowering himself to assume human nature. By this Christocentric interpretation of women mystics' eucharistic fasting, Bynum also points to the inadequacy of applying the modern concept of *anorexia nervosa*. She agrees with Rudolph M. Bell that the aspect of bodily control as device to manipulate family and surroundings appears similar. His study of "holy anorexia" covers 216 Italian women, ranging from the 13th century up to 1934, and gives an instructive survey of female saintly excesses [29]. Nevertheless, Bynum's work demonstrates that medieval "holy fast" is a far more complex phenomenon. I would propose the term *anorexia religiosa*, thereby including the Christological feature of women's asceticism.

So-called heretical women provide an enlightening contrast to ecclesiastically more or less endorsed female holiness. Gottfried Koch has interpreted women's adherence to Catharism mainly in terms of seeking relief from socio-economic pressure [280]. Richard Abels and Jane Harrison discuss the more aloof attraction for women of combined manlike and sexless equality achieved through spiritual baptism, *consolamentum* [1]. Based on material from 13th-century Languedoc, where women admitted to this *élite* level as *perfectae* represented slightly less than 45%, they demonstrate that hierarchical functions as bishop and deacon were strictly limited to male *perfecti*. Although in theory capable of conferring *consolamentum*, there is no evidence that female perfects ever exercised such sacramental power. Preaching *perfectae* occurred very seldom; normally they lived together in conventlike hospices. It follows that Catharism's dualistic rejection of both male and female corporality did not in practice suppress Catholicism's creational gender hierarchy. As

in the great church, *élite* female religiosity was confined to conventual life. *Consolamentum* received by women did not abolish their subordinate status, thus paralleling orthodoxy's bar on ordaining females. Concerning the Waldenses, Giovanni Gonnet notes a corresponding exclusion of women from sacerdotal functions [206]. A thorough study of ideology and practice among the French Cathars is now provided by John H. Mundy [360].

In contrast, another heretical variant can properly be labelled feminist, in the sense of human fulfilment by becoming female [364]. Stephen W. Wessley treats Guglielma da Milano, a widow who died in fame of holiness around 1281 and was buried in the Cistercian abbey Chiaravalle [533]. Her followers believed that Guglielma was an incarnation of the Holy Spirit, with the purpose of founding a regenerated church with a female pope, for the conversion of Jews, Saracens and even Gentiles. The candidate to this papacy was her *vicaria* Maifreda da Pirovano, cousin of Milan's ruler Matteo Visconti. Patrizia Maria Costa has investigated this movement following the inquisitorial acts [131]. Maifreda was burned in 1300, together with two adherents and Guglielma's exhumed corpse. Adriana Valerio has recently analysed this deviant gynocentrism in the sense of manifesting religious women's profound dissatisfaction with traditional doctrine [509]. It is significant that Guglielma's alleged message tends to complement Christianity's andromorphic Godhead and Christ's incarnate resurrection in perfect maleness. Guglielma's believers seem to have affirmed that she was daughter of the Bohemian king Přemysl I Otakar and his second queen, Constance of Hungary.\* If this is the case, an intriguing hagiographical genealogy results. Guglielma was then sister of

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\* Attested in genealogical table, added to text in Zdenek Fiala, *Přemyslovské Čechy* (Premislav's Bohemia), Praha 1975. (Reference checked 1988 by Ladislav Reznicek, Oslo.)

Agnes, a disciple of Chiara d'Assisi and foundress of the Clarisse monastery in Prague, who attained canonisation in 1989. Both were also cousins of Elisabeth von Thüringen (died 1231), who was speedily canonised in 1235 after a process that year.

In 1325 the Beguine Prous Boneta told the inquisition in Carcassone that she had been elected as dispenser of the Holy Spirit to humankind. Prous' confession, a Latin report of her vernacular, is edited by William Harold May [321]. Later condemned as an heretic and probably burned at the stake, Prous' doctrinal content is presented as considerably confused. She seems to understand herself a parallel to Mary giving birth to Christ, that is as a female instrument for the salvific coming of the Spirit. She believes that this revelation had previously been acted out through Jean de Pierre Olivi (died 1298), whom she constantly invokes, scorning the *ecclesia moderna* and its pope, Johannes XXII, a veritable Antichrist. In contrast to Guglielma's gynocentric followers, Prous does not proclaim a perfected female papacy; this honour is reserved for a Franciscan friar, Guillaume Giraudi. Prous' message of redemption by faith in the proclaimed Holy Spirit is holistic as in the Milan movement, since Jews, Saracens and also Gentiles can be saved. On the other hand, Prous seems to define herself as a privileged spokeswoman of the Spirit, not as an incarnation of divinity.

Concerning a more reasonable fringe movement, the Lollards, Claire Cross has shown that their reforming activism included women who were "great reasoners in Scripture" [132]. Her material covers the period from the late 14th century to 1530, and displays female exegesis and preaching. Margaret Aston has discussed whether the Lollard priesthood of all believers was actually realised through women priests [16]. She notes that Walter Brut claimed this equivalence for laywomen, and his trial in 1393 triggered academic debates concerning female cultic incapacity. Aston concludes that different testimonies about women presiding the eucharist still have to be historically proved.

## 6. Women writers

### 6.1 Late Antique, Byzantine and Early Medieval Authors

Very few female writings survive from the late Antique and patristic periods. It is significant that around one hundred letters to women from John Chrysostom, Jerome and Augustine are preserved, whereas not a single missive from their female correspondents has been deemed worthy of transmission. Rosemary Radford Ruether describes this deleted matriscity quite succinctly: "The tragedy of these women is not that they chose a path of accomplishment that was anti-sexual. In this they were no more than the enthusiastic participants in the *Zeitgeist* of their age. Their tragedy, rather, is that in so choosing this path, accepting in good faith the ideals held out to them by the Church, they were nevertheless denied their rightful place in the Church's tradition. They were writers, thinkers, Scripture scholars, and innovators in the formation of monastic life, but because they were women they could have no public voice in the teaching Church here on earth" [443, pp. 93-94].

To my knowledge, the only surviving Latin texts are these: Vibia Perpetua's account from prison before her martyrdom in Carthage (203), inserted into the compiled *Passio sanctorum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* [365]. This text has recently been analysed by Victor Saxer [454]. The Roman Faltonia Betitia Proba composed (ca. 360) a Vergilian *Cento*, which displays God's action through human history by paraphrasing biblical texts, from creation to Christ [112]. The (probably) Galician Egeria's report of her pilgrimage (381/84) was discovered in 1884, perhaps transmitted because of its rich material on liturgy and monasticism [316]. A letter from Paula and Eustochium to Marcella (ca. 392/3) is preserved among Jerome's correspondence (Ep. 46) [283, pp. 100-114]. Two letters from a Spanish

female ascetic (ca. 400) to a colleague survived under the name of Jerome, properly identified and published in 1928 [351]. It is interesting to note that the second of these refers to the incorrupted Mary groaning in birth pangs, thus deviating from contemporary mariology, where Mary is considered exempt from this penalty of Eve's sin (Gen. 3, 16). In 1908, eleven letters from Melania *senior* (died ca. 406) to Evagrius Ponticus, transmitted in Armenian, were presented in Latin translation and later published in 1964 [290].

It is significant that no writings survive from Hypatia, the non-Christian mathematician, astronomer and philosopher [521]. She was brutally murdered in 415 by a ferocious band of monks, perhaps at the instigation of bishop Cyril of Alexandria. Hypatia was teacher and friend of the gentleman bishop Synesios of Cyrene, and seven of his letters to her are preserved. The Byzantine empress Aelia Eudocia Augusta (died 460) is attested to have written six works. These include biblical paraphrases: a sequence on the Octateuch and hexameter versions on Daniel and Zachariah. Only her hagiographical account of the conversion and martyrdom of a former magician, Cyprian of Antioch, is preserved [307, 547]. Eudocia's political influence is analysed by Alan Cameron [98].

In Byzantium, the abbess and poet Kassia (died before 865) wrote some of the most cherished hymns in the Greek liturgy [247]. They are still in use. Her life, work and influence have been studied by Ilse Rochow [437]. The learned princess Anna Comnena (died 1148) wrote an extended historical account of her father, the emperor Alexis I and his reign, which is available in a critical edition [296, 194]. Georgina Buckler has analysed Anna's life and writings, and points out her combination of internalised androcentric ideology and female assertiveness [65]. Married for about forty years to a military leader who initiated the *Alexias*, Anna exemplifies the achievement of secular womanhood, accessible in aristocratic Byzantine society.

From the early Middle Ages onwards, several writings by women emerge in the Western sphere. Peter Dronke presents a thorough study of women writers, framed by two martyrs, Vibia Perpetua and Marguerite Porete, with ample bibliography [161]. This work includes a useful survey of extant texts from 6th- and 7th-century Merovingian and 8th-century Anglo-Saxon literature, mainly produced in female monasteries. Dronke's chapter on Dhouda analyses her *Manual* of religious and secular education, which was intended for her eldest son [161]. This work, completed in 843, is published in a critical edition [430]. It displays the strong impact of man-made traditional doctrine on women's culture. The absence of Marian piety is therefore noteworthy, since Dhouda's monastic male contemporaries ardently debated the physiological details of Mary's *virginitas in partu* (Paschasius Radbertus against Ratramnus). Dhouda's theological thinking is recently analysed by M.A. Claussen [115].

Dronke proceeds with a chapter on the poetic, dramatic and historical work of the 10th-century canoness, Hrotsvith von Gandersheim [161]. Her legends and plays in Terentian style reveal knowledge of Roman literature, biblical, apocryphal and hagiographical texts, as well as patristic and early medieval sources. Parts of Hrotsvith's work were discovered in 1494, her *Gallicanus* was identified in 1900, and other manuscripts were found in 1922, 1925 and 1933. Hrotsvith's *Opera* have been critically edited by Helene Hohmeyer [245], who also offers a German translation [246]. Katharina M. Wilson provides English translations of Hrotsvith's dramas [545] and hagiographical legends [546]. She points to Hrotsvith's emphasis on female virtue as exemplified by virgins and martyrs, thus following a traditional pattern [542]. Wilson has also edited a collection of essays on Hrotsvith's poetic writings [543]. In a recent study, she analyses Hrotsvith's work, including its historical, intellectual and sociological context [544].

## 6.2 Héloïse

Turning to the great women of 12th-century monastic culture, the figure of Héloïse (died 1163/4) is particularly poignant in the interaction between her partly internalised man-made ideology and differing female experience. In his *Historia calamitatum* her lover and husband Abélard speaks of Héloïse's combined erotic and intellectual appeal: *Quae, cum per faciem non esset infima, per abundantiam litterarum erat suprema* [354, p. 183]. (In looks she did not rank lowest, while in the extent of her learning she stood supreme) [418, p. 64]. In spite of this holistic starting-point and resulting sexual gratification, their personal correspondence, initiated by Héloïse when in her thirties, runs in my opinion more like a *dialogue des sourds* [355]. It should be noted to Abélard's credit that he was strong enough to be attracted by a woman of quite exceptional qualities. He never displayed the patronising attitude present in one modern commentator: "One would have expected that Abélard would have chided her and tried to set her right in regard to such extravagant and sinful dispositions" [355, p. 59]. The clash between Abélard's dualistic androcentrism and Héloïse's autonomous thinking is here aggravated through male-gendered scholarship. I interpret Héloïse as being torn between conflicting values, those traditionally accepted and those personally experienced. Héloïse does not challenge the basic tenets of Christian anthropology: androcentric gender hierarchy or the dualistic split between love of God and sexual bonding. On the other hand, she refuses to endorse Abélard's correlated opposition of sexual activity and partner-love. Héloïse insists on valuing their common erotic experience in terms of her loving intention. In this perspective, it is androcentrically significant that scholars normally trace Héloïse's ethical thinking to Abélard's teaching, not *vice versa*. I find it more plausible that his otherwise man-centered *Scito te ipsum*, written after the existential challenge from Héloïse, is influenced by her moral

norm of wilful intent. In his congenial chapter on Héloïse, Dronke notes the literary impact on Abélard of her Italianate style, but he does not discuss the causality of their so-called shared ethical principles [161, pp. 107-143]. In my opinion, the subsequent correspondence of monastic counselling illustrates a realistic move on the part of Héloïse into matters which Abélard is able to comprehend [356]. This change of subject is interpreted by Peter von Moos in the sense of Héloïse's conversion from an erotic infatuation for Abélard to a sublimated love of God [348, 349]. It is of note that no repentant Héloïse can be found in Dronke's collection of medieval testimonies on the famous couple [158]. In his survey of interpretations from the 17th century onwards, von Moos finds two main stereotypes: the romantic heroine or the unrepentant sinner [347]. He traces the debate on the authenticity of the correspondence back to the early 19th century, through its recent revival by John F. Benton at the 1972 congress in Cluny [33]. Here Benton attributed *Historia calamitatum* to 12th-century fiction, the personal letters to 13th-century falsification, whereas the so-called letters of direction were accepted as Abélard's. This discarding of Héloïse's authorship was later retracted by Benton at the 1979 congress in Trier, although Abélard was still assumed author of her demand for a new monastic rule, more adaptable to women [34]. According to Benton, Abélard wrote this letter in order to justify his *Regula* [329]. The rule actually observed at Héloïse's monastery, and most likely written by her, is now presented in critical edition by Chrysogonus Waddell [526]. It is important to note that *Institutiones nostrae* (ch. 6, p. 10) gives the abbess exclusive authority, also over the clerical staff providing sacramental services. In contrast, Abélard's rule prescribes that the abbot of adjoining monks shall preside over the nuns [329, p. 259]. Benton's challenge stimulated further research, as reported in Trier by D.H. Luscombe [309]. Here von Moos assessed the results and estimated the consequences [350]. The current general acceptance of Héloïse and Abélard as principal



authors of their surviving correspondence was already anticipated in Cluny by Jacques Monfrin [346]. Nevertheless, the authenticity debate has recently been revitalised in a 1986 congress on "Fälschungen im Mittelalter." Based on computerised linguistic analysis, John F. Benton here attributed both *Historia calamitatum* and all the letters to Abélard [36]. Hubert Silvestre argued for Jehan de Meung as author of the whole dossier, produced to defend clerical concubinage [477]. The confusion was completed by Deborah Fraioli's pleading for a third party who wrote the *Historia calamitatum* to deride and to ridicule the protagonists, reputed authors of the correspondence [183].

I presume that Héloïse's obvious uncastrated emotional and intellectual capacities, as demonstrated in her personal letters to Abélard, have triggered doubts about their authorship. Assumptions among (mostly) male scholars concerning proper attitudes in a respected abbess, leaving an *élite* establishment with six daughter-monasteries at her death, have certainly been shaken. It is therefore significant that Héloïse's list of exegetical questions addressed to Abélard, *Problemata Heloissae*, has never been suspected of being inauthentic. Dronke has demonstrated their literary resemblance with Héloïse's letters [159]. Preserved in the correspondence of Petrus Venerabilis, abbot of Cluny, is a letter from Héloïse where she asks for his help to provide her son Astrolabius with a prebend, together with Petrus's affirmative reply (Ep. 167,168) [128, 1, pp. 400-402; 2, pp. 209-210].

Héloïse's steadfast efforts to integrate theological theory and existential *praxis* throughout her life are evaluated from a female perspective by Pascale Bourgain [52] and Peggy Kamuf [268]. Adriana Valerio is particularly aware of Héloïse's original thinking [508]. The approach of Régine Pernoud is here more traditional [405]. This extraordinary witness of medieval experience deserves further investigation in terms of a female discourse on God and humanity. It is encouraging to quote Peter Venerabilis' formula of God's solution to Héloïse's tormenting conflict: *hunc inquam loco tui, uel ut te alteram in gremio suo*

*confouet* (Ep. 115) [128, 1, p. 308]. This letter to Héloïse after Abélard's death bridges the traditional rift between divine and human love, since God gratifies Abélard as another Héloïse, to restore him to her as lover and husband at Christ's second coming.

### 6.3 Hildegard von Bingen

A visionary prioress of a Benedictine double monastery, Elisabeth von Schönau (died 1164), is overshadowed by her role model, the renowned abbess Hildegard von Bingen (died 1179). Elisabeth's visions were recorded by her brother Ekbert von Schönau, whereas Hildegard wrote herself with editorial help of secretaries [465]. Elisabeth Gössmann compares their theological anthropology with early scholastic doctrine and finds that both nuns clearly endorsed creational gender hierarchy [202]. Its traditional correlative, women's becoming male or asexual through redemptional equality, is nevertheless challenged by their feminisation of Christ's human nature in subordination to his divinity. Gertrud Jaron Lewis has translated and commented on Elisabeth's vision of the Saviour in the guise of a female virgin (*Liber visionum* III, 4) [301]. Lieven van Acker surveys the correspondence between Elisabeth and Hildegard [4]. Hildegard's main theological work, *Scivias*, is presented in critical edition by Adelgundis Führkötter and Angela Carlevaris [187]. The English translation is made by Columba Hart and Jane Bishop, with an introduction by Barbara Newman [230]. Hildegard's *Liber vitae meritorum* is critically edited by Angela Carlevaris [106]. Lieven van Acker presents Hildegard's *Epistulae* in critical edition [3] and has previously surveyed research problems and results [2]. Most of Hildegard's *corpus* is available in German translation based on reliable sources [46, 455, 459, 458, 431, 432, 23, 186], including her *Vita* [190]. Barbara Newman presents a critical edition of Hildegard's

liturgical hymns, *Symphonia*, with introduction and translation [370]. Adelgundis Führkötter has provided comprehensive accounts of her great Benedictine foremother [188, 189, 191]. As Dronke points out in his chapter on Hildegard, the wide range of her learning is comparable to Avicenna's, since she covers cosmology, anthropology, ethics, medicine and also poetry and music [161, pp. 144-201]. This variety is reflected in the many studies on Hildegard's work, compiled up to 1982 in Werner Lauter's bibliography [291]. Among recent contributors, Barbara Maurmann [320], Heinrich Schipperges [456, 457] and Elisabeth Gössmann [201] consider Hildegard's cosmology, whereas Gerhard Baader [18], Irmgard Müller [358, 359] and Joan Cadden [95] analyse her medical writings. Bernhard W. Scholz discusses the impact of Hildegard's androcentric concept of femaleness [464]. Elisabeth Gössmann also analyses Hildegard's theology in terms of her exegesis of Adam's and Eve's creation, fall and redemption [203]. Hildegard's doctrine of God's loving *Caritas* is surveyed by Margot Schmidt [462]. Fabio Chávez Alvarez analyses her concept of divine and human *rationalitas* [110 a]. Gerhard Müller's account of Hildegard's preaching mission against the Cathars presents an interesting example of prophetic authority in contrast with female submissiveness [357]. In his valuable survey, Dronke emphasises the unreconciled tenets of Hildegard's thinking, where monistic admiration of God's creation and empirical description of human sexuality coexist with a traditional monastic asceticism. Following the encratite definition of originally perfect and eschatologically restored human wholeness in terms of virginity, Hildegard accepts the classical conflict between love of God and sexual activity. In spite of her empirical account of human biology in her medical works, and use of erotic imagery in illustrating God's appeal, Hildegard, having been placed in the monastery at the age of eight, remains alienated from sexually active womanhood. Dronke illustrates this point in the critical edition of autobiographical passages preserved in Hildegard's *Vita*,

begun during her lifetime by a secretary, Gottfried, and completed by another monk, Theoderich, in 1189. Dronke also presents texts from Hildegard's *Causae et Curae*, her first letter to Guibert de Gembloux and twelve other letters from Hildegard, as transmitted in an early 13th-century manuscript [161, pp. 231-264], cf. his previous treatment of this material [160].

The main study of Hildegard's theology, with a focus on her use of female imagery, is now provided by Barbara Newman [369]. Divine Wisdom, *Sapientia*, mediates between God and humanity. Hildegard is here connected with the earlier sapiential tradition, cf. I Cor. 1,24, where God's revealing Wisdom and God's incarnated Son converge. Consequently, Newman explains medieval use of female metaphors describing Christ's human nature in terms of a revival of earlier Christology. Hildegard's Wisdom is in like manner a preexistent model for perfect humanity in female form, realised as the new Eve: the church or Mary. Newman underlines the incoherence between Hildegard's symbolic exaltation of femaleness and her staunch affirmation of androcentric subordination at the sociological level. Newman therefore points to Hildegard's inapplicability as an example to actual feminist theology, since she so clearly has internalised male-centered doctrine, cf. her acute invocation of female bio-social inferiority as an argument against women priests (*Scivias* II, VI, 76) [187, 43, pp. 290-291]. When Hildegard condemns her time for ecclesiastical abuses, she calls it womanish (*muliebre tempus*). She justifies her prophetic task as a church reformer by invoking God's instrumental use of her female frailty (*paupercula feminea forma*), where divine power becomes manifest through human weakness. Newman finds this validation strategy in apparent contradiction to Hildegard's womanlike *Sapientia*. I see this transposition of gender hierarchy from the symbolic redemptional level (God-Wisdom, Christ-new Eve) to the creational level (Adam-Eve, man-woman) and *vice versa* as logically coherent, since the womanlike element in all cases is instrumental, auxiliary and therefore subordinate. Even more

strongly than Dronke, Newman stresses Hildegard's monastic *enkrateia* as counterproductive from a present feminist perspective, where moral autonomy and holistic valuation of both body and spirit are equally indispensable values. For Hildegard, these two were profoundly opposed: "the soul makes its way towards salvation by sharply divorcing itself from the desires of the body" [369, p. 154].

#### 6.4 *Herrad von Landsberg*

The Augustinian abbess, Herrad von Landsberg (died 1195) compiled an extensive encyclopedia for the instruction of nuns, *Hortus Deliciarum*, initiated by her predecessor Relindis (died 1167). Lost in flames during the bombardment of Strasbourg in 1870, this richly illuminated manuscript has been reconstructed from surviving partial copies by Rosalie Green and her collaborators, with extensive textual and iconographical commentary [215]. Herrad's compilation included biblical texts, material from church history, sacramental theology and canon law, thus covering both patristic and medieval sources. Selected to illustrate salvational history, from the covenant, in Christ, through the church and ending with eschatological fulfilment, Herrad's compilation included some of her own poems and theological interpretations. Gérard Cames has studied the origin and content of allegorical symbolism in this wide-ranging work, in which traditional texts and more innovative iconography interact [101]. He notes the use of typological and eschatological imagery, with Adam/Christ and Eve/church as main figures, opposing heavenly Jerusalem to infernal Babylon.

### 6.5 Chiara d'Assisi

The Franciscan abbess Chiara d'Assisi (died 1235) was the first woman to write a *Rule* for female religious. Here she insists on belonging to the order of Francesco and invokes his authority with diplomatic skill. It is significant that only a small part of her writings is preserved. Engelbert Grau has provided a thorough survey of the few remaining texts and their limited transmission [212]. Chiara's writings: *Regula*, *Testamentum*, *Benedictio*, four letters to Agnes of Prague and one letter to Ermentrud van Brugge, are now available in critical edition [27]. In his introduction, Taddé Matura points to Chiara's originality as expressed in the moderation and the democratic tone of her *Regula*. Comparing her with Francesco, Matura notes Chiara's better education due to her aristocratic background, her clarity of thought and her optimistic anthropology. Chiara's Godlanguage is mainly Christocentric, whereas Francesco's perspective is more trinitarian. The two are conveniently published together in English translation [14]. Chiara's writings are now republished with Regis J. Armstrong's English translation of 13th-century sources concerning Chiara and her poor ladies [15]. Canonical documents, canonisation material and Franciscan texts illustrate the transformation of Chiara's initial project.

Chiara's relation to Francesco is discussed by Rosalind B. Brooke and Christopher N.L. Brooke [58]. I find it important to note that the filtered sources available obscure her degree of voluntarily accepting monastic enclosure, but Chiara's stubborn insistence on the so-called privilege of poverty indicates her effort to maintain at least one feature of Francesco's ideal. That her monastery should accept no property or stable income was in fact only compatible with male mendicancy. Women's sharing or imitating the friars' wandering life of preaching was inconceivable for ecclesiastical authority, and being cloistered, the sisters could not beg for themselves. The male Franciscans' consistent reluctance and/or refusal to care for the female branch

of the order therefore persisted through the 13th century, and Chiara's *Regula* was never applied without alterations.

## 6.6 Hadewijch

Hadewijch, a Dutch Beguine writing in the middle of the 13th century, raised well-deserved scholarly interests since the discovery of her work in 1838 and identification in 1857-67. Recent critical editions, with translation and commentary, include Hadewijch's *Visions* by Paul Mommaers [344] and Herman W. J. Vekeman [515], and her *Strofische Gedichten* by Norbert De Paepe [145]. Hadewijch's *Mengeldichten* [342] and her *Letters* [341] have been critically edited by Jozef van Mierlo, who has also provided earlier critical editions of her *Visions* [339] and *Strofic Poems* [340]. Hadewijch's writings are translated into English with an introduction by Columba Hart [229].

Hadewijch's literary brilliance is expressed in the vernacular, but the doctrinal content testifies to solid training in traditional Latin sources. Her theological focus is combined Christocentric and trinitarian. Hadewijch uses the term *Minne*, derived from the vocabulary of courtly love, to express the soul's experience of the loving relationship with God/Christ. This concept is discussed by Ester Heszler [240]. Hadewijch's religious imagery is studied by J. Reynaert, with a detailed account of her rich use of metaphors, thereby clarifying the impact of *Minne* [426]. Frank Willaert has treated Hadewijch's poetical language in her *Strofische Gedichten* [536]. Concerning her *Visions*, he underlines that they are written for fellow Beguines, with pedagogical intention in relating her own mystical experience [537]. Mommaers and Willaert have recently analysed form and content in Hadewijch's *Letters* [345].

### 6.7 *Beatrijs van Nazareth*

Another Dutch visionary, Beatrijs van Nazareth (died 1268), was placed with the Beguines at the age of seven, and successively transferred to her father's three Cistercian foundations, ending up as prioress. A vernacular treatise of her mystical experience survives [514]. Here she describes the soul's seven stages of ascent towards union with God. Elements from Beatrijs' vernacular autobiography are found in her *Vita*, written by a Cistercian confessor [427]. These sources are discussed by Herman W.J. Vekeman in order to clarify her mystical doctrine and her use of the term *Minne* [516]. Frank Willaert and Marie-José Govers have recently prepared a bibliographical survey concerning Hadewijch and Beatrijs, published in Gertrud Jaron Lewis' bibliography of German female mystics in the Middle Ages, ranging from Hildegard von Bingen to the 14th century [303].

### 6.8 *Helfta writers*

The writers linked to the monastery of Helfta bear important witness to women's Godlanguage. The former Beguine Mechthild von Magdeburg (died ca. 1282) spent her last years there. Mechthild's literary remains were redacted by a male Dominican and survive in the 14th-century German version as *Das fliessende Licht der Gottheit*. Rediscovered in 1861 and published in 1869, the critical edition of this work is presented by Hans Neumann and Gisela Vollman-Profe [368]. Recent articles on Mechthild include Alois M. Haas' survey of her poetic style and doctrinal content [222], Paul Michel's analysis of her metaphors [338], and Margot Schmidt's treatment of Mechthild's trinitarian discourse [461]. Marianne Heimbach provides a thorough study of Mechthild's theology and mystical



experience, with accent on her understanding of herself as God's chosen instrument [233].

The work of Gertrud von Helfta (died 1292) is critically edited with a comprehensive introduction. *Exercitia* [251] and *Legatus* book 2 were written by Gertrud herself, whereas book 1 is a later biography [157]. *Legatus* books 3 [157], 4 and 5 [116] were edited by a fellow nun with material received from Gertrud and others. An early 15th-century truncated translation of *Legatus* in German, *Ein botte der götlichen miltekeit*, is presented in a critical edition by Otmar Wieland [535]. Gertrud Jaron Lewis compares this version with the Latin original, noting the reduced content as to poetry and doctrine [302]. Gertrud was placed in the monastery as a child of five and her slightly older colleague Mechthild von Hackeborn (died 1299) was cloistered at age seven. The account of her mystical experience, redacted by Gertrud and a fellow nun, has survived in a manuscript dated 1370, as *Liber specialis gratiae* [388]. A Dutch version, preserved in an early 15th-century manuscript is critically edited by Richard L.J. Bromberg [56]. An English abridged translation, with manuscripts from the 15th century, is presented in a critical edition by Theresa A. Halligan [225].

Alois M. Haas has studied the main themes of Mechthild's doctrine, comparing her with the other Helfta mystics [223]. He points to her focus on Christ's human nature, with corresponding nuptial symbolism. Margot Schmidt's analysis of the two Mechthilds notes the more liturgical character of Mechthild of Hackeborn's piety, a trait she shares with Gertrud [460]. Sabine B. Spitzlei surveys the learning and mystical theology of these Cistercian nuns [482 a]. A comparative study of the Helfta writers, emphasising the interaction between Godlanguage and female self-image, is provided by Caroline Walker Bynum [69]. She finds that Gertrud and Mechthild von Hackeborn are characterised by a strong sense of autonomy resulting from their monastic women's culture. Mechthild von Magdeburg who withdrew to the cloister in her sixties, displays more internalised

female subordination. She has a consistent use of male metaphors describing God, whereas her monastically trained sisters do not stress womanly dependence, and their Godlanguage includes female metaphors. Bynum argues that Gertrud and Mechthild von Hackeborn perceived their visionary privilege as a counter-balancing force to priestly power. They sometimes perform sacerdotal functions in their visions. In contrast, Mechthild von Magdeburg affirms the necessary male character of priesthood. Nevertheless, Bynum notes that their shared eucharistic devotion places all three in a dependent position *vis-à-vis* consecrating and distributing priests.

### 6.9 *Angela da Foligno*

The widow and Franciscan tertiary Angela da Foligno (died 1309) dictated an account of her mystical experience to her Franciscan confessor, who redacted the material and translated it into Latin. This description of a soul attaining union with and knowledge of God through seven stages, is recently available in a critical edition, together with the 15th-century Italian version [497]. In his review, Kurt Ruh affirms the reliability of this redaction as an expression of Angela's thought, typically Franciscan by focusing on the sharing of Christ's poverty and suffering [449]. He stresses Angela's holistic concept of God's goodness as all-embracing, with parallels in Beguine spirituality. Angela's work is also studied by Paul Lachance, attentive to the female genderedness of her doctrine [284].

### 6.10 *Marguerite d'Oingt*

The extant writings of the Carthusian prioress Marguerite d'Oingt (died 1310) are published in critical edition, with vernacular texts in French translation [168]. Marguerite's Latin *Pagina Meditationum* and vernacular account of visions,

*Speculum*, demonstrate her solid theological and literary education. The biography of her colleague Beatrix d'Ornacieux (died 1303 or 1306) is markedly sober, notwithstanding its hagiographical character. Marguerite's writings are now available in English translation by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski [45].

### 6.11 Marguerite Porete

Burned at the stake as a heretic in Paris in 1310, the Beguine Marguerite Porete now finds herself included in the series *Corpus Christianorum*. Her condemned work, *Le mirouer des simples ames*, is presented in critical Latin and vernacular versions by Paul Verdeyen and Romana Guarnieri [517]. In 1946, Guarnieri proved able to identify a late 15th-century French manuscript as Marguerite's book, later edited with an extensive introduction concerning the contextual movement of "Liberio Spirito" [220]. Either anonymously or falsely attributed, Marguerite also survived in Latin, English and Italian translations. The late 14th-century English version is edited by Marilyn Doiron [155]. The unidentified translator's glosses are edited, with those made by the Carthusian Richard Methley for his Latin translation of the English version (1491), by Edmund Colledge and Romana Guarnieri [121]. Marguerite's treatise is now also available in a commented, modern French translation [255].

Paul Verdeyen's detailed survey of her inquisitorial process reveals Marguerite's indomitable courage [518]. Peter Dronke notes that like Hildegard von Bingen, Marguerite castigates corrupt clergy and ecclesiastical institutions, but without Hildegard's prophetic shield she speaks of her own accord, as *Ame Enfranchie (Anima libera)*. Like Angela da Foligno, Marguerite describes her experience of God's love in seven stages, but in contrast to Angela she claims new insight [161, p. 217]. Marguerite's work therefore challenges church authorities

by deeming their *Sainte Eglise la Petite* (*sancta ecclesia minor*), which is guided by *Raison*, as both sustained and excelled by her *Sainte Eglise la Grant* (*sancta ecclesia maior*), directed by *Amour* (*Mirouer* 19, 43) [517, pp. 74-77, 132-136]. Whilst Marguerite is comparable to Hadewijch and Mechthild von Magdeburg in terms of creative thinking, she did not imitate their wise acceptance of being controlled by confessors, nor did she live in the more tolerant 13th century. Kurt Ruh's congenial studies, where Marguerite is considered in the context of Beguine mysticism, are now conveniently collected [455]. He discusses her terms *Loingprés* and *Fine Amour*, designating God's distant nearness and outreaching love. Comparing Marguerite to Hadewijch and Mechthild von Magdeburg, with their use of the term *Minne*, Ruh distinguishes between union with God experienced in ecstasy (Hadewijch), reference to the Song of Songs as *Connubium spirituale* (Mechthild) and transformation of the lover into the beloved through unifying *Amour* (Marguerite) [446]. Ruh has equally explored the influence of Beguine spirituality in the writings of Eckhart (died ca. 1327) [447]. He proposes an interpretation in terms of Eckhart's effort to make this mysticism theologically viable. Teaching in Paris between 1311 and 1313, Eckhart was certainly not unaffected by Marguerite's *Ame Adnientie* (*Anima adnichilata*). Ruh's book on Eckhart also analyses the impact of the condemnation of so-called heretical Beghards and Beguines at the Council of Vienne in 1311, triggered off by the trial of Marguerite [448]. Ruh again argues for her influence on the thinking of Eckhart, who found Marguerite's ideals akin to his own (cf. the partial condemnation of his doctrine in 1329). The influence of Marguerite on Eckhart is likewise discussed by Edmund Colledge and J.C. Marler in the context of Jan van Ruusbroec (died 1381), since his *XII Beghinen* condemns their common themes [124]. Michael G. Sargent surveys Marguerite's significance for the English mystical tradition, and focuses on her translators' glosses to make her work doctrinally less

challenging [452]. Ironically, the English Carthusians seem to have attributed *Le mirouer* to Ruusbroec who was believed to have been a prior in Paris, and consequently encouraged its translation.

### 6.12 Birgitta of Sweden

The aristocratic and visionary widow Birgitta of Sweden (died 1373) has been studied more for her influence on national and ecclesiastical history than for her doctrinal significance. Birgitta's *Reuelaciones*, book 1 [506], book 4 [7], book 5 [40], book 6 [41] and book 7 [39] are available in critical editions. Also critically edited are her *Reuelaciones extrauagantes* [249], *Regula Saluatoris* [170] and *Sermo Angelicus* [169], as well as Birgitta's canonisation Acts [125]. Birgitta's *Vita* and her *Revelations* book 5 and 7 are presented in English translation by Albert Ryle Kezel, solidly introduced by Tore Nyberg [273]. Birgit Klockars has traced Birgitta's sources, illustrating her knowledge of biblical, doctrinal and historical texts [278]. She notes that Birgitta is unaffected by 13th-century women mystics and had probably not read Eckhart, but motifs from Heinrich Seuse (died 1366) are found in her *Revelations*. In a further study, Klockars considers Birgitta's writings in the context of her period's theological and historical knowledge, thereby documenting Birgitta's solid learning [279]. Although she acquired skill in Latin, Birgitta wrote or dictated her visionary account in the vernacular, to be translated into Latin by her confessors. The impact of this clerical edition is discussed by Jan Öberg [383] and Hans Aili [6], the latter with focus on the final editing made by Alphonso de Jaén.

Christ reveals to Birgitta the task of founding a new monastic order, dictating to her the *Regula Saluatoris*. Christ wants to plant a new vineyard, since the old one has ceased to produce good grapes and should be burned (ch. 2, allusion to

Joh. 15, 1-6) [170, pp. 102-103]. This condemnation of extant orders is indeed revolutionary, but Birgitta's woman-centered solution of the *cura monialium* proved more challenging. She stipulates a cloistered community with a maximum of 60 nuns, 13 priests, 4 deacons and 8 lay brothers (ch. 12) [170, p. 118]. The male members are to serve the women's sacramental and material needs; the priests shall, in addition, preach in the vernacular to the faithful attending the monastery's church. The abbess is to be elected by the community and approved by the bishop; she represents Mary and rules as *caput monasterii*. The abbess must select one of the priests as confessor to all, in agreement with the community and to be confirmed by the bishop (ch. 14) [170, pp. 120-121].

Birgitta's *Rule* was never observed in its original form, since consecutive papal approvals involved changes according to current canon law. Birgitta intended her order primarily for the *moniales*; the pastoral and auxiliary activities of the *fratres* are shaped accordingly. The monastery is defined as a unity, where female and male members have separated dwellings and a common church, with different choirs, all placed under the abbess' jurisdiction. It is therefore noteworthy that the *bull*a of Urbanus V (1370) suppresses the *Rule*'s revelatory character and specifies two *monasteria*, for the nuns and brothers respectively. Birgitta's daughter Katharina obtained after considerable efforts a new *bull*a from Urbanus VI (1378), more faithful to Birgitta's intentions but still with alterations. Hans Cnattingius has studied the Birgittine order in Sweden, Italy and Spain, focusing on the impact of Martinus V's *bull*a (1422) which separated nuns and brothers into two different branches of the same order [117]. The ensuing conflict was solved by dispensations until Eugenius IV in 1435 ordered the *fratres* back, to dwell near the female monasteries. The expansion of the Birgittines through the 15th century, in Scandinavia, England, Germany and the Netherlands is studied by Tore Nyberg [377]. Nyberg has analysed Birgitta's *Rule*, assessing the different roles of female and male members

[378]. Nyberg's account of a German Birgittine priest from the 1440's, interpreting his order's *Regula*, illustrates the androcentric development [379]. Now the *fratres'* contemplative and apostolic task has become primary, whereas the nuns assume Martha's active role of providing material support. The abbess' jurisdiction is thus reduced to an honorary title. Canonical alterations of Birgitta's original *Rule* throughout the 15th century are also surveyed by Nyberg [381].

Edmund Colledge has described Birgitta's editor Alphonso de Jaén as one of the main agents in the complicated strategy to ensure both doctrinal approval and canonical sainthood [120]. This procedure is further demonstrated in Arne Jönsson's study of Alphonso and his writings [266]. It must be remembered that Birgitta's orthodoxy was questioned both at the councils of Constance (1415) and Basle (1434-1436). Auke Jelsma has considered Birgitta's doctrinal profile in terms of her conflicting reception in the 15th century [258]. F.R. Johnston relates the cult of Birgitta in England, where Syon Abbey was founded in 1415 [264]. A comprehensive collection of articles concerning Birgitta, her works and her five abbeys in the Nordic countries is recently edited by Tore Nyberg [382].

Birgitta not only formulated a new *Regula*, claimed to be received directly from Christ. She also constructed a new monastic liturgy for her nuns, to the honour of their model Mary. The readings are presented as being dictated to Birgitta by an angel, *Sermo Angelicus*, with mariocentric content partly derived from the apocryphal Gospel of James (ca. 150). The liturgical hymns were written by Birgitta's confessor Peter Olovsson of Skänninge [308]. It is noteworthy that liturgical readings were usually selected from the Bible; Birgitta's innovation is consequently significant in terms of emulating scriptural authority. She describes Mary as the preexisting model of creation, thus appropriating to her Christ's traditional combined Wisdom and *Logos* prerogatives. Tore Nyberg's article on Birgitta's mystical discourse points to her combination of

traditional nuptial imagery with original mariology [380]. In a recent work on Birgitta's Godlanguage and spirituality, Anna Jane Rossing defines her Marian figure as matriarcal, by turning traditional imitation of Christ into imitation of Mary [441]. I would term Birgitta's doctrine "mariocentric feminism", clearly coherent with her monastic ideal. It is important to note that Birgitta in this respect is quite exceptional, since medieval women mystics are predominantly Christocentric. The period's Marian piety was mainly constructed by men, to serve their intellectual and emotional needs [205]. I provide a thorough analysis of Birgitta's mariology and understanding of herself as a chosen instrument for God's continuous revealing [86]. This study is translated into Italian [88]. I find Birgitta's Christotypic mariology to be inapplicable in the sense of Christological deviation, but significant in terms of gynocentric Godlanguage. I value Birgitta's concept of God's continuous revelation, centered on Christ and displayed by incarnated discourse both in Scripture and tradition [91]. This insight makes her a model of theological inculturation.

Birgitta's *Revelations* have been studied from a Jungian perspective by Hjalmar Sundén [493]. He interprets book 5, a visionary dialogue between Christ as judge and a learned monk who challenges God's stern justice, in terms of Birgitta's *animus*, spurring her spiritual growth [492]. Bridget Morris proposes an identification of this *litteratus magnus in theologia*, who aptly exposes the basic enigmas of Christian theodicy, with Birgitta's former confessor Matthias of Linköping [352]. If this proves correct, I would add that Birgitta's envisioned monk on the ladder implies an intriguing rebuke of male scholasticism. In spite of her political impact and hagiographical success, Birgitta's female-centered monastic project was never fully realised and was soon thwarted.



### 6.13 Caterina da Siena

Birgitta's endeavour to move the papacy back to Rome from Avignon did not succeed, but it was realised through her visionary competitor, the Dominican tertiary Caterina da Siena (died 1380), when Gregorius XI returned in 1377. The result was disastrous, since the election of Urbanus VI in 1378 sparked the Western schism, to continue until 1417. No wonder that the leader of conciliar reform, Jean Gerson, reprehended Birgitta in his *De probatione spirituum* (1415), and more indirectly Caterina in *De distinctione verarum visionum a falsis* (1401). Comparing the two mystics, André Vauchez observes that they never chastised the pontifical establishment as such, but urged reform in the sense of a return to a postulated earlier integrity [513]. Peter Dinzelbacher has recently analysed the political influence of medieval women mystics, such as Hildegard von Bingen, Birgitta and Caterina [149].

As a daughter of a well-to-do dyer, Caterina was illiterate and dictated her works, which were written down in the vernacular. The combined devotional and doctrinal treatise, *Il Dialogo*, has been critically edited by Giuliana Cavallini, who has ably reconstructed the original plan and made the text more comprehensible [109]. Cavallini has also provided critical editions of Caterina's *Orazioni* [107] and the hagiographical account by Tommaso di Antonio Caffarini [108]. Caterina's *Dialogue* [372], *Prayers* [373] and part of her *Letters* [374] are available in English translations by Suzanne Noffke. Concerning the vast literature on Caterina an annotated bibliography is available, which covers the period from 1951 to 1975 [391].

Caterina's achievement of official sainthood is studied by Sofia Boesch Gajano and Odile Redon [47]. The *Legenda Maior* (1395) was written by Caterina's confessor Raimondo da Capua. As master general of the Dominicans, he was motivated by the need of his order to obtain a popular saint, rivalling the Franciscans' Francesco d'Assisi. Traditional hagiographical

themes emerge, stressing Caterina's ascetic practice and mystical rapture, with a significant downplaying of her active share in ecclesiastical and secular politics. This constructed holiness clashes in fact with the forceful Caterina as she appears through her letters. Antonio Volpato surveys Caterina's different biographies, demonstrating their strategy in projecting her charismatic activism into traditional patterns of female sanctity, subjected to churchly authorities [525]. Jörg Jungmayr analyses Caterina's activity in the context of lay evangelisation and the Dominican tertiary movement [265].

As in the case of Birgitta, Caterina's Godlanguage has been less explored than her historical influence. In contrast with Birgitta, Caterina does not provide original theological thinking. She has clearly internalised androcentric discourse, as displayed in Umberto Mattioli's thorough study of her wide use of the terms *virile*, *virilmente* (male, manly) to describe spiritual prowess [318]. Her endorsement of the traditional theme of perfect maleness may explain why Caterina obtained the title *Doctor ecclesiae* under Paulus VI in 1970, shortly after the more outstanding and less androcentric Teresa de Avila (died 1582).

#### 6.14 *Julian of Norwich*

From a female point of view, the learned anchoress Julian of Norwich (died after 1416) is a far more appropriate teacher of the church. Included in the liturgical calendar of the Anglican communion since 1980, this foremother of feminist theology is known under the male saint's name of the church adjoining her anchorage, St. Julian in Conisford. In 1373, when deadly sick at the age of thirty and a half years, she received a healing vision of Christ suffering on the cross. Shortly afterwards, Julian wrote her first version of *Showings* in the vernacular. A longer account was completed in 1393, resulting from theological reflection on the meaning of her mystical experience. Both texts are available

in critical editions, with introductions and commentaries by Edmund Colledge and James Walsh [122], who also provide an English translation [123]. Apparently little read in the 15th and 16th centuries, Julian's long version has survived in five manuscripts, three from mid 17th century, one from the 18th century, together with short extracts from ca. 1500. In 1670 the English Benedictine Hugh P. (Serenus) Cressy published this work, based on one of the manuscripts from ca. 1650. The short version exists only in one manuscript from ca. 1450, identified in 1909 and published in 1911. In comparison with more widely diffused English devotional writings, like those of Richard Rolle (died 1349) and Walter Hilton (died 1396), Julian's *Showings* are sober and intellectually demanding. She displays thorough knowledge of biblical, patristic and medieval sources, as well as of vernacular literature. This breadth of learning points to monastic formation, probably Benedictine.

Already in 1978, I described Julian's original transformation of the traditional, but atypical theme of Christ's motherhood into a new, trinitarian Godlanguage [77]. An enlarged version is translated into Italian [89]. I also provide a broader survey of Julian's theology [92]. In order to verbalise her visionary experience of God's all-embracing love: *that alle thynges schalle be wele* (that all things will be well) (short version ch. 15) [122, 1, p. 249; 123, p. 151], Julian elaborates her concept of divine motherhood (long version, ch. 48, 52, 54, 57-63, 74, 83). Julian's doctrine of *oure moder Cryst* (our Mother Christ) as *oure moder god alle wysdom* (our Mother God all wisdom) starts from sapiential Christology in its patristic and medieval formulation of Christ's womanlike human nature, incarnating himself through maternal mercy. Following traditional texts, Julian connects divinity and humanity by means of Christ's incarnation and resurrection. Her original theology appears when she transposes Christ's motherhood to the preexistent level of triune Godhead, where *the seconde person of the trynyte is oure moder in kynd in oure substanncyall making, in whom we be groundyd and*

*rotyd, and he is oure moder of mercy in oure sensualyte takyng* (and the second person of the Trinity is our Mother in nature in our substantial creation, in whom we are founded and rooted, and he is our Mother of mercy in taking our sensuality) (ch. 58) [122,2, p. 586; 123, p. 294]. Accordingly, Julian transposes her concept of divine wholeness to the human level, since initial creation and redemptional incarnation unify the spiritual and bodily elements of humanity. It is important to note that Julian's use of the terms *substannce* and *sensualyte* does not imply dualistic anthropology. On the contrary, her new Godlanguage aims at transcending the combined androcentric and dualistic split in traditional discourse.

Brant Pelphey's work on Julian's mystical theology includes a short treatment of Christ's divine and human motherhood [400]. Jennifer P. Heimmel discusses this theme in comparison with the earlier English tradition, noting precedents also among continental women mystics [234]. Both authors interpret Julian's Godlanguage in terms of female-gendered experience and as validating human femaleness. I find it essential to add that Julian's thinking is shaped by her given patriarchal culture, in that Christ's maternal qualities are described according to traditional female functions, where the mother is protecting, nurturing and compassionate. In contrast, by placing metaphoric motherhood on the combined divine and human level, Julian does not need traditional female imagery of church or Mary as the new Eve. Her use of androcentric typology remains quite limited and discreet.

### 6.15 Margery Kempe

According to her dictated autobiography, the illiterate Margery Kempe (died after 1438) sought the advice of Julian of Norwich in her effort to emulate saintly women, like Birgitta and Dorothea von Montau (died 1394). This life of a burgher's wife

from Lynn was identified in a mid 15th-century manuscript by Hope Emily Allen in 1934, and published with Sanford Brown Meech in 1940 [332]. An English translation is presented by B.A. Windeatt [548]. The book is very revealing, both of Margery's extravagant imitation of recognised sainthood and of the church's tolerance towards her, since she never challenged ecclesiastical authority. Cured by a vision of Christ from an apparent *post partum* psychosis following her first confinement, Margery succeeded after about twenty years of marriage, with fourteen childbirths, to obtain her husband's consent to continence. The traditional conflict between love of God and sexual activity is here obviously invoked as a liberatory device, making it possible for Margery to leave on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The influence of Margery's scribes, first a layman and then a priest, is discussed by Anthony E. Goodman [208]. Despite the work's naive appearance, he argues that the clerical redactor has organised the material both in a sophisticated and a selective manner, although Margery's reported dialogues with Christ are probably little tampered with. In a congenial study, Clarissa W. Atkinson places Margery in a historical context and points to her acquaintance with continental female mysticism [17]. As a pilgrim she travelled widely, and although illiterate, Margery heard readings from devotional literature and absorbed available preaching. An article of Sarah Beckwith interprets Margery's mystical discourse as identifying with Christ's passion, to be redeemed both from and through her marginal femaleness [28].

#### 6.16 *Caterina Vegri*

Since 1982, Mary Martin McLaughlin and Suzanne Fonay Wemple have led a research project on female monastic culture in the Latin West, from 500 to 1500 [327]. This work is of importance for Women's Studies, since female intellectual

achievement during the Middle Ages was mainly realised within a religious framework. Related to this project, McLaughlin provides a detailed account of the 15th-century female community in Ferrara, *Corpus Domini*, which started as a group of pious laywomen around 1406 [328]. Papal and episcopal attempts to enforce Augustinian rule led to the departure of one group in 1426, founding the monastery of Sant'Agostino. The remaining women were by 1431 manoeuvred into monastic observance as Clarisses.

The Franciscan abbess Caterina Vegri/Vigri (died 1463) was educated at the Este court in Ferrara and joined in 1426, at the age of thirteen, the lay community of *Corpus Domini*. In 1438, Caterina wrote a vernacular treatise on the soul's seven-staged battle to attain spiritual perfection, *Le sette armi spirituali*, which she disclosed only on her death-bed. This work is available in a critical edition by Cecilia Foletti [181]. In 1456, Caterina founded a monastery of Clarisses in Bologna. Among her other writings, Caterina's Latin homilies to the nuns, *Sermones ad sacras virgines*, are not critically edited. Caterina's first biography, *Specchio di Illuminazione*, was written in 1469 by a fellow Clarisse, Illuminata Bembo [141, 31]. Caterina's hagiographical career, leading to canonisation in 1712, is surveyed by Serena Spanò Martinelli [481, 482].

### 6.17 *Christine de Pizan*

After this procession of God-enamoured women, it is stimulating to consider the happily married Christine de Pizan (died ca. 1430). Widowed at the age of twenty-five, she later made a career as a professional writer. Angus J. Kennedy provides an annotated bibliography of her varied writings and the secondary literature, up to 1981 [271]. He now presents a selective bibliography, covering literature from 1980 to 1987 [272]. Christine wrote prose works on historical, political and

philosophical themes, and over a hundred poems. Many of her writings are directly concerned with women's existence, where she reacts against clerical misogyny, but without challenging creational gender hierarchy. During the years 1401-1403, the so-called *Querelle de la Rose* waged around Jehan de Meung's addition (end 13th century) to the courtly *Romant de la Rose*, written by Guillaume de Lorris (ca. 1236). Already by 1399, in her *Epistre au dieu d'Amours*, Christine objected to Meung's despising of chivalric love. Provoked by Jean de Montreuil, Christine engaged in debate with him and the brothers Gontier and Pierre Col. In 1402 she presented the dossier, *Les epistres du debat sus Le Romant de la Rose*, to queen Isabeau de Bavière in order to gain her support. The whole polemic is edited by Eric Hicks [243] and further studied by Pierre-Yves Badel [19]. The chancellor of the University of Paris, Jean Gerson, sided with Christine, but it is important to note that their argumentation differs. Conforming to the traditional depreciation of sexual activity, Gerson mainly reacts against male debauchery. Christine condemns Jehan de Meung's exhortation to exploit women because she values human love, especially within marriage.

Christine's defence of female integrity against Meung's denigration of women, depicted as both morally weak and wicked, is further elaborated in the *Livre de la Cité des Dames*, finished in 1405. This work is available in modern French [244] and English [428] translations. Christine's building of a women's citadel displays impressive "her-story", invoking classical, biblical and hagiographical sources. Aided by the allegorical ladies, *Raison*, *Droiture* and *Justice*, Christine illustrates female virtuous power and exemplary sainthood, thereby arguing in favour of women's political and cultural capability. Christine's validation of womanhood is pursued in the *Livre des Trois Vertus*, written in 1405. This work is presented in critical edition by Charity Cannon Willard and Eric Hicks [541]. Willard's English translation is introduced with Madeleine Perner Cosman [130]. Christine here outlines exemplary female behaviour

according to her period's social stratification, but she is original in addressing the lower classes as well. All women, from the queen to the wives of commoners, are exhorted to qualify for their respective tasks, and also to be able to fulfil their husbands' functions in case of necessity. Willard has earlier analysed the *Livre des Trois Vertus* in its 15th-century context [538]. Liliane Dulac compares Christine's advice to widows with Francesco da Barberino's (died 1348) *Del Reggimento e Costumi di Donna*, written ca. one hundred years previously [165]. Dulac also explores the heroic widow Semiramis of the *Livre de la Cité des Dames*, in comparison to her figure in Boccaccio's (died 1375) *De Claris Mulieribus* [164]. Christine's more woman-centered variants of earlier models are equally discussed by Christine M. Reno, concerning her first full-length work, *Epistre d'Othéa a Hector* (1399) [425].

The impact of Christine de Pizan's feminism was already assessed in 1911 by Rose Rigaud [433], followed by the studies of Mathilde Laigle [285] in 1912 and Marie-Josèphe Pinet [410] in 1927. Diane Bornstein has edited a collection of articles on ideals for women in Christine's writings [49]. Joan Kelly considered her a pioneer, anticipating women's defence in the so-called *Querelle des femmes*, which continued through the 18th century [269]. Beatrice Gottlieb places Christine's thinking in historical and religious context, pointing to the anachronism involved when measuring her in terms of 20th-century feminist theory [210]. Both Enid McLeod [330] and Régine Pernoud [406] have studied Christine's life and thought, followed by Charity Cannon Willard's comprehensive account of Christine's historical background and survey of her work [540]. Since Christine was the daughter of an Italian astrologer at Charles V's court, Willard has also analysed her astronomical knowledge in the sense of cosmology and anthropology, pointing to Christine's skeptical attitude to what she understood as superstition [539]. A new volume of articles on Christine's writings is edited by Earl Jeffrey Richards [429].



Christine's last writing, the *Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc*, is presented in a critical edition and English translation by Angus J. Kennedy and Kenneth Varty [270]. In this piece of God-sanctioned, feminist nationalism, Jehanne is defined as follows: *Hee! quel honneur au femenin/Sexe! Que Dieu l'ayme il appert* (Oh! what honour for the female sex! It is perfectly obvious that God has special regard for it) (XXXIV) [270, pp. 265-266]. In her analysis of this poem, Liliane Dulac interprets Christine's faith in Jehanne as divinely inspired to rescue France in the context of her earlier appreciation of women's prophetic power [166]. Completed on July 31 in 1429, Christine's *éloge* joins Jean Gerson's recognition of Jehanne's God-given mission in *De Quadam Puella*, written before her victory at Orléans on May 8 the same year. This text is edited and commented by Dorothy G. Wayman [528]. Debora Fraioli has compared earlier writings in Jehanne's favour, noting Christine's more woman-centered approach [182]. She praises Jehanne as a female warrior, whereas Gerson invokes the traditional theme of God's action through womanly weakness and downplays her male attire. Gerson refers, like Christine, to biblical heroines and not to medieval prophetesses like Birgitta and Caterina da Siena, who were not so dear to him. In contrast, André Vauchez places Jehanne with other of the 14th- and 15th-century prophetic women mystics, noting several French precedents [512].

The enigmatic figure of Jehanne d'Arc, accused of and condemned for both witchcraft and heresy, to be burned at the stake in 1431, eludes classification in terms of Women's Studies. Nevertheless, she deserves mentioning both in the context of and in contrast to the discursive Christine de Pizan. It is important to note that the main events are all determined by political conjectures: her death, her rehabilitation in 1456, and her canonisation in 1920. The acts of Jehanne's inquisitorial trial are available in critical edition with a French translation [503]. Rich in material, they provide a fairly comprehensive picture of the

illiterate Jehanne's thought and action. Particularly pertinent is Jehanne's answer to the treacherous question about her so-called state of grace: *Se je ny y suis, Dieu m'y veuille mettre; et se je y suis, Dieu m'y veuille tenir* (If I am not, God will place me in this state, if I am, God will preserve me there) (24-2-1431) [503, 1, p. 62]. The acts of Jehanne's rehabilitation trial are also critically edited, with French translation [167]. These sources are explored by Régine Pernoud in her knowledgeable survey of Jehanne's career [402], and presentation of rehabilitation testimonies [403]. Reliable biographies are provided by W.S. Scott [471] and Frances Gies [196], attentive to the interaction of historical facts and legendary survival. Ingvald Raknem has traced Jehanne d'Arc in later history and literature [420].

Two recent studies consider *La Pucelle* from a feminist viewpoint. Marina Warner interprets Jehanne as an example of female achievement in male disguise [527]. This can be seen as a variant of the traditional theme of woman becoming salvationally male, although Jehanne's purpose was to save France. For Anne Llewellyn Barstow, Jehanne is a mystic acting as shaman and thereby understood in context of so-called popular religion, with pre-Christian roots [22]. In any case, Jehanne d'Arc emerges as a woman of power, realising her potential beyond the limits of established male authority. She can therefore serve as a model of female self-determination.

## Conclusion

Women's Studies of the medieval Christian tradition display an effective female dismantling of male-constructed barriers. The obstacles raised by theological anthropology, sexology and canon law were in fact surmounted by many women, as made visible through their history, hagiography and writings. The main tenets of this confrontation are men's creational priority and women's salvational parity, accepted as normative by both parties. When

contemporary doctrine anticipates redemptive democracy by deeming it valid for this world, traditional gender asymmetry rests disadvantageous for women. In medieval times the perspective is exactly the opposite, in that women's redeemed equivalence implies God's enhancement of inferior femaleness to a level of perfect male humanity. Medieval Christology also emphasises womanly vulnerability as instrumental for revealing divine power. In this context feeble women can act as God's chosen instruments through gifts of prophetic charisma and mystical grace, thereby anticipating salvational fulfilment. In contrast, a creational gender hierarchy structures the institutional church, whereby cultic performance is restricted to the male priesthood. The resulting incoherence between ecclesiastical androcentricity and charismatic gynocentricity is particularly manifest in the lives and writings of religious women. Due to the church's dominance in medieval society, theological arguments both legitimate and strengthen male-centered social structures. On the other hand, the doctrinal affirmation of equivalence in the order of redemption forces the church to tolerate female mystics and prophets, provided that they submit to clerical control of their activities and writings.

Medieval women's history, hagiography and written works amply demonstrate their proficient exploitation of this religious outlet for female assertion. Their ensuing strategies of survival in both an androcentric church and society, including various degrees of internalisation and/or transformation of man-made norms and values, are clarified by Women's Studies. Bio-social femaleness as a main analytical category has until now proved most fruitful in research on hagiographical material and women's writings, but is equally indispensable for the study of historical sources. In the context of medieval studies in general, research on female existence is of primary importance as a hermeneutical model. Unfortunately, current works on the philosophy and theology of the Middle Ages are often virtually gender-blind, that is, either androcentrically identifying male genderedness

with exemplary humanity or asexually reducing the significance of bio-social gender in human existence. Women's Studies will eventually become obsolete as a special discipline when human genderedness, both female and male, will be fully integrated as an essential factor of interpretation in all fields of research.

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Etudes relatives aux femmes et à leur rôle  
dans les cultures musulmanes  
du VII<sup>e</sup> au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle\*

Cet article se propose de présenter les principaux travaux qui, publiés dans une langue européenne après 1970, ont apporté de nouvelles connaissances sur les femmes et sur le rôle qu'elles ont joué dans les cultures musulmanes, de la fondation de l'Islam à la fin du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle. Nous définirons donc notre domaine de la façon la plus large possible, car nous nous trouvons ici devant un champ de recherche relativement récent; les publications pertinentes font défaut et les lacunes demeurent considérables. Ainsi notre attention se portera-t-elle sur les publications qui touchent à la situation juridique et sociale des femmes, tout autant que sur celles qui explicitent l'idée que ces cultures se faisaient de la femme ou de sa contribution au développement social et culturel de la société musulmane.

Le petit nombre d'études historiques nouvelles contraste avec le nombre toujours croissant des ouvrages consacrés à "la femme en islam", ces derniers se fondent tous sur une conception *implicite* de l'histoire et de l'évolution culturelle. Une simple consultation des différentes bibliographies parues depuis 1980, comme celle de Megdhessian [48], permettra de se faire une idée de la diversité de ces publications. Pour ce qui est des

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\* Version élargie de l'article dans eds. G. Fløistad, R. Klibansky: *Contemporary Philosophy. A New Survey* 6, 1003-1024. Dordrecht, Boston, MA, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990.

sciences sociales, on se reportera à la publication de l'UNESCO de 1984 [85].

Les raisons de cette floraison sont loin d'être dépourvues d'intérêt pour notre sujet, l'une d'elles étant la naissance et l'épanouissement dans les années 1970 du mouvement féministe et des "Women's Studies". A partir de la fin de cette décennie, on enregistre aussi un intérêt croissant pour l'Islam. Conséquence directe des fluctuations politiques, cet intérêt en vint, comme il se conçoit, à englober également la question de la femme, domaine aujourd'hui fortement politisé: du point de vue islamiste, toutes les questions se rapportant aux rôles impartis à chaque sexe ou ayant trait à la famille concernent directement la question de l'Etat islamique. Dans les diverses langues européennes également on peut signaler une importante production d'ouvrages islamistes de caractère apologétique qui, de par leurs interprétations du Coran et de la littérature du hadith, présentent une conception de la femme intégrante à une anthropologie immuable et a-historique.

Nous ne nous arrêterons pas ici sur cette littérature, dominante dans le monde musulman. Un article de Hjärpe [36] nous donnera une idée des interprétations coraniques et des lignes directrices sur lesquelles s'appuie le choix des hadiths utilisés pour légitimer une conception islamiste ou traditionaliste de la femme.

### **Présentation des problèmes de théorie et de méthode**

Il existe aujourd'hui un nombre infime de publications qui traitent explicitement des problèmes de théorie et de méthode liés à une étude historique de la femme dans les cultures musulmanes.

Dans un article consacré au thème de la sexualité dans les sociétés musulmanes de l'époque classique, Rosenthal [67] cherche à définir ce que les sources littéraires peuvent apporter

à nos connaissances sociologiques. A la lumière de cette problématique générale, il montre comment s'articule la question de la femme dans les différents genres de la littérature classique.

Dans l'introduction à leur recueil d'articles intitulé *Women in the Muslim World* [13], Beck et Keddie évoquent quelques-uns de ces problèmes. Un article de Keddie [40], succinct mais de grande importance, signale qu'un des obstacles majeurs à une image nuancée et historiquement correcte de la place de la femme dans les sociétés musulmanes vient des chercheurs eux-mêmes pour qui ce sont les textes théologico-juridiques qui en premier lieu nous renseignent sur le statut des femmes. Keddie insiste sur la nécessité d'utiliser des sources variées et souligne en outre qu'il serait souhaitable d'établir une approche méthodique facilitant aux historiens du passé l'utilisation du matériel socio-anthropologique contemporain. Ce point de vue avait déjà été effleuré en 1971 par Arkoun [8] dans son étude sur l'humanisme arabe au X<sup>e</sup> siècle<sup>1</sup>.

Rassam [65] également a formulé des points de vue intéressants pour les études historiques.

### **Aperçus historiques**

Pour répondre au besoin d'information du grand public fleurit aujourd'hui tout un ensemble de publications qui, outre qu'elles traitent des questions contemporaines, s'intéressent aussi aux femmes du passé, comme le font Beck et Keddie [13] ou encore Fernea et Bezirgan [29].

Il existe également plusieurs présentations historiques qui systématisent et résument nos connaissances. Par sa connaissance directe des sources littéraires, la présentation de Tomiche [82], publiée en 1967, mérite toujours notre attention. Il nous faut aussi signaler les livres de Walther [89] et de Waddy [88]. Quant au bref article d'Arnaldez [11], il esquisse plusieurs thèmes

centraux qui touchent à la conception de la femme et au statut légal des femmes à l'époque classique.

L'article de Denny [24] fait le tour des renseignements que peut apporter l'art musulman.

Une caractéristique commune à plusieurs de ces aperçus historiques réside dans le fait qu'ils puisent tous à des articles ou à des monographies antérieurs à 1960. Deux noms, Abbot et Smith, reviennent dans presque toutes les références, et il convient de mentionner tout particulièrement d'une part la monographie de Nadia Abbot sur l'épouse du Prophète A'isha [1], ainsi que sa monographie consacrée aux souveraines de Bagdad [2], d'autre part la monographie de Margaret Smith consacrée à la mystique Rabi'a [78]. Les trois monographies ont fait l'objet de rééditions depuis 1980.

### **La femme dans l'Islam primitif**

Poète de l'Age d'or, al-Jahiz signalait déjà dans son traité sur les esclaves chanteuses, *Kitab al-qiyam* [14], que dans leurs contacts sociaux les femmes étaient plus libres "avant le voile", c'est-à-dire avant l'Islam ou dans les tout premiers temps de l'Islam.

Les études contemporaines reprennent souvent le même point de vue; Smith [74] se penche sur une problématique globale et se demande si les femmes jouaient un rôle plus actif et plus central à une époque primitive, alors que la religion n'avait pas encore eu le temps de s'établir. Ahmed développe ses points de vue sur l'Islam primitif et sur la situation des femmes, d'abord dans un article [4], et ensuite dans un ouvrage qui couvre tout le développement historique des cultures musulmanes, de l'époque du Prophète jusqu'à nos jours [5].

Dans le but de montrer les grandes lignes historiques de l'évolution, quelques tentatives d'utilisation du Coran et de la littérature du hadith ont été faites, parmi celles-ci on se doit de



signaler la petite étude de Smith et Haddad [75] sur le sort des femmes dans l'au-delà.

Un second article de Smith et Haddad [76] fait la lumière sur les différentes versions du récit de la création de l'homme et sur la façon dont elles sont commentées dans les recueils de hadiths. Ces deux études s'attachent à montrer à quel point le livre sacré fut interprété dans le sens d'une accentuation toujours plus marquée du statut secondaire pour la femme. Dans une étude parue en 1987 Mernissi [50] part du Coran et des hadiths pour montrer quelle était la liberté de la femme au temps du Prophète et dans l'Islam primitif. L'article de Smith et Haddad [77] sur la Vierge Marie dans le Coran, les commentaires coraniques et la littérature du hadith ouvre des perspectives intéressantes sur l'anthropologie religieuse de l'époque classique. Dans ce même contexte, on lira aussi avec intérêt l'article de McAuliffe [47] sur la Vierge Marie et Fatima.

### **Famille, sexualité et société**

L'étude de la famille au Moyen-Age européen constitue un champ de recherche relativement récent. Pour ce qui a trait à l'étude des cultures musulmanes, le parallèle est pratiquement introuvable. De ce fait, la monographie de Goitein [33] sur la famille dans les sociétés méditerranéennes du X<sup>e</sup> au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, étude basée sur la documentation de Geniza du Caire, mérite une attention toute particulière. La population productrice de ces documents, des marchands juifs, comprenait de nombreux immigrants de fraîche date venus de toutes les parties arabisées du monde méditerranéen. Les références à la loi islamique et aux modalités d'application de cette loi, comme aux coutumes et aux moeurs musulmanes sont fréquentes, et nous rendent l'ouvrage de Goitein particulièrement intéressant dans notre contexte.

Cette même documentation de Geniza a été plusieurs fois utilisée pour des études récentes; un exemple intéressant du

genre d'informations disponibles nous est offert par Stillman [81] dans sa petite étude du costume féminin.

Quant à la question de la parenté et du lignage, c'est l'étude de Cheloud [20] qu'il nous faut mentionner.

La monographie de Guichard [35] sur les structures sociales de l'Espagne musulmane du VIII<sup>e</sup> au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle représente une intéressante contribution à la compréhension des structures familiales de la société arabe (et berbère) traditionnelle(s), et explicite la confrontation qui existait en Espagne comme en Sicile entre deux systèmes différenciés: le système de parenté de type "oriental" et celui où les structures sont de type "occidental". Guichard traite en détail le rôle social et culturel de la femme, en soulignant que la civilisation de l'Espagne musulmane ne semble pas s'être beaucoup éloignée de ses racines orientales, bagdadiennes en particulier. Dans un court essai Arkoun [9] étudie les unions mixtes à l'époque classique et il s'appuie, pour ce faire, sur des résultats de recherche obtenus par Guichard.

La monographie de Dillard [25] sur le rôle de la femme pendant la Reconquête et la colonisation (*re población*) des régions précédemment musulmanes nous présente un autre aspect historique d'une Espagne médiévale où plusieurs villes du nord abritaient d'importantes minorités de juifs et de musulmans. L'utilisation d'un matériel jusque-là inutilisé, avant tout des documents juridiques, permet à l'étude de Dillard de pénétrer la société citadine où les femmes musulmanes, libres ou esclaves, se trouvaient à l'échelon le plus bas de l'échelle sociale.

Les études récentes sur les conditions de vie de la femme dans d'autres parties du monde musulman font encore défaut. Pour être avant tout descriptive, l'étude de Raziq [66] n'en est pas moins précieuse: elle s'attache aux conditions de vie des femmes dans les couches élevées de la société égyptienne sous le règne des Mamelouks (1250-1517).

Sources littéraires fort intéressantes même si rarement utilisées, les dictionnaires biographiques nous éclairent sur la

conception de la femme et sur ses conditions de vie. Une étude brève mais substantielle de Lufti [42] analyse le *Kitab al-Nisa* de al-Sakhawi (mort en 1497): par son approche critique et réfléchie, Lufti éclaire les différentes formes de renseignements que ce genre de sources peut apporter.

L'étude de Musallam [57] sur le développement démographique des sociétés musulmanes médiévales soulève dans toute son étendue la question ayant trait à l'utilisation des textes littéraires comme source de connaissance sociologique. Pour ce qui nous intéresse ici, mentionnons sa présentation du débat sur les questions juridiques et éthiques relatives au contrôle des naissances et à l'avortement, un débat dont les différents genres de la littérature classique se font l'écho.

Un autre aspect de ce même débat, qui touche de très près à l'anthropologie philosophique et religieuse, est constitué par les différentes théories sur la conception et sur l'embryologie, ces théories nous donnent en même temps différents points de vue sur le rôle de la femme dans la gestation. Les écrits des théologiens-juristes reflètent l'influence de Galien et de la tradition hippocratique; un article de Belguedj [15] montre que l'on trouve déjà chez les premiers commentateurs du Coran ce qui semble être la trace de doctrines hippocratiques. Plus tard des points de vue hippocratiques seront clairement formulés, comme chez l'exégète Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (mort en 1209), où la participation de la femme est considérée comme aussi importante que celle de l'homme: "Il y a dans l'homme des germes de sexe masculin et des germes de sexe féminin, dans la femme pareillement." Ce point de vue a été à la base de bien des considérations sur la légalité des pratiques contraceptives chez les juristes musulmans de l'époque classique.

La monographie de Boudhiba intitulée *La sexualité en Islam* [17] est pour l'heure l'une des plus importantes contributions qui nous permettent de saisir les différentes compréhensions de la sexualité dans la littérature arabe classique.

Dans un recueil d'articles consacré au thème de la sexualité dans les sociétés musulmanes médiévales, publié par Marsot [46], nous trouvons l'article de Goitein [34] consacré aux moeurs sexuelles des "gens ordinaires", cette étude a été réalisée grâce à la documentation de Geniza.

Dans le cadre d'un travail culturel et anthropologique plus vaste consacré à l'étude historique de la légitimation et du contrôle de la procréation dans les différentes cultures, on remarquera la contribution de Motzki [53] sur les rapports entre droit religieux et sexualité dans l'Islam primitif. Motzki [56] analyse également le verset 39 de la sourate 75, dans la même perspective historique et anthropologique.

L'idée que l'on se fait de l'enfant et de sa socialisation touche de près à la question de la femme. Mais les études sur ce sujet sont pourtant rares et la contribution de Motzki [55] sur "l'enfant dans l'Islam médiéval" est particulièrement bienvenue.

### **Le statut de la femme dans le *fiqh* de l'époque classique**

Le statut de la femme est réglé en détail par la loi religieuse. Historiquement, les pratiques ne semblent pas avoir heurté de front les coutumes traditionnelles des Arabes en matière de structures familiales, et elles ont presque toutes subsisté.

On a coutume de considérer comme mineures les différences qui séparent les diverses écoles juridiques (*madhhab*). Cependant, il serait intéressant d'examiner si ces différences ne se font pas plus marquantes pour les femmes que pour les hommes, et donc si l'on ne sous-estime pas partiellement l'importance de ces différences en omettant de se pencher sur la question des sexes. Comme le montre l'étude de Madelung [45], c'est précisément en rapport avec le statut de la femme que le *fiqh* chiite présente des différences notables avec le *fiqh* sunnite.

Les diverses interprétations de la loi selon les régions géographiques et culturelles comme le décalage important entre

la réalité sociale et le *fiqh* abstrait sont illustrés par les études substantielles d'Idris [39] sur les contrats de mariage andalous; ceux-ci nous sont connus par les recueils de *fatwas*, énorme corpus de consultations juridiques rendues par les juristes musulmans d'Occident et compilées à la fin du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle par al-Wansarishi (mort en 1508).

En étudiant 14 décisions juridiques (*iqrar*) prises à al-Quds (Jérusalem) de 1379 à 1388, Lufti [43] a montré à quel point différents types de documents juridiques peuvent éclairer d'un tout autre jour le rôle économique et social joué par les femmes dans la société traditionnelle. Les aspects de la participation des femmes à la vie économique ont également été traités par Schatzmiller [69].

Un court article de Bowen [18] traite des différents points de vue émis par les écoles juridiques sur *azl* (*coitus interruptus*), ainsi que des conséquences juridiques des méthodes de contraception selon les différentes catégories de femmes (épouse légitime libre mariée à un homme libre, esclave concubine etc.) Dans un article sur la régulation du comportement sexuel au Moyen Age, Coulson [23] discute des peines qui, juridiquement, frappent ce qui a trait à la *zina* (adultère, fornication).

Le statut important d'*umm al-walad* (concubine-mère) est traité dans un article de Blanche et Lourde [16], basé sur la Risala d'un des plus anciens docteurs de la loi malékite, Ibn Abu Zayd al-Qayrawani (mort en 996).

La première partie de la monographie d'Esposito [28] sur la situation de la femme d'après la loi islamique est consacrée à l'époque classique; la monographie de Coulson [22] sur le droit successoral explique les conditions d'héritage pour les femmes libres. Quant à la question du droit successoral de la femme dans le Coran, Powers [63] propose une nouvelle lecture du verset 12 de la sourate 4. L'étude de Powers est d'autant plus importante qu'il s'agit du contrôle de la circulation des biens hors du lignage mâle. La lecture de ce même verset est deve-

loppée par Arkoun dans un article publié dans la deuxième édition du *Lecture du Coran* [10].

Une explication de la terminologie coranique employée pour les différentes catégories de femmes touche en même temps à l'éthique du mariage et de la sexualité selon le Coran. Motzki [54] se penche sur la question dans un article consacré au verset 24 de la sourate 4, un verset du Coran fort discuté.

Plusieurs articles de la nouvelle édition de *l'Encyclopédie de l'Islam* [27] traitent également des divers aspects du statut juridique de la femme à l'époque classique.

### **Les femmes et le pouvoir politique**

La femme n'était pas considérée comme une personne officielle, et aucune place ne lui était réservée dans la vie politique. Un hadith souvent cité déclare: "Ne connaîtra jamais la prospérité le peuple qui confie ses affaires à une femme." Ici aussi existent différentes interprétations. Madelung [44] mentionne que la doctrine kharidjite de l'*imama*, au moins en théorie, ouvre aux femmes la possibilité de remplir la plus haute fonction politico-religieuse.

A travers l'histoire, plusieurs sociétés islamiques nous offrent des exemples de femmes ayant exercé un pouvoir *de facto*. Autant Lufti [42] que Nègre [58] montrent que les historiens arabes s'en sont préoccupés. D'après Lewis [41] l'Égyptienne Sitt al-Mulk (morte en 1027) a régné "competently and vigourously"; et toujours d'après Lewis, la sultane Shajar al-Durr était "a woman of remarkable ability". Nous trouvons chez Chapoutot-Remadi [19] une présentation de la vie de cette même Shajar al-Durr, tandis que Spellberg a consacré quelques pages à Nizam al-Mulk [80]. L'étude de Mernissi [51] sur les "femmes chefs d'Etat" est également à signaler. Mais ces exemples mis à part, les historiens ont laissé le domaine en friche.

## "Les femmes savantes" dans la tradition arabe

Le souvenir des femmes célèbres pour leurs compétences scientifique ou littéraire comme pour leur autorité spirituelle remonte aux tout premiers temps de l'Islam. Certains auteurs arabes de l'époque classique parlent des femme-poètes, et des femmes savantes sont mentionnées dans tous les genres de la littérature classique.

Dans *Muhammedanische Studien* de 1888-1890, Ignaz von Goldzier consacra un petit nombre de pages aux femmes spécialistes de la transmission des hadiths, ce thème fut ensuite pratiquement négligé des chercheurs.

Parmi les premiers auteurs qui se penchèrent sur les femmes-transmetteurs de hadiths se trouve Ibn Sa'ad (mort en 845); Fück [30] signale que parmi les 4250 transmetteurs de hadiths mentionnés par Ibn Sa'ad, 600 sont des femmes. A propos d'A'isha, la femme du Prophète, Watt [91] précise que la tradition lui reconnaît 1200 hadiths, dont 300 se trouvent chez al-Bukhari et chez Muslim.

Une brève étude de Nègre [58] traite du thème des femmes savantes dans les ouvrages historiques de Shams al-din al-Dahabi (mort en 1348). Turc vivant à Damas, al-Dahabi s'intéressait particulièrement aux femmes d'origine turque; ainsi omet-il de mentionner les femmes par ailleurs si célèbres d'al-Andalus. L'autre pépinière de femmes savantes, selon le choix de Dahabi, se situe à Ispahan et au Khorasan. Parmi les femmes mentionnées, on remarque entre autres des spécialistes (*rawiya*) de la transmission des textes, des traditionnistes (*muhaddita*), des spécialistes de la transmission de la tradition (*musnida*), des prédicatrices populaires (*wa'iza*) et même des rédacteurs de chancellerie (*katiba*) ainsi qu'une femme chef des lecteurs du Coran.

L'article de Lufti [42] mentionné ci-dessus illustre à quel point les dictionnaires biographiques peuvent fournir des informations intéressantes: al-Sakhawi raconte qu'il a lui-même

eu des professeurs et des élèves de sexe féminin; il aurait aussi entretenu une correspondance avec des femmes-écrivains et il parle de plusieurs femmes savantes de son temps, mentionnant leurs différentes activités et leurs compétences formelles. Ces femmes n'avaient cependant pas accès aux postes salariés des institutions enseignantes, aucune de leurs oeuvres n'a été transmise, et aucune de ces femmes n'est mentionnée comme faisant autorité en son domaine.

Quant à l'image de la femme dans la poésie courtoise, aucune monographie ne lui a encore été consacrée; cependant, dans bien des contextes, les allusions n'y manquent pas. La monographie de Vadet [86] de 1968 reste encore le livre de référence, et Arié [7] donne un aperçu de ce genre littéraire dans un bref article sur Ibn Hazm (mort en 1064).

Les différentes conceptions de l'amour et de la femme dans la tradition littéraire constituent un thème plus vaste qui ne peut qu'être effleuré ici. Les monographies font défaut, mais plusieurs présentations, comme l'étude de Miquel et Kemp [52] consacrée à la légende de Majnun, approchent ces thèmes.

Walther [90] traite rapidement de l'image de la femme dans les *Contes des Mille et Une Nuits*; Southgate [79] a analysé les moeurs islamiques en conflit avec les normes sociales dans la version du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle du récit de Vis et Ramin. Van Gelder [31] donne un aperçu de la tendance misogyne de la poésie arabe dans une brève étude du dernier chapitre d'*Hamasa* d'Abu Tammam (mort en 850). Un article de Weil [92] est consacré à l'image de la femme telle qu'elle se présente dans l'un des rares recueils de poésie de la littérature *adab* (XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle); enfin plusieurs articles de Marsot [46] touchent également à cet aspect de la littérature *adab*.



## "Leur vie se déroule comme celle des plantes"

Cette remarque concernant les femmes musulmanes est tirée d'un texte d'Averroès (mort en 1199) et elle est citée par Tomiche, Guichard et Arkoun. Ce passage présente l'exemple unique d'un regard critique et lucide sur les effets psychologiques des conditions sociales:

"Notre état social ne laisse pas aux femmes la possibilité de donner leur mesure. Elles paraissent destinées uniquement à donner naissance à des enfants et à les nourrir. Cet état de servitude a détruit chez elles la faculté pour les grandes choses. Voilà pourquoi on ne voit pas chez nous de femmes douées de vertus morales. Leur vie se déroule comme celle des plantes ... "

L'originalité du jugement d'Averroès apparaît avec plus de clarté encore si on le compare avec d'autres attitudes plus conformistes, comme celle d'un Ibn Hazm (mort en 1064), contemporain de Wallada, qui écrit dans son *Collier*: "Les femmes n'ont pas d'autres préoccupations que l'union sexuelle, l'amour et ses différents aspects ... car elles ne s'occupent pas d'autre chose et n'ont pas été créées pour autre chose."

Les textes existent, mais les différents aspects de l'anthropologie des philosophes arabes ne sont pas encore explorés. Quelques traits particuliers sont cependant soulignés. Lorsque nous savons à quel point par exemple Platon était lu et commenté par les philosophes arabes, il est remarquable de constater, au moins pour ce qui nous est accessible de leurs écrits, combien l'interaction entre les sexes en tant que facteur social et politique leur paraissent étrangères: Rosenthal [67] signale pourtant les remarques succinctes d'Ibn Sina (mort en 1037), et les commentaires qu'al-Farabi (mort en 950) nous a laissés sur *La République*.

## Les poétesses d'al-Andalus

Des auteurs arabes comme Ibn Bassam (mort en 1147), al-Suyuti (mort en 1505) et al-Maqqari (mort en 1632) parlent des poétesses d'al-Andalus aux XI<sup>e</sup>, XII<sup>e</sup> et XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles, et donnent des exemples de leur production littéraire.

Tous trois signalent la princesse umayyade Wallada al-Mustakfi (morte en 1091), femme-poète qui tenait un salon littéraire à Cordoue. Wallada maîtrisait la poésie amoureuse tout comme le genre satirique, et dans son article consacré à Ibn Zaidun et à Wallada, Hoenerbach [37] situe la poésie de Wallada dans une tradition orientale, il se réfère en particulier à la célèbre Ulayya (VII<sup>e</sup> siècle) qui joua un rôle important dans le milieu courtois bagdadien.

Nichols [59] se penche sur Wallada et sur la question de l'influence orientale sur la poésie andalouse; les poétesses arabes sont mentionnées dans un aperçu [60], et un petit article traite de l'image de la femme dans la poésie médiévale arabe [61].

Quelques rares essais faits pour traduire cette poésie, dont un poème de la grande Hafsa bint al-Hajj (morte vers 1190), ont été publiés par Udhari et Wightman [84].

On remarquera encore que l'étude la plus complète que nous ayons sur les poétesses arabes de cette période demeure celle de Giacomo [32] sur Hafsa bint al-Hajj, publiée en 1947.

## Les femmes dans la tradition mystique

Le manque d'études sur le rôle joué par les femmes aux premiers temps du soufisme, ou, plus tard, à l'intérieur de diverses confréries religieuses (*turuq*), est flagrant. En général, les nouveaux aperçus consacrent au mieux une demi-page aux branches féminines des ordres soufis. Trimmingham [83] mentionne par exemple les sept couvents de femmes d'Aleppo,

fondés entre 1150 et 1250; Bagdad avait plusieurs de ces couvents dont le *ribat* de Fatima Razaya était le plus connu; de semblables institutions existaient au Caire. Ici aussi l'article de Lufti [42] nous donne des renseignements intéressants: les biographies d'al-Sakhawi signalent comment les femmes s'organisaient en couvents qui leur étaient propres, à la tête desquels se trouvaient une *shaikha*; les femmes répudiées pouvaient y séjourner jusqu'à ce que se présente à elles une occasion de remariage.

La monographie de Meier [49] sur le mystique Abu Sa'id-i Abu l'Khayr (mort en 1049) mentionne les disciples-femmes d'Abu Sa'id. Dans son étude sur la doctrine d'Ibn Arabi (mort en 1240), Chodkiewicz [21] explique de quelle façon ce grand philosophe arabe d'Andalousie concevait l'autorité spirituelle des femmes et la place qui leur était échue dans la hiérarchie des saints.

Dans sa monographie intitulée "Les dimensions mystiques de l'Islam" [70], Schimmel nous donne une idée de quelles furent, au cours de l'histoire, les activités des femmes dans les différentes confréries, y compris à l'extérieur des régions de cultures arabes; tout un chapitre y est consacré à "l'élément féminin dans le soufisme". Son étude de l'oeuvre du mystique Jalal al-Din Rumi (mort en 1273) [71] montre clairement le rôle joué par les femmes dans l'ordre Mawlawiya. Dans un article sur "les femmes dans l'Islam mystique" [73] Schimmel résume plusieurs de ces thèmes; quant à l'image de la femme dépeinte dans les textes soufis, elle la développe dans une courte étude consacrée à Eros dans la littérature soufie [72]. Les travaux de Schimmel qui traitent explicitement du rôle de la femme dans le soufisme nous sont précieux, leur nombre est pourtant restreint: il s'agit d'un champ de recherche d'une très grande richesse, jusqu'ici quasiment inexploré.

Rabi'a al-Adawiyya (morte en 801) est la seule mystique qui ait fait à elle seule l'objet d'une monographie; cette biographie de Rabi'a par Smith [78] date de 1928 et c'est aujourd'hui un

classique; elle a été rééditée en 1984 avec une préface de Schimmel. La présentation que donne al-Sakkanini [68] de la vie de Rabi'a a été traduite de l'arabe en anglais en 1982; une réédition du récit hagiographique de Farid al-Din Attar (mort en 1230) dans la traduction d'Arberry [6] met à notre portée l'une des plus importantes sources que l'on ait sur la vie de Rabi'a; enfin un petit choix de textes de Rabi'a est reproduit chez Fernea et Bezirgan [29], chez Barnestone [12] et chez Oudaimah et Pfister [62].

Extrêmement peu d'études sont consacrées aux saintes et au culte qui leur fut rendu avant 1500. De ce fait nous ne manquerons pas de remarquer la contribution intéressante qu'apporte Ragib [64] avec son étude approfondie d'al-Sayyida Nafisa, l'une des saintes égyptiennes les plus populaires, qui attirait des foules de pèlerins originaires de tout le monde méditerranéen.

Dans la nouvelle édition de *l'Encyclopédie de l'Islam* se trouvent plusieurs nouvelles biographies de saintes, comme le petit article d'Abdul-Wahab sur la Tunisienne A'isha al-Mannubiyya (XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle) [3] ou comme le long article que Veccia Vaglieri [87] consacre à la fille du Prophète, Fatima. Dans ce contexte nous signalons également l'article d'Elias [26] consacré à la femme et à la féminité dans la mystique musulmane.

## Conclusion

Après 1970 la recherche s'est donc agrandie de quelques nouveaux acquis: la fleuraison des "Women's Studies" en général, combinée avec un intérêt grandissant pour l'anthropologie historique, pour les études historiques sur la famille et pour la démographie historique ont contribué à stimuler les études consacrées à la femme dans les cultures musulmanes. On voit ici comment les sources littéraires arabes, telles que les dictionnaires

biographiques, peuvent être une mine de renseignements riches et variés tandis que l'étude de documents juridiques, *fatwas* ou *iqrars*, montre comment la loi fut concrètement appliquée. C'est ainsi que l'image du statut religieux et social de la femme se nuance et que se clarifient les relations entre le *fiqh* abstrait et la réalité sociale.

Il n'existe toujours pas d'études historiques qui soient consacrées à l'anthropologie philosophico-religieuse et centrées sur l'appartenance sexuelle, avec ses conséquences religieuses, juridiques, sociales et culturelles. Importantes, mais encore très peu étudiées dans leurs aspects historiques aussi bien que dans leurs aspects contemporains, sont les expressions d'un islam au féminin à l'occasion des célébrations familiales, des pèlerinages locaux ou du culte des saints.

De nouvelles études pourraient également montrer un dédoublement des activités rituelles et culturelles: les historiens arabes ont ainsi gardé le souvenir "des femmes savantes", et la tradition mystique nous montre les activités des femmes dans les confréries religieuses.

Une idée plus nuancée des cultures musulmanes et donc, historiquement parlant, plus exacte surgira sans doute de l'étude des différentes formes d'exclusion (réciproque) et d'interaction entre le monde féminin et le monde masculin.

Tout porte à mettre en relief ces quelques lignes qu'écrivit en 1978 Mohammed Arkoun: "Il faudrait s'engager dans une longue analyse de la religion des femmes: sujet essentiel pour une connaissance, en profondeur, des sociétés musulmanes"<sup>2</sup>.

## NOTES

1. M. Arkoun, *L'Humanisme arabe au IV<sup>e</sup>/X<sup>e</sup> siècle*, [8] Paris 1971, 89.
2. M. Arkoun et L. Gardet, *L'Islam. Hier-demain*. Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1978, 228.

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## II

### MATRISTICS: LATE ANTIQUE, EARLY CHRISTIAN AND ISLAMIC FOREMOTHERS

## "The Hierophant of Philosophy"\* - Hypatia of Alexandria

It is in the transition from Hellenism to Christianity, at the very starting-point for European culture, that we meet the philosopher and mathematician Hypatia of Alexandria.

Writers and scholars have paid attention to Hypatia up to the present day. Each age has had its own point of view, and the assessments are not always unanimous: Voltaire named her the "héroïne de la philosophie", but for others she was "Satan als freches Weib verkleidet".<sup>1</sup>

Hypatia stood at the centre of the political-ideological struggle that raged between church and state in the fourth century. This led to her brutal murder. The murder of the non-Christian Hypatia aroused a storm of indignation at the time, not least because the patriarch of Alexandria, the mighty Cyril, was identified as the person responsible. Much of the discussion concerning Hypatia has been marked by the need felt in later ages to attack or to defend Cyril; this was perpetually relevant, because the question of guilt was quickly turned into a question about the church's authority and credibility.<sup>2</sup> But Hypatia's life stands as a challenge to the historians quite apart from this question too, and researchers in Women's Studies ought not to be the last to take up this challenge.

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\* Synesius of Cyrene, *Ep.* 137.

## **The sources for Hypatia's life**

The foundation for all biographies of Hypatia is furnished by the Byzantine lexicon *Suidas*, the *Church history* of Socrates Scholasticus, and the letters of Synesius of Cyrene.<sup>3</sup>

*Suidas* was composed in the eleventh century, and it is structured as a lexicon in which the biography of Hypatia is fashioned of excerpts from various authors, primarily from Damascius, a contemporary of Hypatia.<sup>4</sup> Although the short sketch of Hypatia's life history given by Socrates Scholasticus (380-450) contains fewer details than *Suidas*, many points of information in *Suidas* can be corrected with the help of Socrates' text: he is justly celebrated for his reliability and impartiality.<sup>5</sup> The third, and decidedly most important, source is Synesius of Cyrene (370-413), who was Hypatia's pupil and her contemporary; after his studies in Alexandria, he was his home town's ambassador in Constantinople before he was baptised and chosen as bishop in his native city. Many of Synesius' writings have been preserved, including 256 letters; seven of these are addressed to Hypatia, and he describes his teacher in five other letters. The letters constitute an important supplement to the other sources, and there are many indications that they have not been fully utilised hitherto in the study of Hypatia.

## **Hypatia's life**

"The daughter of the mathematician Theon was so learned that she surpassed all the philosophers of her age. She continued the Platonic tradition as this had been mediated by Plotinus, and she introduced into all the philosophical disciplines those who were willing to learn. Those who desired to work with philosophy thronged together and gathered around her because of her learning and authority. She had connections to the leading men in the city. She was

not ashamed to spend her time in the company of men, for all held her in great respect and revered her for her purity."<sup>6</sup>

This is how Hypatia is presented in Socrates' *Church history*. According to *Suidas*, "she became celebrated under the reign of Arcadius". This means that she was well established and at the height of her powers about the year 400, when she was thirty years old. Hypatia must have begun her activity as a teacher five years previously, and it is quite clear that her fame and popularity continued for a period of twenty years until her death in the year 415.<sup>7</sup>

We possess scanty information about Hypatia's family. Her father was the mathematician Theon, who taught at the *Museion* in Alexandria, one of the most renowned centres of education in antiquity. Theon composed several works on mathematics, astronomy and natural sciences, fragments of which are preserved. We also have a hint that Hypatia had a brother, Epiphanius: her father dedicated one of his mathematical works to his son, and the dedication makes it clear that he too engaged in mathematical studies. Otherwise we hear nothing about the rest of the family, mother or other brothers or sisters. Theon provided for Hypatia's instruction. *Suidas* states that he taught her, and that she soon surpassed her father in mathematics, astronomy and mechanics and desired to "engage in all areas of philosophy".<sup>8</sup> Since Theon was a member of the *Museion*, it has been conjectured that Hypatia was instructed there, while others have suggested that she studied at the Neo-Platonic school, but the sources are silent on this point.

*Suidas* adds details to the picture of Hypatia's professional and social activity:

"She, a woman, put on the philosopher's cloak and held lectures at public expense on Plato and the writings of Aristotle or on any other philosopher out in the city for all who were interested. She was practised in speaking and

schooled in dialectics, she possessed insight into practical activities and showed a sense of the duties as a citizen. Accordingly, the whole city looked on her with favour and she was held in high esteem. On occasion, holders of municipal office paid a call on her when they took office."<sup>9</sup>

We are also told that her name "resounded honorably and marvellously" in the city administration.<sup>10</sup>

*Suidas* emphasises first of all Hypatia's strong political, social and professional position, both in Christian and in non-Christian circles; and this picture is confirmed and deepened by Synesius too. The formulation *exēgeito demosia* in *Suidas* is usually understood to mean that Hypatia taught "at public expense" or "with a salary from the public authorities".<sup>11</sup> But we know very little about public support of the teaching activities of philosophers in Alexandria at this period, and the texts contain nothing else that can shed light on this question. The message of the text is clear, however: Hypatia's teaching is given prominence as a part of her public activity, an activity that merited for her the high esteem and respect which was shown her by the citizens and high office-holders of Alexandria. And all the oldest texts that speak of Hypatia agree in never displaying surprise at any point that a woman should have held such a position.

The sources have little to say about Hypatia's writings. She wrote several works, but none has been preserved. *Suidas* mentions three titles: a commentary on a writing by the mathematician Diophantes, an astronomical work and a commentary of Apollonius Perga's conic section. Thus, it is a question only of works concerning mathematics and the natural sciences; here is no trace of any philosophical writings. This lack of information in the sources is perhaps somewhat striking; there is no reason to doubt that Hypatia wrote several works, as well as having many correspondents. It is, of course, often a matter of chance what disappears in the course of time, but we have parts



of Theon's writings, and Synesius' letters have been preserved. This prompts the question whether the same has happened to Hypatia's writings as to the Manichaean, non-Christian portion of Augustine's writings: these writings (conveniently enough) have been lost for all time. The memory of a non-Christian martyr, a woman, a professional philosopher and the teacher of a Christian bishop, must have been a problematical tradition, and there is no doubt that the problems could have been made worse by having Hypatia present also in the form of writings that had been handed down.

*Suidas* mentions not only Hypatia's virtues, but also her beauty. "She was upright and chaste, and remained a virgin all her life. Yet she was very beautiful and well-formed," we are told.<sup>12</sup> Later studies of Hypatia repeat and embroider *Suidas*' information - in some cases one gets the impression finally that Hypatia's good looks were the basis of her fame. Both *Suidas* and Socrates emphasise her virtue, also in the narrower sense concerning sexual morality. Hypatia was surrounded by men, surrounded herself with male students and held conversations with the office-holders of the city. No women are mentioned in connection with her, either as pupils or as friends. It is possible that the need to underline Hypatia's moral irreproachability has resulted in an episode which is reproduced in *Suidas*. The story is as follows:

"One of the pupils fell in love with her. He had no mastery over his feelings, and gave expression to his passion. Ill-informed sources claim that Hypatia used music to heal him, but this is not in keeping with the truth: knowledge of music had been lost a long time before this. On the contrary, what she did was to take out a bloody piece of cloth such as women use. She showed him this sign of women's impurity and said: 'It is only this that you love, young man, not the real beauty'. "<sup>13</sup>

According to *Suidas'* text, the lovesick young man came to his senses after this. All the studies of Hypatia take this as the basis for the claim that the Neo-Platonist Hypatia must have been influenced by the Cynic school.<sup>14</sup> Even if the episode is not historically correct, it is at least interesting that Damascius, who is *Suidas'* source here, has considered the story authentic and also appropriate as an example of Hypatia's virtue. In other words, we meet a mentality in one of Hypatia's contemporaries which was very alien to those who studied Hypatia in later ages, who have often related the episode in footnotes, with the key words in Greek.<sup>15</sup>

### **The letters of Synesius**

Synesius' seven letters to Hypatia cover rather a long period in time: from his departure from Alexandria in 396 until the year of his death, 413.<sup>16</sup> The letters reflect a friendship marked by both closeness and objectivity, and it is precisely these texts that can give us first-hand information about Hypatia's milieu, about her professional interests and social activities. The fact that none of Hypatia's answers or letters to Synesius has been preserved means that we miss the dialogue itself.

In the first letter, Synesius paints his own situation in gloomy images (*Ep.* 10). He relates that he has lost his sons - a theme to which he returns in several other letters to Hypatia. He asks for a sign of life from her: "But now your silence has been added to the sum of my sorrows". In *Ep.* 16, he says: "I am dictating this letter as I lie in bed. May it reach you in good health, you who are my mother, sister, teacher and benefactress .... Bodily weakness has followed on all the sufferings of the soul. The thought of my dead children eats away at my strength little by little .... It is as if a tidal wave that has remained at a distance for a long time, has flowed in over me at full strength, and all the mild and sweet sides of life have disappeared in its

wake. May I either cease to live, or cease to think of my dead sons". He continues with greetings to acquaintances in the circle around Hypatia, "first to my father Theotecnus and my brother Athanasius and to all the others. And if anyone else has come as well as these, and you love him, I owe him gratitude precisely because he is dear to you. And so, greet him from me as if he were my dearest friend".

*Ep.* 15 is rather short, but gives interesting information: it contains a detailed description of a hydroscope which Synesius asks Hypatia to order for him in Alexandria, requesting that she herself oversee its construction. *Ep.* 33 is a fragment; the last part is lost. It is clearly Synesius' reply to a request from Hypatia that he carry out a commission for one Alexander, and he says: "I seemed destined to play the part of an echo. Whatever sounds I catch, these I repeat".

Synesius returns in *Ep.* 81 too to the loss of his sons, giving at the same time an interesting glimpse of his discussions with Hypatia and of her activities. This letter also contains the only genuine rejoinder by Hypatia that we know, a witty variation on Plato's expression *alotrion agathon*, "something good for others".<sup>17</sup> Hypatia has noticed Synesius' wish to help all those who are in need. "But destiny can never take from me the possibility of choosing the good, and the possibility of bringing aid to the oppressed, for destiny will never be able to change my heart. I detest injustice. There was a time when I too was somewhat useful to my friends. You yourself called me other people's providence (something good for others, *alotrion agathon*) .... Now I stand alone, abandoned by everyone, unless *you* have the power to help. You have always had power, and may you continue to have power and to make good use of it. I entrust Nicaeus and Philolaus to your care: two excellent young men who are related to one another. Try to gain support for them among your friends, whether these are private persons or officeholders, so that they may get their property back."

*Ep.* 124 gives a very brief, but gloomy, description of the state of affairs in Synesius' home town. He writes: "Even in Hades will I remember you, dear Hypatia. I am overwhelmed at the sufferings of my city" ... "I breathe in air that is fouled by rotting bodies. I myself await the same fate that has come to so many others, for how can one maintain hope, when the birds of prey blot out the sight of the sky? But even under such conditions, I love my country. Why do I suffer? Because I am a Libyan, because I was born here, and it is here that I look on the honorable graves of my ancestors. It is only for your sake that I would be able to leave my city and change the place where I dwell if I ever had the possibility of doing so".

The last letter to Hypatia which has been preserved (*Ep.* 154) has quite different character. Here, Synesius relates that he has written two books that year, "the one because I was inspired by God himself, the other because of people's slanders. The claim has been made both among those who wear white cloaks and among those who wear black cloaks that I have been unfaithful to philosophy ..." Those who wear black cloaks, the Christian monks, criticise Synesius because he admires the culture of Antiquity, while at the same time he causes the philosophers who wear white cloaks to view him in a negative light, because he attacks their empty formalism. The letter accompanies the books Synesius sends Hypatia, and he says: "I await your decision. If you say that I can publish books, I shall dedicate them to orators and philosophers .... If it seems to you unworthy of Greek ears, if you, like Aristotle, praise the truth more than friendship, a thick and deep darkness shall overshadow them, and humanity shall never again hear any mention of them". He also speaks in greater detail of the book "that God has inspired". Synesius gives a detailed account of how he has experienced an almost ecstatic inspiration: "Even now, when I read this work, it has a strange effect on me, as if a kind of divine voice was wrapped around me.... Whether this experience is unique or can happen to others - enlighten me about all this,

for you are the first among the Greeks after myself to have access to this work. So the books I am sending you have not yet been published, and to complete their number I am also sending you my essay on the Gift. It was written a long time ago, while I was still ambassador ...".

Here Synesius asks for Hypatia's philosophical and literary evaluation and judgment, and the text itself shows what confidence he has in her.

Synesius mentions Hypatia in five other letters, and we find valuable information here too. In *Ep.* 4, to his brother Euoptius, he sends greetings to his closest family and also asks his brother to greet Hypatia and her circle, above all Theotecnus and his brother Athanasius, the same who are mentioned in *Ep.* 16 to Hypatia. Somewhat later, Synesius tells his brother about his journey to Athens (*Ep.* 136). He has nothing but criticism and irony in his reaction to the philosophical studies there, when compared with the situation in Alexandria. "Today Egypt has received and cherishes the fruitful wisdom of Hypatia," he writes.

Since he does not know where his fellow-student Olympius is, Synesius writes to him that he is sending the letter *via* Hypatia, "our common teacher", so that she can send it on (*Ep.* 133). In other words, he takes it for granted that Hypatia knows where her former students are living, and that she is able to see to it that letters are forwarded.

In the letter to another fellow student and close friend, Herculian, he refers to their shared experience in Alexandria: "We who experienced the most wonderful things together - we would not have believed the accounts of such things, had we merely heard about them, but we have seen with our own eyes and listened with our own ears to the woman who rightly holds the mastery over the mysteries of philosophy" (*Ep.* 137).

Synesius gives a certain Paeonius the famous detailed description of the astrolabe, an instrument which shows the heavenly bodies' positions in relation to each other and to the

earth. The construction of the astrolabe presupposes extensive mathematical knowledge as well as insight into the theory of projection. "It is a work of my own devising, including all that she, my most reverend teacher, helped to contribute, and it was executed by the best hand to be found in our country in the art of the silversmiths."<sup>18</sup>

### **Hypatia's murder**

Cyril became patriarch of Alexandria in 412.<sup>19</sup> He was a rigid person who liked power, and he gradually made use of all available means to defend the faith. He was supported by a band of monks who were summoned from the Nitrian desert when things became difficult. They had a bad reputation: "it is only in terms of their appearance that they are human beings," we are told in one place. The bishop's ecclesiastical bodyguard were called *parabolani*, "daredevils", and they played no little role in street fights and various riots, *inter alia* with the Jewish population in Alexandria. At New Year 415, the situation had become acute. Cyril had expelled the Jews and had given the mob a free hand to plunder and confiscate Jewish property. One of his allies, the priest Ammon, was killed, and Cyril did not hesitate one instant in canonising him. Here, he went too far, and the sources give a glimpse of the Christian Alexandrians' indignation at their bishop. The imperial prefect Orestes, also himself a Christian, was Cyril's most dangerous opponent. Orestes defended the Jews, and he was a personal friend of Hypatia; in this way, Hypatia was drawn into the conflict between the bishop and his opponents. It is unclear what role Cyril played in the murder. But it was Cyril's men who carried out the crime, and Socrates Scholasticus is no doubt closest to the truth when he indicates a plausible motive for the murder: Cyril's adherents presumed that Hypatia supported Orestes and that an accommodation between the bishop and the imperial prefect was impossible as long as

Hypatia was alive. This is how Socrates describes Hypatia's death:

"One of the bishop's lectors, called Peter, led *parabolani* around with him. They lay in waiting at a place they knew the noble lady would pass by, then they pulled her out of the coach and dragged her with them to the Kessarian church. Here they stripped her naked and mocked her. Then they killed her by throwing bricks at her. They cut her body into small pieces, and the remains were burnt in an orgy. Cyril and the Alexandrian church were harshly criticised for this. For those who take Christ's path have nothing to do with murder and strife and all violence. This took place in Cyril's fourth year as bishop, while Honorius was consul for the tenth time and Theodosius for the seventh time, in the month of March, in Lent."<sup>20</sup>

The guilty were never punished; *Suidas* informs us that bribes took care of this.<sup>21</sup>

The Christian tradition dealt with these events in its own way; there is much in favour of the hypothesis that the story of the pagan martyr Hypatia was shaped anew to become the legend of the learned and beautiful martyr Catharine of Alexandria, one of the most popular saints of the Middle Ages.<sup>22</sup>

### **A look at the history of research**

The sources, as we have indicated, do not reveal much about Hypatia's writings, and nothing at all is said about their contents. It is only natural that scholars have attempted to press the few available pieces of information as far as possible, and it is not without interest to look in some detail at the result.

As long as Hypatia can be safely placed among the *curiosa et mirabilia* of Antiquity, she is praised by all. She is "virtuous

and clever", as we read in Chadwick's church history.<sup>23</sup> There is a tendency to keep to the adjectives employed in the sources, without raising problems. The church historian von Campenhausen is an example of this. Hypatia has a natural place in the presentation of Synesius in his book on the Greek church Fathers. Campenhausen gives a sympathetic description of Hypatia and of the teacher-student relationship, but he does not raise any difficult questions.<sup>24</sup>

The problems begin as soon as one ventures on an evaluation of Hypatia's writings and teaching; this generally results in a discussion of her originality. *Suidas* gives a short list of titles, mentioning two works of mathematical commentary and an astronomical work, *ton astronomikon kanona*. His text presents the astronomical writing as an original work. This aroused clear opposition among scholars both in the last century and in our own. C. Lacombrade, the French specialist on Synesius, wrote in 1951: "This work is not considered today to be an original work, for in that case it would have replaced Ptolemy's work: it is taken to be a commentary of Ptolemy".<sup>25</sup> In other words, there is full agreement that this *cannot* be an original work from Hypatia's hand. Scholars at the turn of the century engaged busily in altering a few short words in *Suidas'* text so that it became linguistically possible to suppose that the word "commentary" had been omitted.<sup>26</sup> This *fait accompli* means that the result is accepted and reported subsequently by all the authorities.<sup>27</sup> Is the reason for this a reluctance to introduce disorder into established academic-historical hierarchies? For there, Ptolemy is one of the greatest figures. However, the risk of anything drastic happening is small, since Hypatia's astronomical work is lost. The suspicion goes in another direction. In Lapatz' study (1870), Hypatia is likened to Juvenal's ridiculous bluestockings.<sup>28</sup> Lacombrade is not quite so negative; he says, "It would be unjust to dismiss these works of *vulgarisation* without knowing them ..., to compare Hypatia with Juvenal's bluestockings is to make an over-hasty judgement".<sup>29</sup>



For Lacombrade is clear about the professional collaboration between Hypatia and Synesius, and he knows better than anyone Hypatia's active contribution. The detailed description of the hydrometer whose construction was to be directed by Hypatia (*Ep.* 15) "gives the first sketch of a modern areometer, something that gives rise to the reflection that if Hypatia's school had been more accessible to our inquisitive eyes, it would no doubt have had many more surprises in store for us".<sup>30</sup> Here, Lacombrade must defend Synesius' academic honour, and Hypatia's "popular science" at once takes on different dimensions.

More recent researchers like to emphasise the point that Hypatia's chief activity lay in the field of the natural sciences.<sup>31</sup> But the question of the philosophical school to which she belonged and of *what* she can have taught is raised in all studies of Hypatia. As we have seen, the sources are extremely brief. All of them present Hypatia as a philosopher, and Socrates Scholasticus says that she "continues the Platonic tradition, as this had been mediated by Plotinus". We are told in *Suidas* that she held lectures on texts of Plato and Aristotle - and on "all the other philosophers". It is customary to characterise Hypatia as Neo-Platonist, often with links to the Cynic school. In specialised works of reference she appears as leader of the Neo-Platonic school in Alexandria.<sup>32</sup> Neither Lacombrade nor other scholars dispute the fact that Hypatia was a professional philosopher who was paid by the public authorities; the problem arise in the discussion of which direction within Neo-Platonism she can have represented. J.M. Rist has asserted that Neo-Platonism was not very well known in Alexandria at that period: Synesius' writings do not bear any clear trace of knowledge of Plotinus, so Hypatia too cannot have laid emphasis on Plotinus' teaching. We do however have fairly good access to information about the philosopher Hierocles' "old fashioned platonism"; Hierocles and Hypatia are roughly contemporary, so that the same must hold true of Hypatia.<sup>33</sup> The episode about Hypatia's treatment of the

unwished-for suitor leads Rist to introduce a nuance: Hypatia's philosophy must have been coloured by the Cynic school (a conclusion reached by Hoche in 1860). Rist continues: "But the fact that she was a woman must never be forgotten. The robe of Athena did not prevent many of the auditors of such blue-stockings from thinking in terms of the Birth of Venus."<sup>34</sup> As is well known, Venus rose naked from the waves of the sea. Specialised works of reference cite Rist's article as authoritative.<sup>35</sup>

Lacombrade's arguments betray a methodological arbitrariness which is striking in a work otherwise marked by academic objectivity and thoroughness. I omit the sequence of the argumentation itself here, and content myself with a few illustrations: "Did Hypatia follow Plotinus, Porphyry or Iamblicus? To presuppose a determinate choice accords ill in principle with the timidity with which her sex is reproached."<sup>36</sup> "The teacher of Synesius cannot be said to have elaborated any new theory; she has quite simply continued ideas of her predecessors, and Porphyry has occupied a special position here. ... She did not rise up to any synthesising view of life, she did not create an original system as a genuine philosopher does. But she did at least know how to present the doctrines of the Neo-Platonic masters for a small circle."<sup>37</sup> For the present, Lacombrade's conclusions have stood unchallenged. More recent studies of Synesius, however, maintain a different and more cautious tone; the deepest insight is beyond doubt to be found in Bregman's 1982 study.<sup>38</sup>

Not only humanists have taken an interest in Hypatia. She appears at regular intervals in mathematical literature. The mathematicians prove to have been more generous in their evaluation of Hypatia. As early as Montuclas' *Histoire des Mathématiques* (1799), the author does not hesitate to claim that Hypatia left "beaucoup d'écrits", more than those mentioned in *Suidas*. Unfortunately, Montuclas' sources cannot be checked, and this may be sheer wishful thinking. There is, however, agreement in calling Hypatia one of the most important

mathematicians of Antiquity. Richeson writes, "She is the first female mathematician in Antiquity, and after her death we do not find any woman mathematician of significance before the late Middle Ages."<sup>39</sup>

### **Hypatia's school**

Only one authentic response of Hypatia has been handed down, viz. the remark about Synesius quoted in *Ep.* 81. All that we can conclude from this is that Hypatia knew her Plato and that she had a sense of humour!

The solid ground under our feet is not very extensive here, true enough, but we do know something, if we take an overview of the sources and combine the pieces of information which we can count reliable: Hypatia had a thorough education in the natural sciences, and she was the centre of a milieu where both theoretical studies and applied research were carried out. She took an active part in this research activity during a period of twenty years - Synesius' letters indicate that she led it for the whole period. The studies in the natural sciences were integrated into a universal world-view, a metaphysics. We do not know anything concrete about the contents of Hypatia's teaching, only that the exposition of the classical philosophers was an important part of her public instruction. It is a methodological error to reconstruct a variant of Neo-Platonism on the basis of Synesius' letters; the attempt has been made by Lacombrade, and the result deserves criticism. It does however seem probable that Hypatia belonged to a Platonic or Neo-Platonic tendency. We must give up the attempt to answer the question about the contents of her teaching, but this does not mean that we have no possibility of identifying attitudes which must have given it its specific character. As well as having a clear orientation to the natural sciences, Hypatia's school was "neutral in confessional terms". This is how the Alexandrian school in general is described in the

history of philosophy - with precisely the teacher-pupil relationship between the non-Christian Hypatia and the Christian Synesius as the primary example.<sup>40</sup>

We ought to use more positive terms to describe Hypatia's school than calling it neutral in confessional terms. The sources give a clear impression of tolerance and intellectual and human openness and integrity. Synesius' letters paint the picture of a vital research milieu where the professional and human contact between Hypatia and her pupils is maintained over the course of years, and where she is also the one who has the overview and mediates contacts among the pupils themselves. Men with both a Christian and a non-Christian background were recruited to this milieu; when Synesius speaks of persons by name, we can in most cases locate these in one of the upper strata of society. The other sources bring a nuance to this, by emphasising precisely that "everyone" thronged together to hear Hypatia. But it is surely natural to make a distinction between her public teaching and her research into the natural sciences and experimentation.

It was possible in Alexandria at this period for a philosopher to have formal links to a philosophical tendency or school, organised as a brotherhood; there were also teachers who gave instruction on their own initiative and gathered pupils around themselves privately.<sup>41</sup> The Neo-Platonists had an introduction to philosophy and mathematics which was open to all, where the foundation was laid for a more demanding professional training that went deeper. It is not unreasonable to believe that *Suidas*' text about Hypatia refers to such a form of instruction. But we can form a real picture only of her research and experimental activities; it is only Synesius' testimony that goes beyond the very brief and fragmentary information in *Suidas* and Socrates Scholasticus.

Synesius calls Hypatia his "hierophant of philosophy", his *despoina makaria* and *sebasmiôtate didaskalos*, "august mistress" and "venerated teacher". Science and metaphysics were closely linked, and Synesius' description of Hypatia can be seen

in the light of what Marrou says about the philosopher's role: "The philosopher is asked not only to be professor, but a master, a spiritual guide, an authentic director of consciences".<sup>42</sup> If we see Hypatia's teaching activity in this perspective, it is natural to point to the examples we find in Christian Egypt in late Antiquity of women who acted as spiritual guides; the Egyptian *amma* is described both in the Greek collections of *Apophthegmata Patrum* and in the monastic literature as a guide with great insight and authority.<sup>43</sup> In such a perspective, Synesius' unproblematic acceptance of a female teacher becomes much less striking than some scholars would have us believe.<sup>44</sup>

We also know that Hypatia, like Synesius, had concern and interest for persons outside this milieu, and it is clear that these were persons in a rather weak societal position. In *Ep.* 81, Synesius refers to conversations he has had with Hypatia precisely about this, and he takes it for granted that Hypatia not only *can*, but *is willing* to help two young men whom he sends to her. Hypatia's awareness of her civic responsibilities is also mentioned in the other sources. It is clear that isolation in a narrow elitist milieu was something very foreign to her. The impression given is that Hypatia represents an attitude that emphasises professional and human wholeness - a wholeness that integrates antitheses, including gender antitheses. *Perhaps* this inspired Synesius when precisely he employs female metaphors to speak of God:

"Everything is bound fast to your will.  
You are the root of the present and the past,  
of the future and of what is possible.  
You are father, you are mother,  
you are man, you are woman,  
you are voice and silence".<sup>45</sup>

Here, we venture out on to unsure ground. But we ought also to point to this, when we ask the question about Hypatia's orig-

inality: Hypatia achieved professional distinction, while at the same time leading a distinctive social life: a woman who wore the philosopher's cloak, who lived and surrounded herself with male pupils, was outside the established patterns for a woman's life. To break with social conventions, even in a tolerant milieu, has *other* consequences for a woman than for a man, both intellectually and socially, and must necessarily have a different motivation. As scholar and professional philosopher, Hypatia had an entirely specific intellectual and human background to her own experience. Is it unreasonable to believe that this also marked the world of her thinking?

## NOTES

1. Voltaire's phrase "the heroine of philosophy" is found in *De la paix perpétuelle*, 1799. The phrase "Satan in the guise of an impertinent woman" is found in Arnold Beer's play *Hypatia, Tragödie in fünf Akten*, Leipzig 1878. In what follows, I do not discuss in more detail the tradition about Hypatia in European literature. This is an immense theme, where the picture must absolutely be adjusted after two studies from the turn of the century: R. Asmus, "Hypatia in Tradition und Dichtung", in: *Studien zur vergleichenden Litteraturgeschichte* 7 (1907); and H. von Schubert, "Hypatia von Alexandrien in Wahrheit und Dichtung", in: *Preuss. Jahrbücher* CXXIV (1906), 42-60.
2. A thorough discussion of what the sources say about this is found in R. Hoche, "Hypatia, die Tochter Theons", in: *Philologus* 15 (1860). More recent studies do not deviate to any significant degree from Hoche's views.
3. We have used the following editions of texts: *Suidas*, ed. Ada Adler, Leipzig 1938; Socrates Scholasticus in: PG 67, Paris 1864; Synesius, in: PG 66. References to *Suidas* in what follows are taken from: Rudolf Asmus (ed.), *Das Leben des Philosophen Isidoros von Damaskios aus Damaskus*, Leipzig 1911. A translation of Synesius' letters is found in: A. Fitzgerald, *The Letters of Synesius of Cyrene*, Oxford 1926; quotations are from this edition. No translation of

- Socrates Scholasticus has been accessible, and my references are to PG 67.
4. Other historians who mention Hypatia are Philostorgius, Hesychius, Photius and Malalas, but they do not contribute new material. The Alexandrian poet Palladius, a contemporary of Hypatia, dedicated an epigram to her.
  5. I do not discuss here information in *Suidas* about Hypatia which has been shown later to be erroneous: see Hoche, *op. cit.*, 454ff.
  6. PG 67, 766.
  7. The most important attempts at a critical biography of Hypatia are: R. Hoche, *op. cit.*; K. Praechter, art. "Hypatia" in: Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie der klassischen Altertums-Wissenschaft* 9, Stuttgart 1916; E. Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen* 3, Leipzig 1923; C. Lacombrade, *Synésius de Cyrène*, Paris 1951; and J.M. Rist, "Hypatia", *Phoenix*, 19 (1965) 214-225.
  8. Damascius, *op. cit.*, 31.
  9. *Ibid.*, 31.
  10. *Ibid.*, 33.
  11. E. Evrard, "A quelle titre Hypatia enseigna-t-elle la philosophie?", *Rev. des Etudes Grecques* 90 (1977) 69-74, proposes translating *dēmosia(i)* in the phrase *exēgeito dēmosia(i)* as "in a public place", and draws the following conclusion: "It follows from the testimony of Damascius that Hypatia taught out on the open street" (73). See my comment in n. 41.
  12. Damascius, *op. cit.*, 32
  13. *Ibid.*, 32.
  14. Praechter, *op. cit.*, 243; Rist, *op. cit.*, 221.
  15. Hoche, *op. cit.*, 444.
  16. I accept the chronology of Fitzgerald and Lacombrade here.
  17. Plato's expression *allotrion agathon* is found in the *Republic* 343C (and only there). The word *allotrion*, like the Latin *alienus*, denotes something foreign and "other"; its opposite is *oikeios*, i.e. that which is "domestic" (*oikos*) and is one's own. The question under discussion in the *Republic* is justice. It is proposed as something "good" (*agathon*). But for what or for whom is it good - for that which is one's own (*oikeios*) or for something that is foreign to oneself and other (*allotrion agathon*)? The answer given at this point in the text by the powerful sophist Thrasymachus is that it is a "foreign good" (*allotrion agathon*), or perhaps "a good thing for someone else", not a good thing for oneself. For according to his argument, "justice" is

- the chains with which the unjust man, the politician who deals in power, uses to bind his subjects as slaves (Prof. Egil A. Wyller, in a private communication).
18. The letter to Paeonius is classified among works associated with Syneius' mission as ambassador to Constantinople.
  19. Cyril was declared a doctor of the Church in 1882 by Pope Leo XIII.
  20. PG 67, 766-767.
  21. J. Rougé's well-documented article, "La politique de Cyrille d'Alexandrie et le meurtre d'Hypatie", *Cristianesimo nella storia* 11 (1990), 485-504, presents views on how the various sources can be interpreted as far as the responsibility for the murder of Hypatia is concerned. Rougé believes that the patriarch Cyril can be exonerated of such a responsibility: "there is neither responsibility nor exploitation on his part in the death of Hypatia" (503).
  22. R. Asmus, *op. cit.*, 18.
  23. H. Chadwick, *The Early Church*, New York 1981, 194.
  24. von Campenhausen, *Griechische Kirchenväter*, Stuttgart 1955, 127.
  25. Lacombrade, *op. cit.*, 42.
  26. "My proposal is to restore *eis* in front of *ton*, presupposing *hypomnēma*": P. Tannery, "L'article de Suidas sur Hypatia", *Annales de la faculté des lettres de Bordeaux*, II (1880), 199.
  27. Cf. Praechter, *op. cit.*, 244.
  28. F. Lapatz, *Lettres de Synésius traduites pour la première fois, et suivies d'études sur les derniers moments de l'hellénisme*, Paris 1870, 327.
  29. Lacombrade, *op. cit.*, 42.
  30. *Ibid.*, 43.
  31. Rist, *op. cit.*, 215.
  32. *Der kleine Pauly*, II, Stuttgart 1967, 1272.
  33. Rist, *op. cit.*, 217-218.
  34. *Ibid.*, 220.
  35. *Der kleine Pauly*, II, Stuttgart 1967, 1272.
  36. Lacombrade, *op. cit.*, 49.
  37. *Ibid.*, 50.
  38. J. Bregman, *Synesius of Cyrene, Philosopher-Bishop*, Berkeley, CA, London 1982.
  39. A.W. Richeson, "Hypatia of Alexandria", in: *National Mathematics Magazine* (1940), 15. Cf. also J.E. Schrek, "Hypatia von Alexandrien", *Euclides* 21 (1946); and J. Coolidge, "Six Female Mathematicians", *Scripta Mathematica* 17 (1951).



40. F. Coplestone, *A History of Philosophy*, I, part II, New York 1964, 225.
41. H.-I. Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'Antiquité*, I: *Le Monde Grec*, Paris 1948, 308-321. A third group, the wandering philosophers, are also mentioned in the sources and should be recalled in this context too: they stood on the lowest rung of the social ladder, proclaiming their message in market squares or streets, and were not seldom involved with the police. It is scarcely credible that the highly esteemed Hypatia held her teaching "out on the open street" as Evrard suggests (see n. 11 above).
42. Marrou, *op. cit.*, 311.
43. Cf. I. van Hausherr, *Direction spirituelle en Orient autrefois*, Rome 1955, 271. K. Vogt, "La moniale folle du monastère des Tabennésites. Une interprétation du chapitre 34 de l'Historia Lausiaca de Pallade". In the present volume, 177-192.
44. Cf. Rougé, *op. cit.*, 495, who expresses his surprise at Synesius' acknowledgement of the woman Hypatia, who was indeed his contemporary in age. It is however very clear from the Greek Apophthegmata literature that insight and knowledge were considered superior both to age and to sex.
45. N. Terzaghi (ed.), *Synesii Cyrenensis Hymni*, Roma 1959, 27.

La moniale folle  
du monastère des Tabennésiotés.  
Une interprétation du chapitre 34  
de l'*Historia Lausiaca* de Pallade\*

*L'Historia Lausiaca* (v. 420) de Pallade est l'une des nos sources les plus importantes pour la connaissance du mouvement ascétique du IV<sup>e</sup> et du V<sup>e</sup> siècles. Tout au long de l'Antiquité tardive, HL est l'un des textes les plus lus et les plus traduits: L'original grec fut très tôt traduit en latin (manuscrits datés du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle) et connut une grande diffusion en Occident.<sup>1</sup> Autant dire que HL compte parmi les écrits qui marquèrent les débuts de la tradition hagiographique chrétienne et qui contribuèrent à la former.

De par sa thématique, le chapitre 34 intitulé "De celle qui faisait la folle" (*Peri tes hypokrimenēs mōrian*) est à rapprocher des deux chapitres précédents sur les couvents de saint Pachôme en Basse-Egypte. Ce chapitre se présente cependant comme une entité, et il est donc possible de le traiter comme un texte autonome. Ce que fit l'époque comme le démontre la collection latine des AP de Pélage et de Jean où nous retrouvons l'histoire complète mais cette fois-ci attribuée à Basile.<sup>2</sup>

Voici l'histoire: Une vierge du monastère des Tabennésiotés joue la folle et la possédée. Elle rejette l'habit monastique et porte au front un bandeau de haillons (*rakos*); elle se tient dans la cuisine et accomplit les tâches les plus humbles. Aussi s'attire-t-elle le mépris de ses consœurs qui la poursuivent et la persécutent. En fait, cette vierge accomplit les paroles de l'Écriture citées *in extenso*: "Si quelqu'un parmi vous se croit un

sage au jugement de ce monde, qu'il se fasse fou pour devenir sage," I Cor. 3, 18.

Puis la scène change. Un ange apparaît à l'anachorète Piteroum, lequel vit retiré en Porphirite, et l'incite à aller rendre visite au monastère de femmes. Il y trouvera là une moniale qui le surpasse en piété et en connaissance de Dieu. C'est au diadème (*diadema*) qu'elle porte qu'il la reconnaîtra.

Les *didaskaloi* autorisent Piteroum à rendre visite au monastère, mais il n'y trouve pas celle qu'il cherche. Il demande alors que toutes les moniales sans exception lui soient présentées, car il en manque une. De force on va chercher la moniale dans sa cuisine, on la lui amène, et Piteroum la reconnaît au bandeau (*rakos*) qui ceint son front. Il tombe alors à ces pieds et implore sa bénédiction, mais, choquées, les soeurs protestent: "mais elle est folle", ce qui leur vaut cette admonestation de Piteroum: "C'est vous qui êtes folles (*salai*)". Puis il ajoute: "Elle et notre *amma*, notre mère à moi et à vous - c'est ainsi qu'on appelle celles qui ont atteint la véritable vie spirituelle (*tas pneumatikas*) - , et je demande dans mes prières d'être trouvé digne d'elle au jour du jugement." Les moniales se resaisissent alors, elles confessent leurs fautes et racontent comment elles ont persécuté leur consœur. Piteroum prie pour elles avant de quitter le monastère. La moniale y demeura encore quelque temps, mais ensuite trouvant les excuses et les louanges des soeurs plus pénibles à supporter que précédemment leur mépris et leurs mauvais traitements, elle quitta le monastère, et plus personne n'entendit plus jamais parler d'elle.

### **Interprétations antérieures**

Ce petit texte occupe une place toute particulière dans l'histoire de la recherche. Dès 1877 Weingarten mentionne le chapitre 34 dans son *Ursprung des Mönchtums*, et au début de ce siècle Richard Reitzenstein et William Bousset ont traité plusieurs

motifs du texte.<sup>3</sup> Dans son ouvrage de 1975, intitulé *Det gammelrussiske helgenvita*<sup>4</sup>, Jostein Børtnes reprend avec quelques modifications certains des points de vue de Reitzenstein (datant de 1906). C'est sur l'interprétation de Børtnes que nous allons tout d'abord nous pencher.

Børtnes part de l'idée que, pour ce qui est de sa forme, le genre hagiographique se plie à des schémas de composition préétablis; ceux-ci donnent la clef qui permet de comprendre chaque oeuvre particulière, et ce n'est qu'à la lumière de tels schémas stables que nous pouvons lire chacun des textes et les considérer à la lumière d'autres types de textes. En ce qui a trait au chapitre 34, Børtnes croit pouvoir déceler un invariant mythique de base avec "un schéma d'action où la figure féminine est condamnée à l'humiliation, à l'esclavage ou à l'emprisonnement pour ensuite "renaître" à une vie nouvelle en épousant celui qui la sauve du malheur et la ramène à son état d'origine."<sup>6</sup>

Børtnes souligne comme particulièrement frappantes les ressemblances qu'il relève entre le chapitre 34 et le mythe d'Isis en soutenant que le code du mythe est transféré au contexte chrétien par le biais de la citation de Saint Paul.<sup>7</sup> Voici comment Børtnes rapporte le mythe: "Isis est la mère d'Osiris en même temps que son épouse. Elle doit fuir vers des contrées lointaines où elle prend un poste de servante et passe ainsi de l'état de déesse à celui d'esclave, et elle doit vivre en esclavage jusqu'à ce qu'Osiris, le dieu de la régénération, ressuscite des morts et la libère de son esclavage."<sup>8</sup>

Børtnes ne donne aucune référence de cette version du mythe, et nous devons lui objecter tout d'abord qu'Isis n'apparaît jamais comme mère et femme d'Osiris, mais comme sa *soeur* et son épouse; ensuite qu'Isis, comme d'aucuns le savent, se met volontairement à la recherche de son époux prisonnier, qu'elle le libère et l'éveille à une nouvelle forme de vie, celle de régent au royaume au morts. Avec le défunt Osiris, Isis enfante un fils,

Horus, et l'"Isis-mère" continue de vivre dans le monde des vivants avec l'enfant-Horus à ses côtés.<sup>9</sup>

Børtnes lie son parallèle entre le chapitre 34 et le mythe d'Isis à deux motifs du texte de Pallade: a) le bandeau (*rakos*) qui ceint la tête de la moniale et que l'ange nomme *diadema*, et 2) le terme de mère, *amma*, qu'emploie l'anachorète Piteroum<sup>10</sup> pour désigner la moniale. Tant la "couronne" ou le diadème que le titre honorifique d'*amma* sont cependant, comme nous allons le voir, des *topoi* bien connus chez Pallade et dans toute la littérature monastique qui lui est contemporaine; et ceci ne contribue qu'à affaiblir encore l'argumentation de Børtnes.

Le texte de Pallade est clair: la moniale a librement choisi sa forme particulière d'ascèse. Elle a ainsi atteint l'*apatheia* et elle est devenue pour qui la rencontre l'instrument d'une nouvelle connaissance. Avec ceci en toile de fond, nous aurions peut-être pu voir un mythe d'Isis derrière le récit de la moniale "folle": la figure salvatrice d'Isis apporte à ses mystes une connaissance nouvelle, de même que dans un passé archétypal la déesse ramena à une vie nouvelle son frère et époux. Nous savons de quelle valeur était chargé, durant l'Antiquité tardive, le mythe d'Isis, et à la fin du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle, alors que Pallade séjournait en Egypte, le culte d'Isis florissait en Haute-Egypte.<sup>11</sup>

Cependant, pour pouvoir ici démontrer une transposition et un recodage d'un mythe historiquement et concrètement identifiable nous devons pouvoir exiger des points de référence plus précis et moins généraux. Au mieux nous devons laisser ouverte la question de savoir s'il existe un parallèle entre le chapitre 34 et le mythe d'Isis, mais, en aucun cas, nous ne pouvons accepter dans sa forme présente l'argumentation de Børtnes.

## Le chapitre 34 et son contexte historique

Dès 1910 le travail de Sara Murray sur Andreas Salos<sup>12</sup> signale une autre approche possible du chapitre 34; il y est classé parmi les récits de "fou sacré", classification couramment acceptée et que les travaux récents de John Seward et de Lennart Rydén viennent confirmer.<sup>13</sup> Rydén écrit cependant au sujet de notre texte: "The first time we meet a holy fool in Greek literature is in Palladios' 'Lausiak History'."<sup>14</sup> Il nous faut néanmoins nuancer cette assertion. Ce n'est qu'à un modeste degré que l'on utilise les AP pour faire lumière sur le "fou sacré", et c'est précisément cette littérature qui dans notre cas s'avère intéressante: outre les divers *logoi* indépendants sur le motif du "fou sacré" nous y trouvons plusieurs paraphrases de I Cor. 3, 18, ainsi que plusieurs récits manifestement composés sur ce passage de l'Écriture.<sup>15</sup> Dans la version copte la plus ancienne de la vie de saint Pachôme nous trouvons aussi une interprétation de I Cor. 3, 18, qui correspond à l'interprétation que donnent les textes des AP.

Même si la datation de ces textes reste problématique, on est en droit de voir dans le chapitre 34 l'un de ceux qui véhiculèrent à l'époque la compréhension particulière qu'avaient les milieux monastiques de I Cor. 3, 18, à savoir la reconnaissance du charisme spécial de la "folie sacrée", où l'ascèse consiste en un abaissement délibérément choisi, selon une forme qui va nettement à l'encontre de la raison.<sup>17</sup> En voici un exemple:

Un frère demanda à son abbé: "Comment devient-on fou (*mōros*) pour le Seigneur?" L'ancien répondit: "Il y avait dans un monastère un enfant que l'on confia à un sage vieillard pour qu'il le dirigeât et lui apprît la crainte de Dieu, et voici ce qu'il lui disait: "Si quelqu'un t'insulte, bénis-le; si tu es à table, mange ce qui est gâté, laisse ce qui est bon; si tu as à choisir un habit, laisse le bon et prend le mauvais." - "Suis-je donc fou (*morōs*), dit l'enfant, pour que tu me dises de faire cela?" Et l'ancien répondit: "Je te demande de faire cela afin que le

Seigneur te rende sage." C'est ainsi que l'ancien montra ce qu'il fallait faire pour devenir fou à cause du Seigneur.<sup>18</sup>

Par ailleurs, l'utilisation de I Cor. 3, 18 dans la littérature chrétienne des premiers siècles est très rare, et peut mener à penser que c'est dans les milieux monastiques égyptiens du IV<sup>e</sup> et du V<sup>e</sup> siècles que l'on élaborait ce type d'interprétation des textes.<sup>19</sup>

Du point de vue lexical, le chapitre 34 témoigne d'un genre parfaitement développé en ce que Pallade varie son vocabulaire, y utilisant tantôt *morōs*, tantôt *salos*; *salos* y étant justement le terme technique utilisé pour décrire le "fou sacré" tel qu'il apparaîtra plus tard dans l'hagiographie byzantine.<sup>20</sup>

### **Pallade - rhéteur chrétien**

La technique narrative et la forme d'argumentation de Pallade fournissent une autre approche possible de ce texte. Jusqu'ici ce n'est qu'à un modeste degré que la rhétorique chrétienne de l'Antiquité tardive a retenu l'attention, et, ces dernières années, le genre hagiographique a encore moins retenu l'attention que les textes soutenant une argumentation strictement théologique.<sup>21</sup>

Le chapitre 34 montre comment le *paradeigma* (ou l'*exemplum*) classique utilisé dans le récit hagiographique acquiert un caractère autonome: l'exemple constitue tout le texte, et à l'intérieur du cadre du *paradeigma* l'auteur entreprend les autres tours rhétoriques.<sup>22</sup>

La structure fondamentale de notre texte dépend de l'interprétation que fait Pallade de I Cor. 3, 18. De formation classique, il prend ce passage de l'Écriture comme un *tekmerion*, un "signe certain",<sup>23</sup> et en fait le point de départ d'une série d'*enthymèmes*, de syllogismes rhétoriques, où comme le dit Roland Barthes "on part d'un point qui n'a pas besoin d'être prouvé et de là on va vers un autre point qui a besoin de l'être."<sup>24</sup>

Mais de quoi Pallade veut-il convaincre son lecteur? Dès son introduction Pallade signale qu'en décrivant la vie des saints il veut inciter à une *mimēsis*, à une imitation du modèle.<sup>25</sup> Au chapitre 34 Pallade souhaite montrer que la femme en question simule la folie - et ici il faut avoir à l'esprit que l'époque associait folie, possession démoniaque et péché - alors qu'elle a atteint l'*apatheia* et se trouve donc être une telle *eikon*.

Chaque chaînon de l'histoire repose sur le fait que, parce que la sagesse de ce monde (*sophia tou kosmou*) est folie (*moria*) pour Dieu, l'on doit paraître fou pour être sage. La moniale est jugée folle, *en conséquence* elle est en réalité sage, et finit par être révélée comme celle en qui demeure l'Esprit. Ses consoeurs représentent le monde et sa déraison, *en conséquence* ce sont elles qui sont les véritables folles, ce que Piteroum affirme explicitement: "C'est vous qui êtes *salai*, folles." Quant à Piteroum, il est lui-même qualifié de "saint" (*hagios*). Mais nous avons là une ambiguïté, car les paroles de l'ange montrent clairement qu'il n'est pas à la hauteur de sa réputation; parce que limité dans sa connaissance de soi il n'a atteint qu'à un degré limité de perfection. En rendant visite au monastère, et en demandant à la moniale de le bénir, il se rend fou aux yeux du monde, et atteint *en conséquence* un degré plus élevé de sagesse réelle. Nous voyons également que le passage de l'Écriture, I Cor. 3, 18, est placé dans le texte de façon à fonctionner comme une *captatio benevolentiae*. Dès le début du chapitre le narrateur fournit une clef au lecteur qu'il situe par là au même niveau que lui: mis au courant du véritable contexte, le lecteur anticipe la révélation et l'explication.

Alors que la première partie de l'*inventio* de Pallade était régie par les déductions enthymématiques, la seconde dépend des *topoi* dont l'importance est capitale pour la compréhension du chapitre 34: 1) Le principal *topos* consiste en une leçon, résultat d'une rencontre et d'une comparaison, plus précisément la rencontre de l'anachorète et de la moniale. Dans la littérature monastique de l'époque, le point de départ est toujours le même:



un Père, qui lui-même est fort avancé dans la vie intérieure, apprend de façon surnaturelle qu'une ou plusieurs personnes le dépassent dans sa connaissance de Dieu. La rencontre fait partie intégrante du progrès spirituel de l'ascète, de sa *prokopē*. Dans la forme la plus développée il s'agit toujours, comme c'en est le cas au chapitre 34, de deux vies qui ainsi sont liées l'une à l'autre. Autre fait commun: ce sont finalement des personnes apparemment indignes de l'ascète et inférieures à lui qui le dépassent en spiritualité. Tel en est le cas lors de la rencontre de Paphnutius et du joueur de flûte dans HM, ou de celle des frères avec le pâtre Eucharistos et sa femme Maria dans AP, ou encore de Macaire et des femmes mariées dans la Vie de saint Macaire.<sup>26</sup> 2) Au chapitre 34 la moniale porte au front un bandeau de haillons, et non la cuculle de ses consœurs. C'est ce *rakos* que l'ange nomme *diadēma*. Tant chez Pallade que dans la littérature chrétienne qui lui est contemporaine,<sup>27</sup> couronne ou diadème sont maintes fois donnés comme signes de sainteté; on peut ainsi lire dans AP: "Le moine sobre est couronné sur la terre et il est aussi couronné dans les cieux devant Dieu!"<sup>28</sup> Il est de plus permis de supposer que Pallade connaissait l'exposé de son maître Evagre sur la symbolique de l'habit où le *kukullus* est l'image de la grâce divine protégeant la raison (*hēgēmonikon*) des attaques du Malin.<sup>29</sup> Par là aussi Pallade peut jouer sur l'antagonisme sagesse - folie, vie intérieure - vie extérieure, c'est-à-dire ici que la "folle" qui fait abandon de sa cuculle porte en réalité la distinction céleste qu'est le *diadēma*. 3) Piteroum reconnaît dans la moniale une mère, une *amma*. Tout comme "*abba*", *amma* était avant tout un titre honorifique, ainsi Pallade l'utilisera plus loin dans un autre chapitre de HL.<sup>30</sup> Les recueils d'AP connaissent bien ce titre: Quatre *ammas* y sont mentionnées, et leurs *logoi* reproduits.<sup>31</sup> Comme le souligne explicitement Pallade, *amma* désigne une femme en qui demeure l'Esprit, une "pneumatique", qui a dès ici-bas réalisé l'*apatheia*, c'est-à-dire l'état dans lequel se trouve l'être sauvé.

Si nous considérons ici le chapitre 34 comme un texte autonome, nous pouvons remarquer qu'il est construit selon la *dispositio* classique: 1) l'*exorde*, introduction comprenant une *captatio benevolentiae*, 2) une *narratio* et une *argumentatio*, développement où l'auteur argumente pour préciser les données: la moniale du monastère des Tabennésites a actualisé la lettre de l'Écriture, elle est la "folle sage", et 3) une *peroratio* où nous apprenons ce à quoi a mené l'action: La moniale a quitté son monastère, et personne n'a jamais su ce qu'elle est devenue; ce genre de disparition deviendra l'un des *topoi* de la littérature byzantine concernant les "fou du Christ".<sup>32</sup>

L'utilisation de I Cor. 3, 18, comme la révélation de l'ange, attirent l'attention sur un trait caractéristique du récit hagiographique de l'époque. Le narrateur a recours au *pisteis* (aux preuves) qui contribueront à rendre sa présentation la plus convaincante possible. Outre l'Écriture, ce sont les *mirabilia Dei*, les miracles (ou le merveilleux), qui dans le genre hagiographique fonctionne comme critère principal de toute connaissance véritable et de toute compréhension correcte de la réalité.

### Les deux niveaux du récit hagiographique

Le texte du chapitre 34 ne se contente pas de polariser seulement les catégories morales et spirituelles que sont sagesse et folie, il oppose aussi les diverses formes de vie ascétique et les divers rangs sociaux. Pallade se caractérise par son acceptation de toutes les formes de vie ascétique et par le fait que l'*anachoresis* puisse être soulignée comme une qualité purement intérieure.<sup>33</sup> Il présente en même temps la vie d'anachorète comme une *melior vita* comparée à la vie monacale, comme nous le voyons au chapitre 18, 12 qui raconte le séjour de l'anachorète Macaire au monastère de saint Pachôme à Tabennesi. Reitzenstein a déjà suggéré l'existence dans le texte d'une opposition entre *stabilitas*

et *peregrinatio*.<sup>34</sup> Le contraste entre l'anachorète et le cénobite, comme entre *gynè* et *anèr* y est cependant plus évident: Le cénobite (ou la moniale) est supérieur à l'*abba*, l'anachorète.

Il est alors naturel de se demander si ce texte doit se lire comme une spiritualisation et une intériorisation radicale des formes de vie ascétique et des hiérarchies sociales.

A ce propos il est important de souligner que le chapitre 34 (comme toute HL) oscille sans cesse entre deux niveaux et exige de lecteur qu'il reconnaisse ces deux niveaux: 1) la vie ascétique comme *bios angelikos*. L'état d'être sauvé y est déjà réalisé et la classification dans l'échelle sociale s'en trouve annihilée. 2) un présent historique lié à la *prokopè*, la progression de l'ascète vers l'*apatheia*. A ce second niveau le point de vue orthodoxe repose sur l'acceptation des différentes institutions sociales et de la classification hiérarchique qui existe entre elles.

La soumission des moniales est dans notre texte l'exemple d'une telle hiérarchie: les moniales doivent se plier aux décisions des moines, elles acceptent sans songer à la contester l'autorité de Piteroum et finissent par lui confesser leurs fautes. Mais *en même temps* il est très nettement précisé que l'*amma* leur est supérieure à tous; elle a déjà réalisé l'état que Piteroum espère atteindre au jour du Jugement - l'image eschatologique n'a rien de fortuit. Et pour illustrer la liberté de l'être en qui demeure l'Esprit, la moniale quitte son monastère après avoir été découverte.

Précisément ceci est un motif central de HL: l'autonomie de l'être rempli de l'Esprit-Saint, qui implique autorité (*exousia*) et liberté de parole (*parrèsia*), est réalisable par les deux sexes et peut donc supprimer ou renverser la hiérarchie établie entre eux. Dans son HL Pallade donne plusieurs concrétisations de ce motif et calque la forme féminine *hè anthrōpos* sur la caractéristique athanasienne qualifiant saint Antoine comme *anthrōpos tou theou*.<sup>35</sup> Le terme *anthrōpos* est utilisé par Pallade lorsqu'il veut souligner l'autorité et l'autonomie des saintes.<sup>36</sup> Les recueils des AP présentent aussi ce même renversement hiérarchique entre les

sexes, dans Sarra 9 on peut lire: "Elle (*amma Sarra*) dit aux frères: "Moi, je suis un homme, et vous, vous êtes des femmes."<sup>37</sup>

Autrement dit, toute cette littérature se caractérise par un langage symbolique où le lecteur est sans cesse confronté à la tension existant entre une *Umwertung aller Werte* que représente l'état d'être sauvé, et une réalité historique où les hiérarchies sociales sont maintenues. Ce niveau historique est cependant toujours secondaire et dépend du premier niveau qui décrit la *bios angelikos*.

### La conception de l'autorité chez Pallade

Ce niveau historique, secondaire et dépendant du premier niveau, nous pouvons le rapprocher d'un autre aspect du récit de Pallade. Comme plusieurs autres chapitres de HL, le chapitre 34 peut aussi se lire à la lumière de l'une des grandes discussions de l'époque: qui, dans l'église, peut revendiquer l'autorité? Disciple d'Évagre et admirateur d'Origène, Pallade représente les milieux monastiques qui justement ne souhaitaient pas une complète identification entre fonction et autorité. Pallade rejette expressément les prises de position extrêmes et ne conteste jamais la plénipotence des évêques. Cependant il peut attacher des exigences spécifiques à qui occupe une telle fonction, ainsi écrit-il au sujet de Théophile, patriarche d'Alexandrie: "Si un homme n'est pas, autant que faire se peut, parfait (*teleios*), comment peut-il alors être évêque? Qui n'est pas soi-même parfait ne saura jamais gagner l'estime de celui qui est aussi imparfait que lui."<sup>39</sup>

Selon Pallade certaines personnes peuvent, sans en avoir le statut de la charge mais par le fait d'être parfaits (*teleios*), revendiquer une autorité comparable à l'héritage apostolique. Un autre texte de cette époque précise: "Il est évident que là où est Dieu, là aussi il y a tout pouvoir (*exousia*) et toute liberté de

parole (*parrësia*).<sup>40</sup> Dans ce contexte l'argumentation de Pallade ne se limite pas à convaincre le lecteur de ce que le saint est un exemple à imiter, son intention est aussi de le persuader du pouvoir que détient le saint.

Pallade axe donc tout sur le saint et son autorité, *exousia* est directement liée à son statut individuel de pneumatique, indépendamment de toute charge, sexe ou statut social. C'est dans cette perspective que l'on peut lire le texte du chapitre 34. Outre le but qu'il formule explicitement, et qui est de mettre le lecteur sur la voie d'une imitation (*mimësis*) du saint, Pallade légitime en même temps la source d'une autorité en marge de la hiérarchie ecclésiale, et ceci nous ne pouvons guère l'isoler de la lutte à laquelle il prenait part à l'intérieur même de l'église.<sup>41</sup>

En résumé nous pouvons dire qu'à l'intérieur du cadre d'un *topos* bien connu de la littérature monastique des IV<sup>e</sup> et V<sup>e</sup> siècles nous sommes confrontés à un enseignement qui découle d'une rencontre et d'une comparaison; toute une série de *topoi* en dépendent, et les principaux sont liés à la personne à laquelle est confronté le saint anachorète, dans le cas présent, 1) le "fou sacré", et 2) l'*amma* emplie de l'Esprit, supérieure tant à ses consœurs moniales qu'à l'anachorète Piteroum.

Le texte sur lequel nous nous sommes penchés peut être considéré comme l'un des rares exposés littéraires de l'époque où le motif de la sagesse s'oppose à celui de la folie selon une interprétation particulière de la première Epître aux Corinthiens. Le récit de Pallade sur la sainte *amma* peut se comprendre sur cette toile de fond et, dans ce cas précis, les raisons sont bien faibles d'y voir une présentation mythique non-chrétienne. Par contre le texte se prête fort bien à faire la lumière sur la technique narrative de Pallade et sur son langage symbolique; il reflète aussi la conception de l'auteur quant au statut supérieur de pneumatique. Nous pouvons sans doute voir dans le récit de l'*amma*, et dans le renversement de la hiérarchie établie entre les sexes, comme HL en fournit plusieurs exemples, l'expression la plus radicale d'une telle conception.

NOTES

- \* Version revue de l'article publié dans *Symbolae Osloenses* 62 (1987) 95-108.
1. Pour l'histoire du texte, voir DS, XII, col. 116. Edition utilisée: Cuthbert Butler, *The Lausiaca History of Palladius*, Text and Studies 6,2, Cambridge 1904.
  2. PG 73, 984 A. Le texte de Pallade se trouve également dans *Acta Sanctorum*. Ici la moniale est nommée Isidora, cf. *Acta Sanctorum*, 1er mai, 1, Anvers, 1680, 49-50.
  3. H. Weingarten, 'Der Ursprung des Mönchtums im nachkonstantinischen Zeitalter', dans *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* (1877). Richard Reitzenstein, *Hellenistische Wundererzählungen*, Leipzig 1906. Richard Reitzenstein, *Historia Monachorum und Historia Lausiaca*, Göttingen 1916. William Bousset, "Der verborgene Heilige", dans *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*, 21 (1922) 205-219. Dans *Hellenistische Wundererzählungen*, 1906, Reitzenstein lance une série d'idées pour l'interprétation du chap. 34 qu'il rejettera ou modifiera dix ans plus tard. Ainsi en 1916 rejette-t-il l'allusion qu'un motif de conte (Cendrillon) serait à l'origine du chap. 34: "Doch war es unrecht, wenn ich die Märchenform des Aschenbrödels hier wieder finden wollte", 1916, 49. Bousset poursuit cependant l'idée de Cendrillon et la développe dans son article intitulé 'Der verborgene Heilige'. Ce travail posthume manque de méthode, et on ne peut dire qu'il contribue à justifier la réputation de chercheur dont a joué Bousset.
  4. Jostein Børtnes, *Det gammelrussiske helgenvita. Dikterisk egenart og historisk betydning*, Oslo 1975. Børtnes ne mentionne que l'interprétation du chap. 34 et ne fait référence aux corrections qu'y apporte Reitzenstein en 1916. Cf. la critique de Børtnes quant à l'interprétation cendrillonnesque du chap. 34 par Reitzenstein, J. Børtnes 1975, 49. Dans l'édition anglaise, *Visions of Glory: Studies in early Russian Hagiography* (Slavica Nordica, V), Oslo 1987, Børtnes a entièrement retravaillé le chapitre sur l'hagiographie chrétienne primitive, et l'interprétation du chapitre 34 y apparaît sous une forme modifiée.
  5. Børtnes (1975), 49.
  6. Børtnes (1975), 51.
  7. Børtnes (1975), 51.
  8. Børtnes (1975), 51-52.

9. Pour le mythe d'Isis et ses variantes cf. H. Bonnet, *Reallexikon der Ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, Berlin 1952, Isis, 326-332; Osiris, 568-573, et *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, III, Isis, 191-193, IV, Osiris, 626-630. Pour la version de Plutarque, cf. T. Hopfner (éd.) *Plutarch, Über Isis und Osiris, Text, Übersetzung und Kommentar*, Darmstadt 1967.
10. Børtnes (1975), 52.
11. Cf. *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, III, 199.
12. Sara Murray, *The Study of the Life of Andreas, The Fool for the Sake of Christ*, Borna-Leipzig, 1910.
13. John Saward, *Perfect Fools. Folly for Christ's Sake in Catholic and Orthodox Spirituality*, Oxford 1980. Lennart Rydén, *The Holy Fool, The Byzantine Saint*, Sergei Hackel (ed.), London 1981, 106-193.
14. Lennart Rydén, *op. cit.*, 106.
15. I Cor. 3, 18 est utilisé cinq fois dans les collection d'Apophthegmes. I Cor. 3, 19 une fois, voir L. Régnauld (éd.), *Les sentences des Pères du désert*, Nouveau recueil, Solesmes 1977, 315. Des ascètes qui feignent la folie pendant une période plus ou moins prolongée, cf. PL 73, 782 CD, et PG 65, 121 C: Méprisé par une femme qui le considère comme fou (*salos*), l'abbé Ammoun lui dit: "Que d'années j'ai passées dans la solitude pour acquérir cette folie (*salotêta*). Devrai-je la perdre aujourd'hui pour toi?"
16. L. Th. Lefort, *Les Vies coptes de Saint Pachôme, et de ses premiers successeurs*, Louvain, 1943, 163.
17. Pour les trait caractéristiques de cette forme d'ascèse, cf. Ernst Benz, *Heilige Narrheit, Kyrios* 3 (1983) 1-55, ainsi que John Saward, *op. cit.*, 16-19.
18. Nau 71. F. Nau, *Histoires des solitaires égyptiens*, dans *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* (1907) 396.
19. Des origines à Clement d'Alexandrie et Tertullian I Cor. 3, 18 n'est utilisé que deux fois, cf. *Biblia Patristica*, 1, Paris 1975, 450. Dans le troisième siècle, cinq fois, cf. *Biblia Patristica*, 2, Paris 1977, 380, et chez Origène, deux fois, cf. *Biblia Patristica*, 3, Paris 1980, 450.
20. Pour la discussion du terme *salos* dans sa forme technique, cf. L. Rydén, *op. cit.*, 107.
21. Nous trouvons un bon exemple d'une analyse rhétorique réussie de texte théologique dans G.S. Steed, *Rhetorical Method in Athanasius, Vigilia Christianae* (1976) 30, 121-137. George A. Kennedy présente rapidement le rhéteur Pallade dans *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors*, Princeton, NJ, 1983, 213. Kennedy donne aussi une

- bibliographie utile, cf. surtout le chap 4, 'Christianity and Rhetoric', 180-264.
22. Roland Barthes note qu'au début du 1<sup>er</sup> siècle a. J.-C., une nouvelle forme d'*exemplum* apparaît: Le personnage exemplaire (*eikōn, imago*) désignant l'incarnation d'une vertu dans une figure. C'est cette forme d'*exemplum* qui nous transmet le récit hagiographique. Roland Barthes, L'Ancienne rhétorique. Aide-mémoire, dans *Communications* 16 (1970) 201.
  23. Parmi les prémisses enthymématiques se trouve l'indice sûr, *tekmērion*, le signe nécessaire ou encore 'le signe indestructible', celui qui est ce qu'il est et qui ne peut être autrement. (Barthes, 204). Voir également Quintilien, *De institutione oratoria*, livre V, chap. IX, De signis: *Priora illa sunt quae aliter habere se non possunt, quae Graeci temēria vocant*. Ed. H. Bornecque, III, Paris 1933-34, 149. Pour la pratique de l'enthymème et son développement historique, notamment son caractère elliptique (syllogisme incomplet ou écourté) chez Quintilien, voir Barthes, 202.
  24. Barthes, *op. cit.*, 203.
  25. HL 1,3.
  26. Paphnutius, HM XIV; Eukaristos et Marie, PG 65, 168 B - 169 A. Amélineau (éd), *Apophthegmes sur Saint Macaire, Annales du Musée Guimet*, 25, Paris 1894, 228-230, même épisode dans PL 73, 1014 AB.
  27. HL 21, 14; HL 40, 4.
  28. Marius Chaine, *Le Manuscrit de la Version copte en dialecte sahidique des Apophthegmata Patrum*, Le Caire 1960, 3.
  29. Evagre, *Traité Pratique* II, Sources Chrétiennes 171, 485.
  30. HL 59; voir également *amma*, dans *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de la liturgie*, 1, 1306.
  31. *Amma* Theodora, PG 65, 201-204, J.C. Guy, *Recherches sur la tradition grecque des Apophthegmata Patrum*, Bruxelles 1962, 22-23; *Amma* Sarra, PG 65, 420-421, J.C. Guy, *op. cit.*, 34. *Amma* Syncletica, PG 65, 421-428; *Amma* Eugenia, L. Régnault (éd.), *Les sentences des Pères du désert*. Nouveau Recueil, Solesmes 1977, 65.
  32. John Saward, *op. cit.*, 27. Ernst Benz, *op. cit.*, 22ff.
  33. HL 14.
  34. Reitzenstein, *op. cit.*, 1916, 47-48.
  35. *hē anthrōpos tou theou*, HL 9; HL 65,2.
  36. Voir le témoignage de Pallade au sujet de la diaconesse Olympias dans le *Dialogue*, chap. 16. Exemples de la supériorité ou de l'équivalence



- de la femme sainte, dans HL, voir HL 31; HL 59; et les chapitres sur sainte Mélanie: HL 9; HL 10,2; HL 38, 8-9; HL 46, 2-3; 46, 5-6.
37. *Egō eimi anēr, hymeis de este gynaikeis*, J.C. Guy, *op. cit.*, 34. Pour le thème de 'la femme transformée en homme' et les expressions métaphoriques de 'devenir mâle', voir Kari Vogt, "Becoming Male": a Gnostic, Early Christian and Islamic Metaphor. Dans le volume présent, 217-242.
  38. HL 26.
  39. *Dialogus*, chap. XVI, PG 47/48, 56.
  40. *Sancti Pachomii Viae Graecae*, Francisci Halkin (ed.), Subsidia Hagiographica 19, Bruxelles 1932, 85.
  41. Le rôle de Pallade dans la querelle origéniste, voir DS, XII, 125; sur la querelle origéniste du 5e s., voir DS, XI, 955-956.

#### ABRÉVIATIONS:

- AP: Apophthegmata Patrum  
DS: Dictionnaire de Spiritualité  
HL: Historia Lausiaca  
HM: Historia Monachorum in Aegypto  
PG: Patrologia Graeca  
PL: Patrologia Latina  
SC: Sources Chrétiennes

## The Desert Mothers: Female Asceticism in Egypt from the 4th to the 6th Century

"Let us go to Egypt and consult the saints." It is the Roman Melania the Younger who is said to have spoken these words early in the fourth century. And Melania followed up these words with deeds: for the space of six months, she went with her companions from cell to cell in the Egyptian wilderness to speak with "holy monks and the very faithful virgins".<sup>1</sup>

Melania was one of many. As early as the close of the fourth century, women and men from the entire Christian world streamed to Egypt. Some of those who travelled to Egypt remained there for good, while others went on their way after a few years spent learning there. Among these was Palladius, Bishop of Helenopolis, who wrote down in the *Historia Lausiaca* (419-420) his experiences among the Egyptian ascetics.

Thus, contemporary Greek sources can mediate an encounter with one of the most remarkable phenomena in the early history of Christianity: the growth and spread of the Egyptian anachoretic and monastic movement. The same sources also give a clear impression of the prestige enjoyed by the Egyptian ascetic, far beyond the boundaries of the country.<sup>2</sup>

Little attention has been paid to one side of this history: the history of the female ascetics.<sup>3</sup> It is indeed true that the information is scarcer and more fragmentary than is the case with the male ascetics, but if we take our starting-point in the early monastic literature, it ought nevertheless to be possible to paint a synthetic portrait of the lives of these women in one of the most important Christian centres in this period.

Egyptian sources clearly show how the anachoretic life for women, and the various forms of Christian fellowship among women, were developed in parallel to corresponding forms of life for men. The *Apophthegmata Patrum* (AP) tell of female dwellers in the wilderness, and papyri from Oxyrrhynchus show that monasteries of women existed in those regions as early as the fourth century.<sup>4</sup>

The basis for this picture lies primarily in the various collections of *Apophthegmata*, the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* (HM) and Palladius' *Historia Lausiaca* (HL). Two other texts, both originating in Christian Alexandria in the 5th century, have proved to be useful in this context: the *Bios Synkletikes* (BS), which is one of the oldest oriental *vitae* of women, and the *Peri parthenias* (PP), which differs from other contemporary writings with a similar title by reason of its numerous concrete counsels and rules for the life of Christian virgins. A Coptic text from the 6th century should also be mentioned, viz. *Apa Moses'* letters to his spiritual daughters, which give unique information both about the daily life of the nuns and about the instruction they received.<sup>5</sup>

Among these texts, the AP collections have a special position, both because they spring directly from the anachoretic milieu in Egypt and because of the concrete information these texts can furnish about the life and activity of the female ascetics. HM gives information about female ascetics and nuns only by way of exception, and consequently this text plays a modest role in this presentation, compared with HL, where Palladius emphasises in his introduction that he wishes to speak about ascetics of both sexes;<sup>6</sup> this particularity of the HL was already noted by Socrates Scholasticus.<sup>7</sup>

## **Christianisation and monasticism**

Alexandria was already a Christian centre early in the second century. We know only in part the stages by which the country was Christianised, but from the beginning of the fourth century, churches were spread over the greatest part of the Egyptian *chōra*. Members of monasteries played an active part in Christianisation, and in a period marked by social unrest and distress, the monasteries were able to give aid and to function as relatively safe places of refuge.<sup>8</sup>

When the word *monachos* is used for the first time in a secular document in the year 324, it is the monk in his social role we encounter: a monk called Isaac has prevented a physical assault and is mentioned as a possible witness in a lawsuit.<sup>9</sup> The letter of the woman Valeria to the anchorite Paphnutius (from the 350's) contains a prayer for healing and shows very clearly what that period expected of a Christian ascetic.<sup>10</sup>

The first great anchorites came from the Coptic-speaking part of the population, and the narratives about Antony, Pachmonius or Ammonius of Nitria display a specific social profile: they all come from the relatively well-off and free part of the Egyptian peasant population.<sup>11</sup> This applied with equal force to women and to men.

## **The recruitment of female ascetics**

The narratives about the first Fathers give at the same time information about their sisters or wives who consecrated themselves to an ascetic life. Antony's younger sister was entrusted to a fellowship of virgins, and it is clear that Isidore in the HL follows Antony's model when he entrusts his sisters to 'a fellowship of seventy virgins'.<sup>12</sup> Ammonius of Nitria had well-off relatives, and when he is forced to marry, there is no reason to believe that he married under his social position. As is

well known, Amoun persuaded his young wife to choose the ascetic life together with himself.<sup>13</sup> Syncletica's parents are said to have been Macedonian immigrants to Alexandria, and it is stated explicitly in her *Vita* that they were very well-off.<sup>14</sup> It is obvious that Alexandra, who had earlier been a servant-maid in Alexandria, had more modest origins.<sup>15</sup> The virgin Piamoun is described as an ordinary village woman who lived at home with her mother, whereas Palladius' neighbour in Antinoë perhaps came from a better-off family, since she possessed a work by Clement of Alexandria.<sup>16</sup>

Although the texts sometimes mention the previous professional activity of male ascetics, this is specified very seldom in the case of the women. Alexandra is described as having previously been a servant-maid; and in a few contexts it is stated that prostitutes repent and consecrate themselves to an ascetic life.<sup>17</sup>

Thus the little that the texts can tell us bears witness to a varied recruitment: clearly, the female ascetics came from various social strata in the urban and rural population, and as in the case of the monks, there were socially marginal persons among them.

Occasionally, the texts can hint at membership of an ethnic and linguistic group, as in the case of Syncletica. Otherwise, there are few certain pieces of information, and the customs connected to the giving of names in Egypt say little about such membership. In the material from Lower Egypt, names of Greek and Jewish origin dominate: the AP texts mention Theodora, Sarra, Syncletica and Eugenia.<sup>18</sup> Paesia, who is mentioned as a recruit to the ascetic life, has an Egyptian name, but the other female ascetics in AP are anonymous. HM does not mention any female ascetic by name, and only very few Egyptian women are mentioned by name in HL. Besides the Greek name Alexandra, this text mentions three ascetics with Egyptian names: Talis, Taor and Piamoun.<sup>19</sup> Characteristically, these live in Upper Egypt.

There are reasons to reckon with a high number of female ascetics at this period. The numbers given in the texts are naturally a very unsafe starting-point, but if we consider the proportion in numbers between female and male ascetics, the women can sometimes be in the majority: for example, we are told that they are twenty thousand nuns (*parthenoi*) and ten thousand monks at Oxyrrhynchus.<sup>20</sup> Three hundred women live in the monastery at Tabennisi, three hundred in Elias' monastery at Atripe. According to Palladius, there were twelve female monasteries at Antinoë when he stayed there, and sixty sisters lived in *amma* Talis' monastery. At Alexandria, Isidore could entrust his sister to a community of seventy virgins.<sup>21</sup>

### **Women's motivation for an ascetic life**

The texts often deal with the reasons women had for choosing an ascetic life, and occasionally something is indicated of the circumstances surrounding his choice. In a number of cases, it is the encounter with a holy monk that is decisive, as is shown by the narrative about *abba* Serapion and the prostitute, and we find such narratives about both men and women. But when the anchorite Alexandra explains her choice by the wish to avoid awakening desire in the other sex, this is something specific to women, and a similar motivation for women's choice is found in later monastic literature too.<sup>22</sup>

The family situation is mentioned several times as a decisive factor, both in a negative and in a positive sense. PJ tells of two women who had the wish to live as ascetics, but who did not obtain their husbands' permission for this.<sup>23</sup> More commonly, a brother or husband has made his decision to lead an ascetic life, and subsequently persuades his sister or wife to do the same. The episode where Amoun of Nitria persuades his young wife is found in a number of texts. Socrates Scholasticus has Ammonius employ the same arguments that are used in BS and PP, which

are also well known in contemporary monastic literature. The woman who chooses an ascetic life does not only win the eternal good things, but avoids at the same time a number of evil things: births that threaten her own life, worries that come from caring for children, and dependence on a husband's demands and moods.<sup>24</sup> In order to motivate women, it is constantly asserted that a life in continence frees the woman from her biological life-cycle, and women's subordination in marriage is set in contrast to 'the freedom of continence'.<sup>25</sup>

The ascetic life had high prestige in this period, and by choosing it, women attained in a number of cases something close to an equality with men. This is an aspect of women's motivation for this form of life which is emphasised in recent studies of Greek and Roman women's involvement in the early ascetic movement.<sup>26</sup> It is clear that the same kind of motivation can have played a role in Egyptian milieux in the same period.

### **Women's way of life**

It is emphasised in BS that there are many kinds of vocation: 'Each individual must decide which form of life suits best. Many will find advantage in the life in a monastery, but for others it will be better to withdraw into solitude.'<sup>27</sup>

It is precisely the great variety and the large number of possible choices as far as the ascetic form of life is concerned that are characteristic of this period. The female gyrovagues (wandering ascetics) are scarcely mentioned in the Egyptian material; there may perhaps be a hint in the AP, where Syncretica warns monks and virgins against going from place to place.<sup>28</sup> Female anchorites in the wilderness are however mentioned in many contexts. HL tells of a group of four, two brothers and two sisters, who go out into the desert where each one lives a life in solitude.<sup>29</sup> The Greek, Coptic and Latin collections of AP all contain narratives about the female

anchorites: once *abba* Bessarion and *abba* Doulos are passing a cave where an ascetic is sitting and weaving a rope. On their way home, they stop and discover that the ascetic has died in the meantime. In the course of the preparations for the burial, they discover that the ascetic was a woman, and *abba* Bessarion breaks out into praise of the women who live in the desert.<sup>30</sup> Another AP text tells of two monks who are wandering in the desert areas near Sketis. They hear a weak voice coming from a cave in the mountain, and when they come there, they find an old woman who says: 'Now I have lived in this grotto for thirty years, I have lived on roots and have served Christ. Until this day, I have not seen a human being here. In truth, God has sent you to bury me.' When she had said this, she fell asleep in death's sleep. The monks praised God, buried her body and departed.<sup>31</sup>

The texts give extremely little information about *where* in Egypt the female anchorites lived. It is not possible to draw certain conclusions, and W. Bousset does not have sufficiently solid reasons to claim that *amma* Sarra cannot have belonged to the Scetiote milieu.<sup>32</sup> His claim rests on an interpretation of Sarra 8, where we are told briefly that she is visited by monks from Sketis. It is obvious that if female anchorites did live in the region of Sketis, they were separate from the dwellings of the monks. There is in fact a hint in one context that there can have been female anchorites in the region of Scetis: namely, the female anchorite discovered by the two monks in the course of their wandering 'near Scetis' (*juxta Schytim*).<sup>33</sup>

The anachoritic life could involve especial dangers for a woman, as the texts often show: HM speaks about attacks on the cell of a female anchorite, and about one of the anchorites who is saved from rape and led back to the village.<sup>34</sup>

Women who had themselves immured, often in a grave close to a town, are mentioned in several contexts. Palladius speaks of Alexandra who lived immured for ten years: food and work were brought to her from the town and delivered through



a little aperture. She could also carry on a conversation through this aperture, and Palladius reproduces a dialogue between Alexandria and Melania the Elder.<sup>35</sup> After the death of her parents, Syncletica took up her dwelling in the grave of a relative, and here she is visited by women from Alexandria who wish instruction in the inner life.<sup>36</sup> About two-thirds of BS consist of this instruction, and this is probably also the source of Syncletica's *logoi* in AP. Syncletica's blind sister lived with her, and she surrounded herself with faithful disciples. In this case, we can speak of a semi-anachoretic existence which is so characteristic for the ascetic life in Lower Egypt.

A special variant of this form of life is mentioned in HM, where a female anchorite has her cell close to a monastery of monks.<sup>37</sup> It is clearly that this was fairly common, and can also be attested from a somewhat later period; the excavations of the monastery of Epiphanius show that female anchorites lived close to the monastery and had *inter alia* epistolary contact with the monks.<sup>38</sup>

Life in the monastery too could take various forms. In HL we are told in two places of a form of organisation that is reminiscent of a double monastery: HL 29 relates how the ascetic Elias built a *monasterium* on his property at Atirpe. Here he gathered together three hundred female ascetics, living among them and functioning as counsellor and mediator. His successor lived in a storey by himself, to which the sisters had no access.

Both HL and AP give glimpses of life in monasteries of women, and even here it is possible for the individual to choose her own form of asceticism, independently of rule and community. The newly converted prostitute whom *abba* Serapion conducts to the monastery herself chooses after a time that she will be immured in the monastic cell, and she also decides on her praxis of fasting. Palladius tells about Taor in the monastery at Antinoë that she refuses to receive new clothing and does not go to the church with the other sisters, but sits in her cell clothed in rags.<sup>39</sup>

One and the same life-cycle could contain abrupt changes: the sister who is appointed *amma* by the monk Piteroum can suddenly leave the monastery, and no one hears anything more about her. The text indicates that this was an expression of her great humility.<sup>40</sup> Such changes in the form of life were also connected to various stages in spiritual maturity: in many cases, monastic life could be a preparation for the anachoretic life. The opposite path too is hinted at in BS. Syncletica says that if a female anchorite is plagued by (evil) thoughts, she ought to enter a monastery.<sup>41</sup>

"House asceticism" was frequently practised in Egypt throughout the whole of this period: women remained at home and lived as a Christian *parthenos theou* in prayer and work. Such a mode of life is spoken of and regulated both by pseudo-Athanasius and by Hippolytus' Canons.<sup>42</sup> In HL, a whole chapter is dedicated to the visionary virgin Piamoun who lives at home with her mother in the village, and Palladius speaks also of an anonymous virgin who was his neighbour in Antinoë.<sup>43</sup>

PP does not recommend any specific outer framework, but indicates various forms of ascetic praxis.<sup>44</sup> The concrete counsels, e.g. with regard to prayer, the praxis of fasting and clothing, could be linked equally to house asceticism and to an anachoretic existence. Nevertheless, PP presupposes celibacy, and hence is not directly addressing women who belonged to the *philoponoi* or *spoudaioi* of that period, i.e. members of Christian fraternities of fellowships that did not radically abandon their link to the "world".<sup>45</sup>

We find relatively little information about the clothes of the female ascetics. There are hints that ascetics of both sexes in many cases wore the same habit: for example, *abba* Bessarion does not notice that he is speaking to a woman, when he seeks the anchorite who is sitting and weaving a rope. Palladius says that the brothers and sisters in the Pachomian monastery had the same form of life, and adds that the only difference was that the women did not wear the cloak (*melote*). He also mentions that

the women cut their hair and wore a cowl (*cucullus*).<sup>46</sup> In the monastery at Antinoë, Taor refused to receive a new habit (*himation*), veil (*maphorion*) and shoes. PP, chapter 11, gives the most detailed description of clothing. The Christian virgin is to wear a black or uncoloured *himation* of cheap material, and the sleeves are to be long enough to cover the hands as far as the fingers. The hair is to be cut, and the head covered.

### Work and prayer-life

From the 4th century onwards, the relationship between work and prayer was one of the most debated questions in the ascetic milieu in Egypt.<sup>47</sup> The ideal was unceasing prayer, but how were prayer and work to be combined? The orthodox answer to this question is formulated clearly in the texts, and a specific characteristic of the Egyptian ascetic life was precisely the weight attached to manual work. Each one was to be self-supporting whether as anchorite in the desert or as member of a monastic community. The monk Pambo says on his deathbed: "I cannot remember ever eating my bread any day without having won it with the work of my hands."<sup>48</sup> *Apa* Moses emphasises precisely this ideal when he writes to the sisters that "each one of you is to carry out the manual work which is laid upon her, for it is only thus that one obeys the commandment that 'the one who does not work is not to eat either'".<sup>49</sup>

Naturally, work was important for economic reasons. In the closing formula in one of the letters. Moses mentions that the mother superior (*maay*) of the monastery has the material responsibility for the sisters, and he asks God to help her to be able at all times to find the means necessary for the maintenance of the sisters - for "the number of the sisters is great," he writes.<sup>50</sup>

Work ensured the independence of the ascetics, while at the same time being the presupposition for the ability to give alms

to the needy. Work had another important function too: to counter the dreaded *akēdia*, the depression or discouragement that could descend on the ascetic. When Melania the Elder visits the anchorite Alexandra, Melania's first question is precisely how she fights against *akēdia*. Alexandra's answer is clear enough: "From early in the morning until the ninth hour of the day, I pray, while spinning linen at the same time".<sup>51</sup>

The glimpses we are permitted to have of the female ascetics' work do not diverge at any point from the activities of the monks. Like Alexandra, the virgin Piamoun spins linen, and the woman who has herself immured in her monastic cell receives her manual work through an aperture together with her food. Taor in the monastery at Antinoë never leaves her cell, but sits there occupied with work.<sup>52</sup> The most customary work among the male ascetics, viz. the weaving of rope, was clearly also carried out by the female ascetics: the woman whom Bessarion passes out in the wilderness was engaged precisely in weaving such a rope.

The big monasteries were organised like firms with specialised manual labour, and Palladius informs us about a tailor from the city who wandered astray across the river to the large monastery of women in Tabennisi. Here he asks for work, and one of the sisters replies: "We have our own tailors".<sup>53</sup> In Moses' letters, various forms of charitable work are also mentioned: the sisters take care of sick and needy persons, they take in children in need of care, and they prepare food for the laity.<sup>54</sup>

Manual work was linked to the daily prayer. The most widespread form of prayer, *meletē* (meditation), consisted of recitation from memory of scriptural texts. This made it possible to carry out these two obligations simultaneously, and one could retain the inner concentration irrespective of what tasks one had. Moses advises the sisters thus: "When you work, you are to recite aloud from God's word, so that the demons do not find your heart open and receptive."<sup>55</sup>

In the anachoretic milieu of Lower Egypt, a specific number of prayers or psalms to be recited in the course of a day - usually twelve - was established relatively early. It was only on Saturday and Sunday that they came together for a common *synaxis*, a liturgical celebration, often with the celebration of the eucharist. The daily meal was taken at the ninth hour, and the anchorite Alexandra, who prays and works until this hour, continues after the meal with meditations on the lives of the prophets, martyrs and apostles.

In part, the prayer-life followed a set pattern, but in part there were possibilities for personal choices, and thus also for the great ascetic exploits: Palladius tells us about a virgin who recited seven hundred prayers in the course of five days, without even pausing to eat. She had been doing this for thirty years. We are told that Piamoun in one specific situation stood upright in prayer during the whole night, without genuflections.<sup>56</sup>

PP confirms that the ideal was to stand upright during prayer, and this text gives concrete regulations both about the position of the body and about the women's clothing during prayer. PP also gives precise information about *which* Psalms of David could be included in the daily cycle of prayer, and this selection of Psalms is probably representative of an Alexandrian milieu of female ascetics at the beginning of the fifth century.<sup>57</sup>

### **Direction and instruction of female ascetics**

When Taor in the monastery at Antinoë is called the *mathetria*, disciple, of *amma* Talis, this points to *amma* Talis' role as spiritual director.<sup>58</sup> The women in Alexandria visited Syncletica for direction; women ascetics who were not linked to a monastery could also visit one of the monks.<sup>59</sup>

None of the sources gives detailed information about how the instruction of the nuns or of the female ascetics was carried out; it is only the letters of *apa* Moses that give glimpses of

what such an instruction could contain in concrete terms. But both monastic life and anachoretic life presupposed specific forms of knowledge, and the texts give some indications concerning specific aspects of the transmission of this knowledge.

For example, we know from the *Life of Pachomius* that Pachomius himself saw to it that the monks' rule was sent to the sisters.<sup>60</sup> The Father who was appointed to have responsibility for the sisters was also to see to it that they were instructed in sacred Scripture, and the rule itself laid great emphasis on instruction, *inter alia* by demanding that the illiterate were to learn to read.<sup>61</sup>

It is probable that Egyptian women were generally less able to write than men, independently of the women's social position.<sup>62</sup> But several signs indicate that it was precisely in the ascetic milieu that women could acquire at least a certain ability to read and write. *Apa Moses'* letters to the sisters are once again an interesting piece of testimony, and some passages in the AP point indirectly to such skills: a female ascetic who addresses herself to Antony to receive direction tells him that she has learned both the Old and the New Testament, and we are told of a certain *abba* Johannes that he regularly receives letters written by his elder sister, who lives in a monastery at some distance from him.<sup>63</sup> Palladius tells us that his neighbour in Antinoë gives him her copy of a work by Clement of Alexandria shortly before her death,<sup>64</sup> and the PP presupposes not only that Christian virgins were able to read, but that they also possessed books: "Have a psalter and learn the psalms. May the sun as it rises see the book in your hands," says this text.<sup>65</sup> Palladius relates both the intellectual gifts of the Roman women Paula and Melania the Elder's learning and wide studies.<sup>67</sup> It is altogether remarkable to what an extent the monastic literature at this period can present learning as a part of the ideal for Christian women.

## Segregation and collaboration

To renounce the "world" involved at the same time a struggle against one's own sexuality. This struggle, with its victories and defeats, is a continuously recurring theme in these texts. This is true of ascetics of both sexes: the AP texts tell us that *amma* Sarra fought for thirteen years against *pneuma tes porneias*, the spirit of fornication.<sup>67</sup> A continual theme in Moses' instructions is precisely the demand for sexual purity "One does not win purity without suffering, and guard yourself against meeting men unless it is absolutely necessary, never spend a night outside." Moses was clearly a guide with insight into the psychology of self-deception, and he can express himself thus: "Do not tell yourself, 'I am old', or 'I am only a child', or 'I am a virgin' - for the devil is evil, he devours, he chews to pieces, and he tramples what remains under his feet."<sup>68</sup>

The life of the desert anchorites, and especially the life of the nuns, presupposed a permanent collaboration between the sexes, and roles for segregation and enclosure were one way to regulate this collaboration. Palladius relates how the Pachomian monasteries of men and women in Tabennisi lay each on its own side of the Nile, and only the priest and the deacon crossed the river each Sunday. The successor of the ascetic Elias in the monastery in Atripe exercises surveillance and exhorts the sisters from a storey of his own, but they never met, for, as the text says, "there was no ladder there".<sup>69</sup>

Palladius tells us, however, that *amma* Talis was so much loved by the young sisters that the monastery doors could stand open.<sup>70</sup> According to Aline Rousselle, this remark intends to say something characteristic of the situation in the female monasteries of Egypt: here, young women could be locked in without their own consent.<sup>71</sup> We know, however, that the enclosure was practised very strictly in the male monasteries in Egypt too. In Shenute's monastery, the brothers were shut up in the monastery area, and even there the freedom of movement

was restricted.<sup>72</sup> The wall which surrounded the Egyptian monasteries not only marked out the monastic area as a *temenos* in relation to the surrounding world, but had at the same time a clearly disciplinary and juridical function. There is in fact nothing in the sources that indicates a difference between male and female monasteries on this point; on the contrary, where we do find concrete information about the female monasteries, it is the freedom of movement that is criticised. Moses complains that the sisters undertake tasks of work outside the monastery, and that he is intensely displeased that they prepare food in the homes of the laity. He points out that this has led to criticism of their conduct of life, and he adds: "If I hear about something like this again, I will not tolerate it."<sup>73</sup>

Palladius' remark about *amma* Talis must be seen in connection with the rest of the section about her: the freedom which holds sway in the monastery is connected to her holiness. *Amma* Talis had attained such a degree of inner harmony (*apatheia*), says Palladius, that she could sit down with him and lay both hands on his shoulders. Such a spontaneous expression of freedom and openness was possible for one who had come sufficiently far in the inner life.

In contrast to all commandments about segregation and rules for enclosure, all the texts can consequently emphasise that, in some clearly defined contexts, such regulations were not essential, or were invalid. For example, Amoun and his young wife began their ascetic life together in the wilderness of Nitria, and Socrates Scholasticus emphasises that they shared a dwelling. He says that they could do this irrespective of the fact that they were of different sexes, "for they were one in Christ".<sup>74</sup> Palladius' account of Melania the Elder's friendship with the great anchorites Pambo and Macarius, and also of her journey with the Egyptian ascetics in exile, must be seen in such a light.<sup>75</sup>



The accounts in AP texts of the activity of the *ammas* also presupposes the idea that the person's sex was considered to be irrelevant in certain situations.

### **The authority of the word**

The charismatic word played the same role in the anachoretic milieu in Lower Egypt as the rule in the Pachomian monasteries, and J.-C. Guy distinguishes two forms of instruction: the anchorites' "education in the Word" and the monastic members' "education in the Rule".<sup>76</sup>

It was the spiritual director who had the authority of the Word, and who would lead the disciple further by virtue of his/her own experience and insight into the inner life. "Give me a Word, so that I can be saved," say the AP texts, and as *abba* Poimen says, the director was to be a *typos*, a model, not a *nomothetēs*, a lawgiver, for his disciples.<sup>77</sup>

In the ascetic movement in Egypt, both women and men worked as directors and models. The fact that women could function with authority on the same terms as men, is expressed clearly by their transmission of the "charismatic word" and by the inclusion of their *logoi* in the collections of *Apophthegmata*. Later translators such as the Armenians have clearly seen this pointing-up of women's authority, and have consequently changed the text by attributing the women's *logoi* to men. W. Bousset observes: "There appears to have existed a shame to quote women as having authority."<sup>78</sup>

The Greek collections do not mention more than four *ammas* by name, but in this connection, the modest number is less important than the fact that their *logoi* are quoted. I. Hausherr formulates this very clearly: "What counts is their presence, which is a fact with doctrinal value, based on a principle; their small number has a merely historical and sociological significance."<sup>79</sup>

## The Egyptian Mothers

The oriental material employs the term *amma* (*ama*) primarily as an honorific title, and Palladius says that the title is used in Egypt for the "spiritual women" (*tas pneumatikas*).<sup>80</sup> In other words, an *amma* made visible specific gifts of grace which those around her could recognise and accept as signs of holiness.

The AP collections quote *logoi* of *amma* Theodora, *amma* Sarra, *amma* Syncletica and *amma* Eugenia. The term *amma* is used in the HL both of an anonymous nun of low rank, and of *amma* Talis who unites the two meanings this title could have: she has formal status as the superior of the monastery and at the same time she has attained *apatheia*.

In the AP, an *amma* is described in exactly the same way as an *abba*. This is true of the contents of the *logoi* of the *ammass*, just as much as of the glimpses we are given of their life and activity. The information given by the texts about their work and their social contacts deserve special attention. We are told quite simply as a matter of course that *amma* Theodora addresses herself with an exegetical question to the patriarch Theophilus, and in Theodora 10 one of 'the old men' puts to her a question concerning the resurrection: "She said, 'As pledge, example, and as prototype we have him who died for us and is risen, Christ our God'."<sup>81</sup> We are told of *amma* Sarra that she sends messages to the *higumen* Paphnutius in Sketis,<sup>82</sup> and she is visited both by two great anchorites from Pelusium and by brothers from Sketis. On another occasion, we are told that she speaks to the brothers.

The AP do not mention any women who address themselves to the *ammass*, but a stylistic detail is peculiar to the *logoi* of Theodora and Syncletica: both include women in their discourse by twice addressing "virgins and monks".<sup>83</sup>

In this context, it is a subordinate question to what extent such *logoi* are to be considered as historically correct. What is interesting is that the person or persons who wrote them down

took such situations for granted, and also fulfilled that period's demands for an historically probable narrative. The intention was to portray the exemplary, and to emphasise what the reader or adherent should lay to heart.

### **Women as models**

All the texts emphasise that the holy ascetic brings to new life the exemplary human persons of earlier times, and in a number of cases we have genuine ascetic dynasties.<sup>84</sup> Often, the external *appearance* of the ascetic can be presented prominently as a sign of this: we are told of the anchorite Johannes that: "He looked like Abraham and had a beard like Aaron". The external appearance is never mentioned in the *vitae* of women, or in the narratives of the *ammās* in AP or HL, when their holiness is to be described. But despite this difference in the form of hagiographical expression, holy women can bring to life historical models in the same way as men. In BS, Syncletica is described as a "faithful disciple of saint Thecla", and the course of their lives is parallelised in a lengthy passage.<sup>85</sup> Gregory of Nyssa describes his sister Macrina as a new Thecla.<sup>86</sup> In the introduction to the *Life of Olympias* we are shown the dynasty of saints in whose footprints the deaconess Olympias follows: Abraham and Lot, Joseph and Job, and finally Thecla, "the holiest among women".<sup>87</sup> But it is not only for women that Thecla is proposed as a model: Gregory of Nyssa can inflame his friend Amphidocius with zeal for an ascetic life by pointing to the example of Thecla.<sup>88</sup>

The saint can also be portrayed as the successor of the prophets, patriarchs and apostles, and both sexes share in this transmission of the "inheritance of power", *hē kleronomia tōn charismatōn*, throughout history.<sup>89</sup>

A favourite motif in the monastic literature is an instruction given by means of a comparison between persons. The starting-

point is often the supernatural knowledge given to one of the Fathers, who himself has come far in the inner life, that one or more persons surpass him. After this, he wins new insight through an encounter with these persons. The monk Piteroum is told about a sister in the Tabennisi monastery who surpasses him, and he goes to the monastery and identifies her for the other sisters: "She is an *amma* for me and for you ... and I pray that on judgment day I may be set as high as she."<sup>90</sup> The life of the female anchorite becomes a corrective for *abba* Bessarion, and he says: "Women too fight against Satan, they overcome him out in the desert through the power of the Cross, while we lead a useless life in the towns."<sup>91</sup> In a little narrative found both in PJ and in the Bohairic version of the *Life of Macarius*, Macarius is told of two women who surpass him in perfection. He visits them and learns that they are married and live with their husbands. After the conversation, Macarius exclaims: "Truly, the decisive point is not whether one is a virgin or married, monk or layman. God gives the Holy Spirit to all, according to their good will."<sup>92</sup>

The point of the story is not at all that Macarius - or his biographer - has changed his view on the ascetic life as the *melior vita*. But there is another piece of knowledge that Macarius acquires through the encounter with the women, and that emerges at the same time as an important and charismatic hierarchy, independent of sex, civil status and office. Thus, these texts hint at a link between symbolic language and social reality: on certain conditions, and in certain milieux, women could receive "the rank of men", which meant in this context that holy women could be attributed the same charismatic authority as men. This can be singled out as a characteristic trait in the early ascetic movement in Egypt.

## NOTES

1. *Vie de Sainte Mélanie*, SC 90, 96.
2. The term *ascetic* is used in this presentation to speak of all forms of Christian *anakhoresis*. In the texts, the female ascetic is usually called *parthenos* or *parthenos theou*, independently of the question whether she lived alone or in a community.
3. Women ascetics are virtually never mentioned in the classical studies of early monastic life: cf. Heussi og Chitty.
4. Judge, 298-307.
5. Amélineau (1888).
6. HL, prolog.
7. PG 67, 521; Hist. Eccl. 4, 23.
8. Martin, 21-22.
9. Judge, 82.
10. Bell, 108.
11. Martin, 12.
12. HL 4; Rousseau, 1971, 380-419.
13. HL 8, 2-6; HM 12, 1-3; PG 67; Hist. Eccl. 4, 23.
14. BS 1, 4; 1, 7.
15. HL 5, 1.
16. HL 31, 1; 60, 2.
17. PG 65, Serapion 1; John Kolobos 39.
18. *Amma* Theodora, PG 65, 201-204, Guy 1962, 22-23. *Amma* Sarra, PG 65, 420-421, Guy 1962, 34. *Amma* Syncletica, PG 65, 421-428. *Amma* Eugenia, quoted in Regnault, 65.
19. HL 59, Talis; Taor; HL 31, Piamoun.
20. HM 5, 6.
21. HL 33, 29; 59, 1, 5.
22. HL 5, 2; John Moscos 102.
23. PG 73; 20, 17.
24. BS 42; PP 2.
25. PG 67; Hist. Eccl. 4, 23.
26. Clark, 1986.
27. BS 97.
28. PG 65, Syncletica 7; cf. Fiey, 283.
29. HL 11.
30. PG 65, Bessarion 4.
31. PG 73, 1008A.
32. Bousset, 39.

33. PG 73, 1008A.
34. HM 10; 14.
35. HL 5, 2.
36. BS 21.
37. HM 10, 3.
38. Winlock & Crum, 132.
39. HL 59, 2.
40. HL 34, 7.
41. BS 50.
42. Ps. Athanasios c. 98, 104, 136. Ps. Hippolytos c. 38.
43. HL 31; 60.
44. PP 13; 14; 16.
45. Cf. E. Wipszycka, s. 512.
46. HL 33; 34, 1.
47. Amélineau (1888), 700.
48. PG 65, Pambo 8.
49. Amélineau (1888), 701.
50. Amélineau (1888), 701.
51. HL 5, 2.
52. HL 5, 2; Serapion 1; HL 59, 2.
53. HL 33, 2.
54. Amélineau (1888), 697-698.
55. Amélineau (1888), 700.
56. HL 20; 31.
57. PP 11; 12; 16; 20.
58. HL 59, 2.
59. BS 20.
60. Lefort, 96.
61. Deseille, 38.
62. Bell, 108.
63. Regnault, 201.
64. HL 60,2.
65. PP 12.
66. HL 41, 2; 55, 3.
67. PG 65; Sarra 1.
68. Amélineau (1888), 699.
69. HL 30; 59, 1.
70. HL 59, 1.
71. Rouselle, 234.
72. Leipoldt, 145-146; HM 17, 1.
73. Amélineau (1888), 698.

74. PG 67; Hist. Eccl. 4, 23.
75. HL 10, 5; 18, 28; 38, 8-9; 46, 5-6; 46, 3.
76. Guy, 1974, 45.
77. PG 65; Poimen 188.
78. Bousset, 39.
79. Hausherr, 271.
80. HL 34, 6.
81. Theodora 10, Guy 1962, 23.
82. PG 65; Paphnutius 6.
83. PG 65; Theodora 3; Syncletica 8.
84. Rousseau, 72.
85. BS 8.
86. *Vie de Sainte Macrine*, 146.
87. *Vie anonyme d'Olympias*, SC 13 bis, 406-408.
88. PG 37, 1550A.
89. HM 15.
90. HL 34, 6.
91. PG 65; Bessarion 4.
92. PJ 20, 17; Amélineau 1894, 230.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- AP Apophthegmata Patrum. *Patrologia Graeca* 65.
- BS Bios Synklétikēs. *Patrologia Graeca* 28.
- HL Butler, C. (Ed.), *The Lausiac History of Palladius, Texts and Studies*, 6, 2. Cambridge 1904.



- HM Festugière, A.J. (Ed.), *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*. Bruxelles 1961.
- PJ Pelagius and John. Latin translation of AP, *Patrologia Latina* 73.
- PP Peri Parthenias. *Patrologia Graeca* 28.

## "Becoming Male": a Gnostic, Early Christian and Islamic Metaphor

In certain Gnostic texts or texts that show unmistakable Gnostic influence, we find a sex-change metaphor<sup>1</sup> where "woman is turned into man" (*hē gynē eis andra metatithestai*) or where the more general expression "becoming male" (*apandro*) is used. Apparently these terms can be regarded as parts of an anthropological and soteriological terminology.

A well-known example of such a sex-change metaphor is found in the *logion* 114 of the *Gospel of Thomas*. This text comes out of the Nag Hammadi library Codex II, and probably springs from an encratite Gnostic-Christian setting. *Logion* 114 is set within the characteristic Gnostic frame of reference to the opposition between Peter and Mary Magdalene, "Simon Peter said to them, 'Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life.' Jesus said, 'I myself shall lead her in order to make her male (*hout*), so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself male (*hout*) will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.'"

The *Gospel of Thomas* is one of the most discussed texts of the Nag Hammadi library, and *logion* 114, "ce fort étrange propos" as H.-Ch. Puech calls it, is often commented on.<sup>2</sup> The sex-change metaphor in *logion* 114 is almost without exception regarded as a purely Gnostic metaphor. Only on rare occasions, as with G. Quispel, do we find that a parallel is drawn between it and the work of Philo and Porphyrios.<sup>3</sup>

In Porphyrios' *Ad Marcellam* as well as in Philo's work there is, in fact, talk of "becoming male" as a metaphorical expression of an inner development and of the attainment of spiritual perfection.<sup>4</sup> As we shall see, similar imagery can be found among prominent Christian authors of the early period as well.

In other words, the sex-change metaphor was in wide-spread use and indications are that this metaphor can be regarded as part of the cultural *koinē* of late Antiquity. On the basis of a common scale of values, the categories "male" and "female" are polarized, and the "becoming male" metaphor indicates in all contexts a development from a lower to a higher stage of moral and spiritual perfection. Used as a religious and literary metaphor, "becoming male" need not necessarily be given a more precise interpretation than this.

The first question under consideration is whether the sex-change metaphor has a specifically Gnostic meaning so that it may be said to be an integral part of Gnostic anthropological thought.

Furthermore, no parallel between Gnostic and Christian use of the sex-change metaphor has so far been drawn, and a comparison between the use of the sex-change metaphor in the two religious systems is all the more interesting since these systems partly converged and partly diverged sharply during the first centuries C.E.

In this way we will be able to gain a better understanding of how this religio-literary metaphor might have its meaning determined by theological context, either Gnostic or Christian, and consequently might have a more precise and nuanced content than what is conveyed by the general idea of a development from a lower to a higher state.

In the present context the term "sex-change metaphor" will refer to metaphors that explicitly refer to a change from one sex to the other. It can be either "woman becomes man", which expresses a positive development, or "man becomes woman",

which expresses moral degeneration and perdition. Consequently, no mention will be made of the phenomenon of a female state that is superseded by a qualitatively better male state, as described in the Ps. Clementine literature and in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*. In our context these are not regarded as sex-change metaphors in the strict sense.

In the Gnostic as well as in the Christian texts, the dominant metaphor of change is the "woman turned into man" variant, expressing spiritual progress and salvation. There are two main types of this metaphor: (a) in the *Gospel of Thomas* the process of change applies to women only; (b) in *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, the metaphor indicates a change which either sex can undergo.

### **The Sex-Change Metaphor in Gnostic Anthropology**

In Gnostic myths crucial cosmic and anthropological events are described through the use of a plethora of images taken from human biology. Since these images often have sexual reference, the male-female categories are brought to the fore. Body symbolism, or what Mary Douglas calls "natural symbols", can be said to be typical of the period and the same time it is the Gnostic vehicle of expression par excellence. In Gnostic texts, therefore, we must regard the sex-change metaphor as part of a larger and more all-encompassing symbolic language, where the conflicting or complementary nature of the male-female categories is central.<sup>5</sup>

Current work on this topic will quite spontaneously refer to the sex-change metaphor as Gnostic (or alternatively as apocryphal Judaeo-Christian) and consequently regard it as extraneous to Christian orthodoxy. In the light of this fact it is surprising to discover the extremely small number of the explicit sex-change metaphors we can actually find in Gnostic literature.

In the *Gospel of Mary*, Mary Magdalene tells the apostles that Jesus made her as well as them into "human beings" or

"into men" (*afaan nro*).<sup>6</sup> This statement has recently been interpreted in the light of the sex-change metaphor as we find it in *logion* 114.<sup>7</sup> In the Nag Hammadi library Codex VII 2, 65, we read that the chosen are warned against being "made women" or to "become like women" (*mmprsope nshime*).<sup>8</sup> Apart from these examples, the sex-change metaphor in its explicit form can only be found in the church Fathers' comments on the Gnostic systems; and of these there are only three instances: (1) In Clement of Alexandria's *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 21, 3; 22, 3 and 79, (2) in a *Fragment of Heraklion* quoted by Origen *In Johannem*, VI, XX, 111, (3) and a somewhat vaguer reference in Hippolytos' *Refutationes* V, 8, 44 in connection with the Naassenes. And this is all. Both Theodotos and Heraklion represent the Valentinian Gnosis in the second half of the second century; the Oriental and the Italian branch respectively. In this paper we shall take a closer look at Clement's rendering of Theodotos. The *Fragment of Heraklion*, in the rendering given by Origen, is an exegesis of Joh. 1, 23, and, in terms of ideas expressed, in line with the *Excerpts*. In the *Excerpts* we have the additional advantage that the sex-change metaphor is used with a good deal of contextual support.

### **"Woman turned into man" in Excerpta ex Theodoto**

Exc. 21, 2 is an exegesis of Gen. 1, 27b, "male and female he created them" and of Cor. 1, 15, 29, "What will those do who are baptized for the dead." According to Theodotos, Gen. 1, 27b talks of Sophia's emission (*probolē*): Sophia brought forth Christ and the angels, the chosen male, as well as the female element which is called upon to be saved and which stands for the Valentinians themselves. Throughout the text male stands for angels, perfection, the elect. Opposed to this there is female which stands for imperfection, yet an imperfection that is called upon to become perfect. In this context female is a positive

category even if it manifests itself as being temporarily an imperfect state. This positive connotation linked to the female concept can be found in the description of the pleromatic world. Here we find a positive *conjunctio oppositorum*: the female is an integrated part, even though it is derived and secondary to the male.

In Valentinian anthropological thinking this pleromatic *conjunctio* is lost and the human being in the material world is characterized by the separation between male and female. In the *Gospel of Philip* it is expressed in this way: "When Eve was still in Adam death did not exist. When she was separated from him death came into being."<sup>9</sup> When salvation is described in Exc. 21, 3, it is said that "the female (pneumatic) elements, becoming men (*apandrothenta*), are united to the angels and pass into Pleroma."

The female constitution is, as we can see, common to men and women and both sexes are "made male". In the Gnostic context, however, all human beings do not stand the same chance of achieving salvation; only the chosen few can reach salvation aided by their pneumatic nature which is given at the outset, not acquired.

In Exc. 22, 1-3 another aspect is brought forward: Cor. 1, 15, 29, "Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead?" Theodotos' interpretation of this is that the angels "among whose numbers we are" as he characteristically puts it, let themselves be baptized for the human beings who are called "the dead". The angels are here called "the men" and "the living" because they are not part of the divided material existence. On this basis we get the following equations: (1) worldly existence = death = female; (2) angel-likeness and pleromatic existence = life = male. Equating female with death, and the negative terminology flowing from this equation is the main theme in Exc. 67, 68, and 79. In these passages a distinction is made between "woman's child", who is devoid of reason, power, and form, and "man's child", the

manly, pneumatic element or "the manly fruit". Those who are brought forth by woman are destined to die, only those who are "formed" and transformed into men (*mophōthen de metetethē eis andra*) will have life.<sup>10</sup>

Here the category called "female" differs from the male category by its double nature of ambiguity: female indicates first of all those who are chosen and may achieve salvation; and at the same time and within the same system, female stands for that which is evil and doomed to perdition and death. In the Gnostic system evil is linked to sexuality and procreation, and the sexuality-salvation polarity is paralleled by the female-male polarity.<sup>11</sup> In this sense salvation will always represent the final parting of the ways for male and female. A most salient expression of this is found in Nag Hammadi library's Codex VIII, *Zostrianos*, in a passage which reads: "Flee from the bondage of femininity, and choose for yourselves the salvation of masculinity." It should be noted that even this quotation is taken from a text where femaleness has obvious positive connotations when the pneumatic world is described.<sup>12</sup>

In the anthropological and soteriological context under discussion, female is thus a term that is inherently ambiguous on the one hand, it is positive even though it may be temporarily imperfect; on the other hand, it is negative, evil and linked to desire. In this respect it is in stark contrast to the concept of maleness, which does not have the same duality attached to it, but which unambiguously stands for reunion and unity: salvation is *conjunctio*, which could be called *becoming male*.

The quotation from the *Gospel of Philip* 68 shows how the separation of Adam and Eve was used as an image of the degenerate state of the cosmos. In the same text we also read, "If he (Adam) becomes complete and attains his former self, death will be no more." To be "made man" is thus primarily linked to the idea of regaining unity, and Exc. 22, 3 uses a number of parallel expressions covering the same idea: "Therefore we are raised up 'equal to angels', and restored as males, member for member in

unity." Here we see how the metaphor "restored as males" duplicates other central Valentinian metaphors that all refer to the restoration, *apokatastasis*, of a lost unity: "to become equal to angels", the "members that are united"; similar, also, to metaphors in other texts like: "to be united with one's image" or "with oneself" or "to come together in the nuptial chamber". Metaphors like "woman changed into man" or "female made male" are central in soteriological imagery. It seems reasonable, therefore, to consider the sex-change metaphor an integral part of this imagery.

And even if the sex-change metaphor is seldom used in its explicit form in Gnostic texts, it would be wrong to consider it a foreign element in these texts.

The specific trait of the sex-change metaphor is that it focuses on sexual differentiation *per se*. The passage in the *Gospel of Thomas*, *logion* 114, where Mary is "made male" is often interpreted in light of *logion* 22, which reads, "... so that the male not be male nor the female female." Variations on this theme are found also in *logion* 106. In these cases we are obviously dealing with descriptions of a process of salvation where sex categories are used as spiritual categories, indicating an asexual or a metasexual state. This metasexual interpretation of the sex-change metaphor, which is reasonable for the quotations from the *Gospel of Thomas*, cannot rule out different interpretations in other context. In Hippolytos among others we find, in connection with the Naassenes, that salvation involves the coming into existence of a new being who is neither man nor woman, but a man-woman, *arsenothēlys*.<sup>13</sup> It seems reasonable to look upon this as a variation on another and related Gnostic motif, that of androgyny, of which there are also definite traces in early Christian texts.<sup>14</sup>



### The "becoming male" metaphor in early Christian texts

So far we have interpreted the Gnostic sex-change metaphor as a non-literal, symbolic expression. Are there instances where "woman turned into man" has been given a more concrete and literal interpretation? A literal interpretation is, in fact, suggested in Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* 22, 17 where the resurrection of the dead is discussed. Unfortunately, Augustine does not develop this point beyond stating that some, he does not say who, have interpreted Rom. 8, 29, "To be even formed to the image of the Son" and Eph. 4, 13, about "becoming perfect man", to mean that women are supposed to be resurrected as men. Augustine rejects this interpretation as do other Christian authors of the period.<sup>15</sup> We are not here focusing on Augustine's interesting text *per se*, but we want to use it to draw attention to New Testament passages which may have served as scriptural foundation for the "woman turned into man" theme as it appears in a Christian context. Looking at the patristic material in order to check specifically the use of *teleios anēr*, we find that Eph. 4, 13 in particular has played an important role in giving the sex-change metaphor moorings in Christian thought.<sup>16</sup>

Clement of Alexandria is the first Christian author who makes use of Eph. 4, 13 and whose work gives prominence to *teleios anēr*. Clement describes the Christian Gnostic as *the perfect man*; and in an interesting but overlooked passage in Strom. VI, 100, 3, we read of the Christian Gnostic wife who frees herself from the bondage of the flesh and reaches perfection in the same way as her husband; "souls are neither male nor female, when they no longer marry nor are given in marriage. And is not woman turned into man, (*gynaika eis andra metatithestai*), the woman who is no more female than he, the perfect, manly woman."

"Making women manly" is certainly not a central theme in Clement's writings. However, on the basis of this passage and his anthropology generally, where the relations between a

common human soil and sex-differentiated nature are discussed in detail, there are good reasons for assuming that he includes women when, for instance, in a context where he quotes Eph. 4, 13 *in extenso*, he exhorts the believers to become "male and perfect" (Strom. IV, 132, 1). To become *teleios anēr*, "male and perfect", is thus the aim for both sexes, and the metaphor "woman turned into man" shows women as *anthrōpos* and is used by Clement as an image of salvation.

To sum up, in the writings of Clement we see how the "becoming male" theme, coloured as it is by its time and cultural background, converge with certain New Testament texts where *teleios anēr* can be regarded as a determining metaphor. We would, of course, need a more thorough analysis of this motif in Clement as Eph. 4, 13 is not the only relevant text. However, our aim in the present paper is primarily to point to important themes, and to achieve this objective some passages from Origen will serve to illustrate the Christian use of the "becoming male" metaphor.

In Origen's work the male and female polarity is strongly stressed. This has consequences for his ideas on anthropology and ethics; consequences which must be seen in the light of the fact that he links the categories male and female to his concept of the soul. The masculine part of *homo interior*, i.e. the spirit, is regarded as superior and qualitatively better than the female part, *anima*, whose domain is the senses. However, male and female categories constitute not only the inner hierarchy, but are also used metaphorically to indicate moral qualities.<sup>17</sup> "Woman" stands for weakness, sensuality, laziness, dependency and can also be linked directly to the sphere of sin. This is, of course, a well-known theme in patristic literature. The point we want to make here is that Origen at the same time spiritualizes the category of sex.

This means that he explicitly states that the individual human being's real sexual appartenance is of an inner nature. It is the moral and spiritual quality of *homo interior* which decides

whether the individual should be named man or woman. In *Homilia in Josue* 9, 9 we read: "Men and women are distinguished according to differences of heart. How many belong to the female sex who before God are strong men, and how many men must be counted weak and indolent women." This text, among several other possible texts, is of special interest because it expressly links the metaphor and the extra-metaphorical reality. A woman by virtue of her moral and spiritual qualities may be turned into a man, i.e. may be saved, while a man may "become a woman", i.e. may degenerate and be lost.

Just like Clement, Origen uses Eph. 4, 13 as a text about the progress (*prokope*) of the soul, and the goal of human salvation is described as a transformation into "the perfect man". To get a clearer idea of the interrelationship between the "becoming male" metaphor and other soteriological metaphors in Origen, we must take a closer look at the concept of *homo interior*.

We find in a number of Christian writers of late Antiquity that *homo interior* is described as a man with all the ordinary limbs and sense organs. This is a frequently used metaphor, not only in theological literature, but in hagiographic texts as well.<sup>18</sup> Two texts from Origen are well suited to shed some light on the early version of the imagery under consideration, namely *Homiliae in Genesim* and *Dialektos*.<sup>19</sup>

The most detailed and systematic description of *homo interior* in all of Origen's work is given in *Dialektos*, where the starting point is, characteristically, an exegesis of Gen. 1, 27b. Here we read that "every member of the outward man has a name corresponding to what is true of the inward man."<sup>20</sup> The idea of growth and change of this inner man is central because it is only *homo interior* who is created in the image of God and this image must be renewed constantly. To achieve *homoiōsis* and to "become like Christ" thus duplicates the metaphor of becoming "the perfect man". In accordance with this the aim of salvation is described as leaving the female state or cease to be a woman through a change of sex. The concept of a *homo*

*interior* of either sex is thus clearly expressed in Origen's work and it is precisely the contrast between the inner and the outward man that is crucial: *homo interior* can be man or woman independently of observable, empirical sex. Moral quality and spiritual progress are the decisive factors when it comes to be called man or not.

Sex categorization in this spiritualized sense is in Origen's work part of a soteriological terminology. Whether an individual should be called woman or man is thus decided on the basis of the development and perfection of *homo interior*. It is worth noticing that when the term "female" or "woman" is used in a derogatory sense, then these terms are not primarily related to empirical, observable sex, but refer to *homo interior*.

In the centuries that followed, a number of Christian authors used the sex-change metaphor to point out harmony of disharmony between the "outward" and the "inner" man. Didymos the Blind of Alexandria expresses this idea clearly in his comments on Gen. 1, 27b, where he points out that human beings according to the ways of nature can neither choose nor change their sex; for the inner man, on the other hand, sex is an acquired quality.

It is not without interest to look more closely at Didymos' way of reasoning. It is well-known that Didymos has a lot in common with Origen, and in his commentary on Genesis he brings together and juxtaposes with great lucidity a number of themes found in Alexandrian anthropology. In this way the "becoming male" metaphor is used in a larger and more comprehensive context.

In his discussion of Gen. 1, 27b Didymos concentrates on *homo interior*. The inner man is identical to the soul, which alone is created in the image of God. This *eikōn* is the precondition for achieving likeness: through spiritual progress (*prokopē*) the soul comes to partake in God and achieves "likeness" (*homoiōsis*). Thus Didymos subscribes to the view that the relationship between *eikōn* and *homoiōsis* is a dynamic one: it

is through spiritual progress that the human being can reach salvation and become like Christ.

At the same time Didymos links the progress of the soul to the idea of ruling (*arkein*) over the inner man as well as over the outward nature of man. Didymos specifies that the concept of ruling can be applied on two different levels: there is first of all the command over outward nature and then the command over the inner world, over "the wild beasts inside" and over "the fishes in the spiritual ocean". Certain people have achieved such command over the inner world that consequently they can command also in the outward world, i.e. have legitimate authority over others. It is not only the apostles and "the just" in the Scriptures that come into this category; Didymos extends the category to take in "the holy" (*hagioi*) who have legitimate authority over other people based on their possibility of leading them "from the worst to the better through the Word".<sup>21</sup>

It is against this background that we must read Didymos' exegesis of Gen. 1, 27b, "male and female He created them." Didymos points out that a literal interpretation of this passage implies that man and woman share a common human nature; the distinction between them is restricted to different roles in relation to procreation. In this way Didymos presents the Alexandrian point of view which is that woman is equally created in God's image. The anagogical interpretation, however, differs slightly from Origen's exegesis of Genesis. Whereas Origen points out that male and female are two aspects of *homo interior*, Didymos restricts his "male" as superior and "female" as subordinate and inferior. This implies that the male soul is capable of leading and teaching; i.e. standing forth as an authority and as a leader of others, whereas the female soul is described as a passive receiver.

At this point in his discussion Didymos draws a clear line between the world of the senses on the one hand and the spiritual world on the other. In the former, God has decreed whether an individual is to be a man or a woman, and it is

impossible to change nature (*fysis*). In the spiritual world, on the other hand, it is possible for an individual to choose to become a man. The person who is a woman (*en taksei thēlykos*) may through spiritual progress become a man (*ek prokopēs anēr*) and thereby also become a *didaskolos* with authority to lead and teach others; i.e. to be the possessor of legitimate authority. Only through being a spiritual man (*pneumatikos*) in constant progress can the soul reach its highest perfection. According to Didymos this process involves a transformation into "the perfect man", a metaphor which in his work is interchangeable with "becoming like Christ".<sup>22</sup>

In continuation of this Didymos touches on another theme: the "becoming male" of the soul is linked to another set of metaphors which has received much more attention in patristic research, i.e. those metaphors giving expression to the idea that all souls are female before God. This goes to show how the very same author quite effortlessly can link up these two sets of metaphors which appear to be incompatible. And what ties them together is first of all the nuances of meaning that go with "woman" and "female". They may refer either directly to negative qualities or conditions, which the believers must put behind them, or, as particularly underlined by Didymos, to a temporary, wordly and secondary condition. When the soul's relationship to God is described with a bridal metaphor, this is precisely to underline its dependency and inferiority in relation to God. After having developed the theme of how the soul becomes male, Didymos adds, "If we apply this to the Word of God (*logos*), it is the whole rational nature (*logikē fysis*) which in relation to Him has the female role."<sup>23</sup>

### **Social context of the sex-change metaphor**

Our starting point for the discussion of the sex-change metaphor was the cultural frame in which it was set; a frame where male

was considered superior and female inferior. However, in a social context the value system that goes with this frame of reference raises problems for Gnostics as well as for Christians. In a Gnostic context we see this when those who are chosen may be said to be equal not only in relation to salvation but also in terms of religious authority. As Elaine Pagels has already pointed out, in several Gnostic texts there is a possible connection between; (1) *mythical and precosmic reality*, where the female is integrated both in teachings about the syzygies, and in female saviours; (2) *mythic history*; where an esoteric message of salvation is also entrusted to women, e.g. Mary Magdalene, and where women can function as carriers of messages of revelation; (3) *socially*; where Pagels finds it most likely that in several Gnostic communities women have been priests as well as teachers and prophets.<sup>24</sup>

How did this work in the Christian community? Is it possible to point to concrete application of the sex-change metaphor?

To answer these questions a passage from Hieronymus' commentary on the Epistle of Ephesians will serve as a starting point: "So long as woman is subject to childbirth and the care of children, she is different from man, like the body is different from the soul. If she chooses to serve Christ and not the world, however, she ceases to be a woman and can be called a man, as we all crave to become perfect man." (*Mulier esse cessabit, et dicetur vir, quia omnes in perfectum virum cupimus occurrere*).<sup>25</sup> In other words, if a woman chooses to live an ascetic life, she ceases to be a woman and can be called *vir*. And this is a prominent metaphor in the ascetic-monastic literature in the 4th and 5th centuries where holy women can be referred to as having become manly, *gynaikes andreiai*.

A case in point: In Palladios' *Life of Chrysostome*, we find the following dialogue between a deacon and a bishop where the person referred to is the deaconess Olympias. The deacon asks, "Where does this woman come from?" The bishop: "Do not say

'woman' (*gynē*), but such a 'man' (*hoios anthrōpos*) for this is a man (*anēr*) in spite of the outer appearance of the body (*schēma*)".<sup>26</sup>

Early hagiographic literature thus emphasizes the holiness of woman by polarizing "male" and "female", and by describing holiness as something that transcends femaleness.

For a woman to be called a man is clearly a term of praise. However, other shades of meaning seem more important. In a letter from Hieronymus to Lucinus, a woman, his continent wife Theodora, is described in this way: "she has become your sister, has changed from woman to man, from subject to equal" (*de femina virum de subjecta parem*). After the death of Lucinus, he writes to Theodora, "even on earth he saw you as a sister, or better, as a brother."<sup>27</sup> Other sources too will confirm that social contact, friendship or cooperation between the sexes is explained and legitimized through metaphors where sex is either neutralized or radically changed.

One concrete example, chosen among several, of such a legitimizing metaphor can be found in Melania the Younger's *Vita* where the heroine visits the monks in Kellia. The brothers receive her "as if she were a man." Her biographer adds that she had "transcended femaleness" and acquired a "manly" and "heavenly" frame of mind.<sup>28</sup>

When the sex-change metaphor is used in this literature, it gives expression to the idea of a redefined human relationship. Even if the ascetic life in principle presupposes absolute segregation between man and woman, this segregation could in certain circumstances be considered unnecessary and irrelevant.

And this is exactly how monastic literature of late Antiquity describes the future paradisiacal condition, namely, a condition where segregation of the sexes is no longer necessary. As an image of human transformation after resurrection, Ps. Makarios points to Gal. 3, 28 and writes, "without offence to decency the brother directs words of peace to the sister, as they are both one in Christ. Enjoying peace in the same light, they will be looking



at each other."<sup>29</sup> This paradisiacal state comes true for the holy even in this world.

Nuances in this legitimizing use of the "becoming male" metaphor are further specified in the *Apophthegmata* collections. Here it is applied in a context where *women's* spiritual authority is highlighted and justified. In this context we could say that Hieronymus' expression *de subjecta parem* comes into its own. The fact is that the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers (Apophthegmata Patrum)* also contains the *logoi* of the *ammata*. The activities of the "mothers" and their authority can be seen in the light of two *logoi* attributed to *amma* Sarra. The first text, Sarra 4, tells of two great anchorites who come to see her. On their way, they conspire to humiliate her, and they say to her: "Be careful not to become conceited thinking to yourself: 'Look how anchorites are coming to see me, a mere woman.' But *amma* Sarra said to them. 'According to nature I am a woman, but not according to my thoughts.'"<sup>30</sup> Here a contrast is set up between nature (*fysis*) and thought (*logismos*), thus driving home the point that the "outward being", which in this case is a woman according to nature (*fysin*), does not reveal anything about the inner being and its qualities. In this way the text manages to convey the discrepancy between femaleness and perfection as well as pointing out the basis of true authority. In Sarra 9 this point is again elaborated and the message made even clearer, "She said to the brothers: 'I am a man, and you, you are women.'"<sup>31</sup> *Amma* Sarra's statement "*egō eimi anēr*" reveals a hidden hierarchy: charismatic authority belongs to those whose inner life is the most advanced and this authority is independent of both sex and official position.<sup>32</sup>

In the monastic literature of late Antiquity, ascetic life is pictured as the restoration of paradise and as an anticipation of heavenly life. To express this, a symbolic language, prolific in images, was developed. "Woman turned into man" emerges, then, as one of the metaphorical elements representing paradise regained and also the link that binds doctrine, symbolic language

and social reality together. Under certain conditions some women achieved "the rank of man". This implies that saints of both sexes were accorded the same charismatic authority.

### **"Becoming male" as metaphor in Islamic tradition**

The metaphor of sex-change is also found in classic Islamic texts, both in commentaries on the Koran and in the hagiographical literature with roots in Sufi circles. A clear example is Farid al-Din Attar's little biography of Rabi'a in *Tadhkirat al-Auliya* ("Memorial of the Saints"), from the beginning of the thirteenth century; this is one of the most widely-read Sufi biographies, and has contributed to the shaping of an Islamic hagiographical genre. Farid al-Din Attar's text has many similarities to the texts of the *Apophthegmata*, and his description of the life of the mystic Rabi'a can be compared at many points to the accounts of the Egyptian *ammas*.

Rabi'a is the only woman given a place in this work, and the reason for her inclusion among the great masters is justified in the introduction: "If anyone says, 'Why have you included Rabi'a in the rank of men?' my answer is, that the Prophet himself said, 'God does not regard your outward forms. The root of the matter is not form, but intention, as the Prophet said, 'Mankind will be raised up according to their intentions'. Moreover, if it is proper to derive two-thirds of our religion from A'isha, surely it is permissible to take religious instruction from a handmaid of A'isha. When a woman becomes a 'man' in the path of God, she is a man and one cannot any more call her a woman".<sup>33</sup> The Sufi tradition also portrays Rabi'a al-Adawiya (c. 717-801) as one of the greatest masters - she is an ascete, mystic and poet; fragments of her mystical poetry have survived, and her most famous commentator is without doubt the philosopher al-Ghazali (died 1111), who quotes and expounds her

poem on the "two forms of love" in his *magnum opus* entitled *Ihya ulum al-din* ("The Revival of Religious Sciences").

Farid al-Din Attar indicates an interesting perspective when he describes Rabi'a as "the handmaid of A'isha". In the Sunni Islamic tradition, A'isha, the prophet Muhammed's favourite wife, is one of the foremost transmitters of traditions (*hadith*) about the Prophet; these *hadith* texts, together with the Koran, are defined as "the roots of the law" (*usul al-fiqh*) and function as the legal norm for *umma*, the Islamic community. In other words, the author links the statement, "she is a man and one cannot any more call her a woman", to the idea of a "spiritual dynasty" of women who, when specific requirements are met, can function as religious teachers and as models for the believers.

In *Tadhkirat al-Auliya*, Rabi'a is visited both by scholars in the law and by the great Sufi masters, and she instructs them all. Hasan of Basra, one of the founders of Sufism, appears as a close friend, and it is invariably Rabi'a who directs Hasan and shows him what he still lacks in insight into himself and spiritual experience. In societies that demand segregation of the sexes and uphold the subordination of women as a religious norm, these narratives take on a special pointedness. Farid al-Din Attar's crafty little texts raise in reality the question of religious authority: what authority does the Sufi master have on the basis of his experience of God? The question of charismatic authority *versus* institutional authority was central in the Sufi circles. The Sufi masters came early in their history to take a position anti-theoretical to the representatives of the orthodox legal schools and to the political authorities, and these texts can be read in the light of such a problematic.

One of the great theological questions in the classical *tafsir* literature (commentaries on the Koran) concerns prophethood. This question too is introduced into the biography of Rabi'a in the form of a little story about Rabi'a who, in the course of a nocturnal conversation with three Sufi masters, blows on her

finger, which thereafter shines like a lamp during the whole night. She explains the miracle by referring to what the Koran says about Moses' hand (*sura* 27, 12): "If anyone says. 'How could this be?', I answer, the same as Moses' hand. If it is objected, 'But Moses was a prophet', I reply, Whoever rejects a farthing's worth of unlawful offerings has attained a degree of prophethood".<sup>34</sup> It is scarcely possible to make more clearly the point about the true dignity and authority of the Sufi master, and the message of course becomes all the stronger when it is placed on the lips of a woman.

The question of the extent to which a woman can have the same privileges and qualities as a prophet, and consequently can also be called a prophet (*nabiyya*), is raised in the early *tafsir* literature, linked here to the interpretations of what the Koran says about Mary, Jesus' mother.

The great *tafsir* specialists, such as Tabari (died 923) and Fakhr al-Din Razi (died 1209), refuse Mary the rank of prophet: she cannot have such a dignity, precisely because she is female. There have, however, been a few dissenting voices: Ibn Hazm (died 1064) seems to have been the most prominent of the classic writers to affirm Mary's prophethood; he states that Mary, like the mother of Moses, has received a revelation and is thus designated as prophet. The *tafsir* of Haqqi is of particular interest in our context: he is of the opinion that there is no question of prophethood for women, simply because being a prophet means being visible and making public proclamations, while the condition of women is naturally one of concealment. He concludes, however, with the observation: "Among women are some perfect and knowledgeable and who attain the standard of men (in this context Mary, Khadija, Fatima and A'isha) - they are in a real sense men".<sup>35</sup>

The application of the metaphor of "becoming male" in these texts indicates, first, that when it is believed that women realise the highest degree of perfection, the discrepancy between femaleness and perfection is emphasised by the statement that

they are "in a real sense a man". The metaphor also opens the path, however, for an acceptance of women as "spiritual guides" with charismatic authority. The metaphor of sex-change is applied in the hagiographical literature in contexts where the author clearly is interested in raising the problematic of the question of legitimate authority and the powers to which the religious establishment lays claim. In a Sufi text, as in Farid al-Din Attar, such a theme can have a central place precisely because it can be explicitly linked to the question of a form of authority that is freed from all external forms and established hierarchies, including that between man and woman.

Such a theme, linked to the application of the metaphor of sex-change, has not been investigated at all in an Islamic context; a closer analysis of theological contents, social context, and possible historical models, of the metaphor of sex-change presupposes wholly new research.

## Conclusion

Sex-change metaphors are found as part of the shared imagery in the Graeco-Roman cultural sphere of late Antiquity. It would also have been of interest to trace the use of such a metaphor over time and in diverse cultural contexts. The fact is that we find a great spread in the use of the sex-change metaphor: from *Papyrus Louvre* 3079 where Isis "makes herself male even if she is a woman"<sup>36</sup> to the Chinese Buddhist *Lingpao* scriptures from the 5th century C.A. where the bodhisattva says, "When I am made a Buddha, I vow to bring it about that, within my land, there will be no women or maidens. Those who desire to be born in my land will first become male."<sup>37</sup> The transformation of woman into man is moreover a frequent theme in Indian Buddhist *Mahyana* literature.

It is thus not difficult to find apparently parallel metaphors in other cultures. It will be sufficient here to point this out

without elaborating further. One result of this investigation into Gnostic, Christian and Islamic sex-change metaphors is, in fact, that their content can only be understood in an historical and doctrinal context. We have also established that the male-female polarity and sex-change metaphors are found both in Gnostic and Christian texts as part of soteriological symbolic language. The sex-change metaphor is found much more often in Christian than in Gnostic texts. This *may* be because the Gnostic material is, after all, fragmentary, but there is no basis for characterizing the sex-change metaphor as a purely Gnostic or apocryphal-Christian phenomenon.

These sex-change metaphors were to have a long history, not only in orthodox Christian hagiography, but in Islamic hagiographical texts and in certain tafsir-texts as well.

The "becoming male" metaphor was also in use among marginal religious groups in Europe in the Middle Ages. When court documents from the Inquisition show that a certain Guillaume Belibasta in 1321 maintained that women in order to reach salvation had to be changed into men after death (*converti in viros, in homines masculos*)<sup>39</sup>, this does not necessarily mean, as H. Ch. Puech suggests, that the French Cathars knew the *Gospel of Thomas*.<sup>40</sup> It seems more reasonable to assume that marginal religious groups were drawing on a tradition of symbolic language which was well-known and often used by prominent Christian writers of an earlier period. Convincing documentation of such a connection, which has so far escaped notice, can, in our opinion, be found in the Cathars' use of Eph. 4, 13 as a basis for claiming that women are transformed into men.<sup>41</sup>

There are two aspects of Christian authors' use of the sex-change metaphor that deserve special attention. Firstly, this metaphor duplicates well-known New Testament metaphors. "Becoming male" is interchangeable with such metaphors as Rom. 8, 28, "to be conformed to the image of the Son" and with Eph. 4, 13 "to become perfect man" (*anēr*). These are linked to

Pauline metaphors which describe "the inner man" (*anthrōpos*) in relation to *eikōn* and *homoïōsis*. The manner in which the "becoming male" metaphor is used in Christian texts shows that it is well integrated in the theological anthropology of the period.

"Becoming male" or becoming "perfect man" involves both sexes and refers to a metasexual sphere; "man" and "male" can therefore describe human nature (in what is common to the sexes) and relate to a state in which sex is transcended. "Woman" and "female" on the other hand always refer in such contexts to the inferior beings in this world. All this literature redefines and spiritualizes the category "sex": belonging to one or the other sex is not something given; it has to be achieved by the inner man. In this context, "sex" depends on spiritual progress, and it has a decisive role in the attainment of salvation.

Secondly, in the Christian texts, the "becoming male" metaphor also appears in a *social* context. Didymos' comments on Gen. 1, 27ab show clearly *how* the sex-change metaphor could be linked up with the idea of legitimate authority. When "maleness" is acquired by the "inner man", which is described as either male or female, then empirical, observable sex as a criterion for becoming *didaskalos*, teacher, becomes irrelevant.

In monastic-hagiographic literature we find variations on this theme. The metaphor "woman turned into man" is used as part of a richly developed symbolism describing paradise, and sex-change anticipates the attainment of salvation. In continuation of this paradise motif, we can also observe how the metaphor often is used to legitimize interaction and cooperation between the sexes, and to justify charismatic authority and thereby also *women's* charismatic authority. It seems that Islamic hagiographical texts have used the "becoming male" metaphor with similar shades of meaning.

## NOTES

1. In this article the term *metaphor* is used as defined in the classical rhetorical tradition by Du Marsais: "La métaphore est une figure par laquelle on transporte, pour ainsi dire, la signification propre d'un mot à une autre signification qui ne lui convient qu'en vertu d'une comparaison qui est dans l'esprit", cf. Le Guern (1973), 11. Whether a metaphor is used as part of symbolic language or not, is determined by context.
2. Puech, 51.
3. Quispel, 104-105, Puech, 280, Tardieu, 231, where the 'becoming male' motif in logion 114 is mentioned as 'thèse judéo-chrétienne'.
4. Porphyrios, *Epistula ad Marcellam*, 33. Philo, *Quaest. in Exodum*, I, 8; *Quaest. in Gen.* II, 49. Philo, cf. Baer, 45-49.
5. This subject is discussed by Sælid Gilhus (1984).
6. Till, 66.
7. Tardieu, 231.
8. Robinson, 336.
9. Robinson, 141.
10. Exc. 79, SC 23, 203. cf. Sagnard, *Lexique*, 647.
11. Similar ideas in *Apocryphon Johannis*, cf. Sælid Gilhus (1983), 42.
12. *Zostrianos*, 131, S-8. Robinson, 392.
13. Hippolytos, Ref. V, 7, 15.
14. van den Broek, 357 ff.
15. cf. The debate between Rufinus and Jerome; texts referred to in the present volume, 274, note 77.
16. The use of Eph. 4, 13 by Clemens of Alexandria, cf. Vogt (1985), 97-99; Vogt (1991), 177-178.
17. *Homiliae in Genesim* I, 12-14, PG 12, 146 ff.
18. cf. *Vita Syncreticae*, chap. 99, PG 28, 1548-49. Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*, chap. 12, 2.
19. *Homiliae in Genesim*, 1, 13 and 15; PG 12, cf. note 17. *Entretien*, SC 67, 89-103.
20. *Entretien*, SC 67, 89.
21. *Sur la Genèse*, I, SC 233, 156.
22. *Sur la Genèse*, I, SC 233, 163.
23. *Sur la Genèse*, I, SC 233, 161.
24. Pagels, 25.
25. PL 26, 567.
26. Palladius, *De Vita S. Johannis Chrysostomi*, chap. XVI, PG 47/48, 56.



27. Ep. 71, 3; Ep. 75, 2. Labourt, VI, 10; 34.
28. *Vie de Sainte Mélanie*, SC 90, 200.
29. Ps. Makarius, 261.
30. Sarra 4, PG 65, 420.
31. Sarra 9, Guy, *Recherches*, 34.
32. For similar ideas on charismatic authority in early hagiographic literature, cf. Vogt (1987).
33. Arberry, 40.
34. Arberry, 46.
35. Smith & Haddad, 179.
36. *Lexicon der Ägyptologie*, III, 198.
37. Both quotations in Strickelman, 473.
38. The need for women to change their sex to reach higher Bodhisattva-stages is a frequent theme in Mahayana literature. A woman has either to wait until she is reborn as a man before she can enter the career of the Bodhisattva, or, as in certain texts, women are granted the right to become lower-stage Bodhisattvas, but their sex is transformed as they reach the levels immediately preceding the Buddhahood. Diana Paul maintains that in certain texts the change of sex is described as both a physiological and a mental process, cf. Diana Paul, 171-174.
39. von Döllinger, 177.
40. 'Les cathares faisaient-ils usage des plus anciens de nos Évangiles apocryphes?', Puech, 51.
41. Duvernoy, 98-99.

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### III

## MATRISTICS: MOTHERS OF THE CHURCH

## Ancient and Medieval Church Mothers\*

### I. Matristics and Women's Studies

Nearly all women writers known from late Antiquity and the Middle Ages have been preserved within the Christian tradition. During the last twenty years these church Mothers are focused by Women's Studies in religious and intellectual history. Using human genderedness as main analytical category, in the sense of interaction between biologically programmed sex and socio-culturally expressed gender, humanistic Women's Studies provide pioneering methodology. Applied to the Christian tradition, this innovative scholarship highlights the influence of specifically female and male experience in human Godlanguage.

Very few female writings survive from Christian Antiquity. It is significant that around a hundred letters to women from John Chrysostom, Jerome and Augustine are preserved, whereas not a single missive from their female correspondents has been deemed worthy of transmission. Nevertheless, the solid theological learning of aristocratic church Mothers is attested by their less highborn male admirers and protégés. In his *Lausiaca History* (419/20), Palladius significantly describes Melania the Elder (died ca. 406): "She was most erudite and fond of literature, and she turned night into day going through every writing of the ancient commentators... (Origen, Gregory, Basil). And she did not read them once only and in an offhand way, but she worked on them, dredging through each work seven or eight times".<sup>1</sup> Conversely, Palladius accuses Jerome of hindering the intellectual pursuits of his benefactress Paula the Elder (died 404): "A certain Jerome from Dalmatia stood in her way, for she was well

able to surpass everyone else, being a genius of a woman. He thwarted her with his jealousy and prevailed upon her to work to his own end and purpose".<sup>2</sup> Jerome's combined ego-androcentric attitude is pertinently exposed in his memorial praise of Marcella (died 410/11), addressed to her disciple Principia: "This much only will I say, that whatever in me was the fruit of long study and as such made by constant meditation a part of my nature, this she tasted, this she learned and made her own. Consequently, after my departure from Rome, in case of a dispute arising as to the testimony of Scripture on any subject, recourse was had to her to settle it. And so wise was she and so well did she understand what philosophers call *to prepon*, that is 'the becoming' (*id est decere, quod facias*), that when she answered questions she gave her own opinion not as her own but as from me or someone else, thus admitting that what she taught she had herself learned from others. For she knew that the apostle had said: 'I suffer not a woman to teach', and she would not seem to inflict a wrong upon the male sex, many of whom, including some priests, questioned her concerning obscure and doubtful points".<sup>3</sup> Jerome proceeds to commend Marcella's less decorously effaced campaign against Origenists: "She it was who originated the condemnation of the heretics. She it was who furnished witnesses first taught by them and then carried away by their heretical teaching. She it was who showed how large a number they had deceived and who brought up against them the impious books *On First Principles*, books which were passing from hand to hand after being 'improved' by the hand of the scorpion (Rufinus). She it was lastly who called on the heretics in letter after letter to appear in their own defence. They did not indeed venture to come, for they were so conscience-stricken that they let the case go against them by default rather than face their accusers and be convicted by them. This glorious victory originated with Marcella, she was the source and cause of this great blessing".<sup>4</sup>

Matristic defence of the faith is equally praised in Gerontius' *Life of saint Melania* (ca. 440). He relates that during her visit to Constantinople (436), the inspired theological discourse of Melania the Younger (died 439) led many brilliant interlocutors from the errors of Nestorius back to orthodoxy.<sup>5</sup>

Only the following texts of ancient church Mothers are preserved: Vibia Perpetua's account from prison before her martyrdom in Carthage (203) is inserted into the compiled *Passio sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*.<sup>6</sup> The Roman aristocrat Faltonia Betitia Proba's Vergilian *Cento* (ca. 360) displays God's action through human history by paraphrasing biblical texts, from creation to Christ.<sup>7</sup> The (probably) Galician Egeria's report of her pilgrimage to the Middle East (381/384), with rich material on liturgy and monasticism, was discovered in 1884.<sup>8</sup> Eleven letters from Melania the Elder to Evagrius Ponticus, transmitted in Armenian, were presented in Latin translation in 1908 and published in 1964.<sup>9</sup> A letter from Paula and Eustochium to Marcella (392/3), is preserved among Jerome's letters.<sup>10</sup> Two letters from a Spanish woman ascetic to a female colleague (ca. 400) have also survived under the name of Jerome, these were identified and published in 1928.<sup>11</sup>

Transmitted among the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (5th century) are *Sayings* from the Egyptian Desert Mothers Theodora<sup>12</sup>, Sarra<sup>13</sup>, Syncretica<sup>14</sup> and Eugenia<sup>15</sup>.

The Byzantine empress Aelia Eudocia Augusta (died 460) is attested to have written six works. These include biblical paraphrases: a sequence on the Octateuch and hexameter versions of Daniel and Zachariah. Only her hagiographical "Martyrdom of saint Cyprian" is preserved.<sup>16</sup> The early medieval Byzantine abbess Kassia (died before 865) wrote some of the most cherished hymns in Greek Orthodox liturgy, which are still in use.<sup>17</sup>

During the early Middle Ages several women writers emerge, mainly from Frankish (6th century onwards), Anglo-

Saxon (8th century onwards) and German (10th century onwards) monasteries.<sup>18</sup>

Preserved from Caesaria the Younger, abbess of Saint John at Arles, is a letter of instruction addressed to Radegundis and Richildis in the monastery of the Holy Cross at Poitiers (552/7).<sup>19</sup> Sent with Caesarius of Arles' *Regula uirginum* (534)<sup>20</sup>, her letter emphasises the importance of scriptural learning and liturgical prayer. Three surviving *Dicta* testify to the same concern.<sup>21</sup> A fragmentary decree reserving inhumation in Saint John exclusively for the nuns is also transmitted.<sup>22</sup> The Carolingian aristocrat Dhouda's Manual of religious and secular education (835) for her eldest son illustrates the impact of man-made traditional doctrine on women's culture.<sup>23</sup> The 10th-century German canoness Hrotsvith of Gandersheim's legends and plays in Terentian style demonstrate knowledge of Roman literature, biblical, apocryphal and hagiographical texts, as well as patristic and early medieval sources.<sup>24</sup>

Female monastic and religious culture culminates between the 12th and the 14th centuries, with Hildegard of Bingen (died 1179)<sup>25</sup>, Hadewijch (fl. ca. 1250), Mechthild of Magdeburg (died ca. 1282)<sup>26</sup>, Gertrud of Helfta (died 1292)<sup>27</sup>, Mechthild of Hackeborn (died 1299), Birgitta of Sweden (died 1373)<sup>28</sup> and Julian of Norwich (died after 1416).<sup>29</sup> Contrary to ancient church Mothers, medieval women of God transform traditional male gendered doctrine and symbolism. In this perspective, the patristic Graeco-Roman inculturation from the 3rd to the 5th century is emulated by medieval matristics. Influenced by their less malecentred Germanic and Anglo-Saxon culture, these church Mothers redress the Mediterranean androcentrism of late Antique church Fathers.



## II. Religious Feminism and Female Godlanguage

In fact, the fundamental incompatibility of Godhead and femaleness, which traditional Christianity shares with Judaism and Islam, presents a constant challenge to religious women throughout church history. God is overwhelmingly described as andromorphic or metasexual, with corresponding male or asexual human Godlikeness. It follows that classical Christian anthropology excludes women from being created in God's image *qua* females.<sup>30</sup> Thus deprived of a model for female humanity at the divine level, the prime concern of ancient and medieval church Mothers is to obtain complete religious capability by achieving fully human Godlikeness.

Classical theological anthropology builds on two contrasting axioms: Female subordination is established by God's creative order. Human equivalence in the sense of women's salvational parity with men is realised through Christ's redemption.<sup>31</sup> It is important to observe that the resulting conflict between women's creational inferiority and their redeemed equality is apparently accepted by all female authors who survive in Christian tradition. Their writings are transmitted by ecclesiastical establishments, and often censored, redacted or translated by male clerics and confessors. Nevertheless, matristic writers demonstrate assertive exploitation of religious advancement. In late Antique perspective, women's redeemed equivalence results from God's enhancement of creationally inferior femaleness to a level of perfect male humanity. Consequently, ancient church Mothers strive to actualise their salvational equality with Godlike men through ascetic defeminisation, overcoming their submale femaleness by virginity or widowhood.<sup>32</sup> In fact, this transformation into perfect maleness remains a basic theme in early Christian and patristic texts concerning holy women, as well as in the few extant female writings from late Antiquity.<sup>33</sup> I find it essential to observe that such gender reversal is not reducible in terms of women's social advancement through

androcentric promotion to honorary manhood. Their redeemed achievement of fully human religious capability by "becoming male" in Christ is a necessary consequence of traditional Christology, where the divine Son is born and resurrected in perfect male humanity. In medieval perspective, female weakness can imitate God's lowering of himself through the incarnated and suffering Christ. In this sense of displaying divine power, feeble women can serve as God's chosen instruments by prophetic charisma or mystical grace. Starting with the traditional, although atypical use of female metaphors describing Christ's human nature, medieval Christology is therefore reshaped in terms of "becoming female".<sup>34</sup> This gynecomorphic imagery, which is found both in male and female authors, is creatively expanded by leading church Mothers like Hildegard, Birgitta and Julian in order to redress androcentric and metasexual Godlanguage. In fact, the prime concern of medieval matristics is to provide a model of female Godlikeness by placing metaphorical femaleness at the divine level.

### III. Male Godlikeness

The first stage of matristic feminism, "becoming male" in Christ, corresponds to early Christian anthropology, where the male human prototype, Adam, is created in God's image, as expressed in Gen. 1, 26-27a: "Let us make Adam (collective male) in our image, according to our likeness... And God created Adam in his image, in the image of God he created him". This text is regularly combined with God's formation of Adam from clods in the soil and blowing into his nostrils the breath of life, according to Gen. 2, 7. Paul's argument for exclusively male Godlikeness in I Cor. 11, 7-9 is based on such exegesis: "For man should not cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man". Man's theomorphic precedence is here affirmed in terms of woman's derivative

formation from Adam's rib,"as an aid fit for him", according to Gen. 2, 18, 21-23.<sup>35</sup> Traditional biblical interpretation regularly combines Eve's origin with the sexual differentiation related in Gen. 1, 27b: "male and female he created them". It is essential to observe that this verse is connected to the subsequent fertility blessing in 1, 28 and not to the previous image-text of 1, 26-27a.<sup>36</sup> In consequence, Proba's scriptural paraphrase explicitly unites Gen. 1, 27a and Gen. 2, 7 by affirming that Adam, termed *uir* and not *homo*, is created Godlike: "He pulled plump clay and gave it shape by kneading on the spot the fertile ground, its soil quickened from the years's first months. And now - so suddenly - the image of such holiness! Man's new shape went forth, handsome at first beyond comparison, resembling God in countenance and shoulders. Man, whose mind and intellect a greater God influences, and so sends forth to greater tasks". (*iam in prouiso tantae pietatis imago procedit noua forma uiri pulcherrima primum, os umerosque deo similis, cui mentem animumque maior agit deus atque opera ad maiora remittit*). Accordingly, Proba interprets Eve's formation from Adam's rib in the traditional sense of her wifely sex role: "one of these ribs he plucked apart from the well-knit joints of the youthful Adam's side, and suddenly arose a wondrous gift...: Woman, a virgin she, unparalleled in figure and in comely breasts, now ready for a husband, ready now for wedlock". (*claraque in luce refulsit insignis facie et pulchro pectore uirgo, iam matura uiro, iam plenis nubilis annis*).<sup>37</sup>

#### IV. Becoming Male in Christ

Traditional androcentric Christology emphasises Christ's incarnation in perfect male humanity, as the new Adam. It follows that women's redeemed equality with men is realised by achieving Christlike maleness, as expressed in Eph. 4, 13: "until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the full knowledge

of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ". The early Christian motif of "woman turned into man" is most succinctly verbalised in the last *logion* (114) of the Gospel of Thomas (before 150): "Simon Peter said to them, 'Let Mary (Magdalene) leave us, for women are not worthy of Life'. Jesus said, 'I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit (cf. Gen. 2, 7) resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven'". Sometimes disregarded as marginal and even "heterodox", this salvational "becoming male" results logically from the "orthodox" Christocentric mixture of divine Sonship and perfect manhood. In fact, the sex-change metaphor is found more often in Christian than in Gnostic sources.<sup>38</sup>

A significant example is provided by Perpetua's diary. In her visionary dream before the final fight with beasts, Perpetua is changed into a male athlete and assisted by handsome young men: "And I was stripped naked, and became a man. And my supporters began to rub me with oil, as they do for a wrestling match" (*et expoliata sum et facta sum masculus; et coeperunt me fauiores mei oleo defricare, quomodo solent in agone*). After a fierce struggle against the devil in the shape of a hideous Egyptian, Perpetua conquers him by stepping on his head. Finally, she receives the prize of victory from a purple-clad athletic trainer of marvellous stature: "And I went to the fencing-master and received the bough. He kissed me and said: 'Daughter, peace be with you!'. And triumphantly I began to walk towards the Gate of the Living. And I awoke" (*et osculatus est me et dixit mihi: Filia, pax tecum*).<sup>39</sup> It is here remarkable that following her victory, Perpetua is addressed as a female and not as a Christomorphic male athlete. Her trampling on the Devil with heels and feet alludes to the enmity between Eve and the serpent in Gen. 3, 15, cf. the apocalyptic woman fighting against the dragon in Apoc. 12, 13-18. The female role of this victorious new Eve is further stressed when Perpetua guides the gladiator's

sword at the end of her *Passio*: "It was as though so great a woman, feared as she was by the unclean spirit, could not be dispatched unless she herself was willing" (*fortasse tanta femina aliter non potuisset occidi, quae ab inmundo spiritu timebatur, nisi ipsa uoluisset*).<sup>40</sup>

The earlier account of Blandina's martyrdom in Lyons in 177 (written shortly afterwards), emphasises that a feeble female is empowered to conquer the writhing serpent Leviathan, slain by God according to Isa. 27, 1. The slave-woman Blandina's assimilation with the male athlete Christ is stressed with allusions to Rom. 13, 14 and Gal. 3, 27: "and tiny, weak and insignificant as she was she would give inspiration to her brothers, for she had put on Christ, that mighty and invincible athlete, and had overcome the Adversary in many contests, and through her conflict had won the crown of immortality."<sup>41</sup> This theme of women's "becoming male" in Christ through martyrdom is constantly repeated in patristic praise of female martyrs.

The proto-martyr Thecla, featuring apostolic virginity in Christlike manhood, becomes exemplary patroness of Eastern female monasticism and is persistently praised by patristic authors.<sup>42</sup> The female protagonist in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* (185/195), which was rejected as apocryphal by the *Decretum Gelasianum* (end 5th century) under the title *Actus Theclae et Pauli* (V, 4, 9), may have an historical base.<sup>43</sup> Infatuated by Paul's preaching on virginity as indispensable prerequisite for achieving resurrection<sup>44</sup>, Thecla refuses to marry her fiancé and is condemned to be burned. Miraculously saved from the fire, she seeks out Paul, cuts her hair short like a man and follows him to Antioch. The apostle is unwilling to baptize her, and when Thecla is wooed by a powerful Syrian, she is deserted in a cowardly manner by Paul.<sup>45</sup> Refusing to marry her suitor, Thecla is condemned to the beasts. She decides to baptize herself in a pool of seals before the final struggle: "And when she had finished her prayer, she turned and saw a great pit full of water, and said: 'Now is the time for me to wash'. And she threw

herself in, saying: 'In the name of Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 2, 38) I baptize myself on the last day!'. And when they saw it, the women and all the people wept, saying: 'Cast not thyself into the water!'; so that even the governor wept that such beauty should be devoured by seals. So, then she threw herself into the water in the name of Jesus Christ; but the seals, seeing the light of a lightning-flash, floated dead on the surface. And there was about her a cloud of fire, so that neither could the beasts touch her nor could she be seen naked".<sup>46</sup> Still untouched by more terrible beasts, Thecla is released by the governor and puts on male attire to continue her pursuit of Paul: "So she took young men and maidservants and girded herself, and sewed her mantle into a cloak after the fashion of men, and went off to Myra, and found Paul speaking the word of God and went to him. But he was astonished when he saw her and the crowd that was with her, pondering whether another temptation was not upon her. But observing this she said to him: 'I have taken the bath, Paul; for he who worked with thee for the Gospel has also worked with me for my baptism'.<sup>47</sup> Paul's reluctance to confirm Thecla's apostolic mission is overcome at last: "And Thecla arose and said to Paul: 'I am going to Iconium'. And Paul said: 'Go and teach the word of God!'" Thecla's active evangelisation is further stressed: "And when she had borne this witness she went away to Seleucia; and after enlightening many with the word of God she slept with a noble sleep".<sup>48</sup>

It is noteworthy that the hagiographic *Life of saint Thecla* (5th century) expressly relates her apostolic activity. Thecla preached, catechised and baptized. Working great miracles as did the apostles Peter, Paul and John, she thereby led the whole world to the faith.<sup>49</sup>

When Tertullian in *De baptismo* (200/06) strongly opposes women's right to teach and to baptize, he significantly rejects their emancipatory invocation of Pauline Thecla. Characterising *Acta Pauli* as a forgery, Tertullian cites the genuine norm of women's obedient silence, according to I Cor. 14, 34-35.<sup>50</sup> Since

Tertullian otherwise underlines that Eve caused the fall of Godlike Adam<sup>51</sup>, the cultic incapacity of non-theomorphic women is a self-evident premise.

Christomorphic maleness is strongly focused by the Thecla figure in Methodius' *Symposium* (ca. 300).<sup>52</sup> Here ten virgins compete to clarify the excellence of chastity. Because of her great theological competence, acquired through her formation as Paul's disciple, Thecla wins the prize. In Thecla's speech, the apocalyptic woman giving birth to a male child, according to Rev. 12, 5, is interpreted as the church regenerating the faithful through baptism in Christlike perfect maleness. With allusions to Christ's shape in Gal. 4, 19 and Christ's perfect manhood in Eph. 4, 13, Thecla states: "Now I think that the Church is here said to bring forth a male child because the enlightened receive the features and image and maleness of Jesus; the form and likeness of the Word is stamped on them and is begotten within them by perfect knowledge and faith, and thus Christ is spiritually begotten in each one".<sup>53</sup>

Praising perfect chastity in terms of Christomorphic manhood, Thecla's convoluted speech seeks to explain the incorporation of the faithful into Christ, the male Word, through virile courage of virginal continence.<sup>54</sup> Methodius' *Symposium* thereby presupposes a protology of moderate *enkrateia*, constitutive in early Christian asceticism. Rejecting the ditheistic dualism of radical *enkrateia*, this "orthodox" variant nevertheless explains sexual differentiation, or more precisely femaleness, as cause of or resulting from the original fall.<sup>55</sup> As explained in Marcella's speech, married sexual activity counteracts physical death by procreation, but remains a precariously inferior state of life for the common multitude.<sup>56</sup> Sexually ruptured humanity can only be restored to its original unity of perfect maleness through redemptive virginity, exemplified by Christ, the Archvirgin (*archiparthenos*).<sup>57</sup>

Encratite "becoming male" is amply featured by ascetic church Mothers. In his *Lausiac History*, Palladius emphasises

this matristic emulation with men of God: "I must also commemorate in this book the manly women (*gynaikōn andreion*) to whom God granted struggles equal to those of men, so that no one could plead as an excuse that women are too weak to practise virtue successfully. Now I have seen a good many of them and I have associated with refined women among virgins and widows".<sup>58</sup> In this perspective, the prominent pilgrim to Mount Nitria, Melania the Elder, is called a female man of God (*hē anthrōpos tou theou*).<sup>59</sup>

Egyptian Desert Mothers provide poignant examples of Christlike maleness. In the *Life of saint Syncletica* (ca. 400) this upper-class Alexandrian *amma* is praised as a disciple of Thecla. Comparing their saintly careers, the author concludes that Syncletica fought her battle against the devil more fiercely.<sup>60</sup> The female ascetic's outstanding virtue is described in terms of virile prowess (*andreion phronēma*).<sup>61</sup> Owing to this manly charismatic authority, several sayings of Desert Mothers are transmitted among those of the Desert Fathers. Two texts from *amma Sarra* manifest particularly striking female internalisation of perfect maleness. One saying states: "Another time, two old men, great anchorites, came to the district of Pelusia to visit her. When they arrived one said to the other, 'Let us humiliate this old woman'. So they said to her, 'Be careful not to become conceited thinking to yourself: Look how anchorites are coming to see me, a mere woman'. But *amma Sarra* said to them, 'According to my nature I am a woman, but not according to my thinking' (*Tei men physei gynē eimi, all'ou toi logismōi*)".<sup>62</sup> This discrepancy between physical femaleness and mental perfection is further emphasised in another saying, where *amma Sarra* refers to her Godgiven charismatic authority: "She also said to the brothers: 'I am a man (*egō eimi anēr*), and you, you are women'".<sup>63</sup>

In this context of male perfection, Gerontius emphasises that during her visit to Egyptian Desert Fathers and Mothers, Melania the Younger was received by holy monks as a man (*hōs andra*).



Referring to Melania's salvational maleness, he precises that she had surpassed all female limitation (*gynaikēion metron*) by achieving male or even heavenly thinking (*phronēma andreion/ouranion*).<sup>64</sup> Another famous benefactress, Olympias (died after 408), is in the *Life of Olympias*, (anon. 5th century) likened to Thecla: "Olympias walked in the footsteps of this saint, Thecla, in every virtue of the divinely-inspired way of life. Olympias, most serious and zealous for the road leading to heaven, followed the intent of the divine Scriptures in everything and was perfected through these things".<sup>65</sup> In Palladius' *Dialogue* on the life of John Chrysostom (408) Olympias is explicitly promoted to exemplary manhood: "Do not say woman (*gynē*), but such a man (*hoios anthrōpos*). For this is a man (*aner*) despite the shape (*schēma*) of her body".<sup>66</sup>

## V. Asexual Godlikeness in Male Disguise

A radical shift in Christian anthropology occurs when Clement of Alexandria (died before 215) as the *first* church Father connects the sexual differentiation of Gen. 1, 27b to the theomorphic male prototype of Gen. 1, 26-27a, using the Christomorphic asexuality of Gal. 3, 28 as proof-text: "there is not male and female, for you are all one (collective male) in Christ". By this ingenious "feminist" device, Clement manages to anticipate women's salvational Godlikeness already at creation.<sup>67</sup> Conforming to the fundamental incompatibility of Godhead and femaleness, theomorphic privilege is here defined in terms of sexless moral and intellectual capacity. This is shared by men and women, since both sexes are equally human beings (*anthrōpos*). Citing Luke 20, 34-35 on the absence of marriage in the resurrection, Clement affirms androcentrically that the female differs from the male only in this world.<sup>68</sup> Clement's argument combines the Stoic definition of humanity, as attribu-

table even to women and slaves, with Neo-Platonic restriction of male and female gender to the bodily level. Invoking Gal. 3, 28 and Col. 3, 11, Clement underlines that the same human nature (*anthrōpotēta physin*) and virtuous power are found in women and in men, as in barbarians, Greeks, slaves and children. Following Stoic acquiescence of sociological inequality, this moral equivalence does not affect bio-social gender hierarchy. Clement emphasises that although woman as Godlike human being (*anthrōpos*) shares man's rational capacity in her rational soul (*kata psychēn*), she differs from exemplary maleness in her female corporality and sexual function, as *gynē*. Citing I Cor. 11, 3 and 8, Clement firmly states the hierarchical relationship between Christ/man and man/woman, as displayed in Adam's priority and Eve's derived origin. Nevertheless, invoking I Cor. 11, 11 and Gal. 5, 16-7, Clement underlines that women can imitate men's headship by dominating inferior appetites.<sup>69</sup> Despite Clement's concept of genderfree Godlikeness, he also uses Eph. 4, 13 to describe Christlike moral and intellectual perfection in terms of virile prowess. Salvational Christomorphic manhood is thus achieved through enlightened knowledge and by conquering womanish lust through Stoic *apatheia*.<sup>70</sup>

Basil of Caesarea (died 379) follows Clement's connection of Gen. 1, 26-27a and 27b in the sense of asexual Godlikeness, equally attributable to men and women. It is noteworthy that Basil's "feminist" exegesis introduces an androcentric lady who has certainly read I Cor. 11, 7, but without directly referring to Paul: "For man should not cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man". Commenting on Gen. 1, 27a, this *gynē* underlines that *anthrōpos* as grammatically masculine only concerns man, *anēr*. Basil retorts that Gen. 1, 27b is added in the scriptural text precisely to emphasise the inclusion of *gynē* in Godlike humanity: "Also woman possesses, like man, the privilege of being created in God's image. Equally honorable in their two natures, sharing equal virtuousness, they are equal in reward and like in

condemnation. Woman should not say: I am feeble. Feebleness is of the body, in the soul is power". Basil underscores that pious women can even surpass men in virtue, arduous prayer and good works. In spite of female feebleness, the virtuous *gynē* actualises her resemblance with God through generous charity and subjection of passions, thus attaining theomorphic dominion.<sup>71</sup>

Among the few preserved texts from ancient church Mothers, I have not found any example of their asserting women's creational Godlikeness. Therefore, Basil's praise of the martyr Julitta (died 306) is important by stating that this wealthy and forceful widow emphasised women's theomorphic equality with men. Before mounting the pyre to be burned in Caesarea, Julitta urged the women present not to avoid persecution by pleading female frailty: "We are formed of the same material as men. We are created in God's image as much as men are. Woman is made capable of virtue equally to man by the Creator. Are we not connected with men in everything? Not only flesh was taken to form woman, but also bone of bones. Therefore we owe the Creator constancy, strength and endurance, just as men do".<sup>72</sup> In her speech, Julitta combines the formation of Adam and his woman, according to Gen. 2, 7 and 2, 21-3, with the image text in Gen. 1, 26-27a, implicitly linked to the sexual differentiation in 1, 27b. Julitta's argument for women's and men's equal Godlikeness and ensuing capacity for virtue is here based on their unity of common bodily origin, significantly omitting the traditional theme of Adam's priority. In contrast, Basil's description of this exemplary female martyr demonstrates his androcentric framework. Julitta could hardly be called a woman, since her feeble femaleness was concealed by spiritual magnitude. Apparently contradicting himself, Basil remarks that Satan was especially humiliated in being conquered by female virtue (*gynaikaias aretēs*). Nevertheless, he proceeds with the traditional interpretation of women's "becoming male" through

Christlike martyrdom, exemplified by Julitta's manly surpassing of her female nature (*andreioteran tēs physeos*).<sup>73</sup>

Patristic "feminism" culminates with Augustine's (died 430) holistic definition of both maleness and femaleness as fully human. Like Basil's Julitta, this leading Father of Latin theology affirms creational unity by combining the two creation accounts. Against Manichaean dualism and encratite double creation, Augustine distinguishes between two modes of God's unique creative act: the instant, seminal *informatio* expressed in Gen. 1 and the successive *conformatio* described in Gen. 2. By this exegetical device, Augustine connects the sexual differentiation according to Gen. 1, 27b with the preceding image text of 1, 26-27a. It follows that the formation of Adam and his woman in Gen. 2, 7, 18, 21-3 is linked to the creation of Godlike humanity, so that the female human being, *femina/mulier*, is included in the theomorphic human prototype, *homo*.<sup>74</sup> Consequently, Augustine is the *first* church Father who explicitly confronts I Cor. 11, 7 by insisting that women too are created in God's image. It is essential to observe that all patristic exegesis understands this biblical text as literally stating men's exclusive Godlikeness. Refusing to accept Paul's denial of women's *imago Dei*, Augustine resorts to allegorical interpretation. *Mulier* is explained in terms of lower human reason, which is not theomorphic, whereas higher reason is figured by Paul's Godlike *uir*. The combined presexual and andromorphic equality of Gal. 3, 28 is here used as proof-text, but even more illogically than by Clement. Thus, the negated citation of Gen. 1, 27b, "there is not male and female", serves to include women as Godlike by attaching *homo* in 1, 26-7a to *femina* in 1, 27b, instead of literally abolishing femaleness.<sup>75</sup> It is of note that this "feminist falsification" of Gal. 3, 28 has survived through medieval exegesis with such success that today it is often invoked as normative!

Nevertheless, Augustine's insertion of Paul's submale *mulier* in Godlike humanity through the stratagem of attributing to her

a sexless higher reason, sharpens the conflict between theomorphic privilege and inferior femaleness. Women are not God-like *qua* females, but in spite of their bodily sex. In contrast, men's spiritual *imago Dei* corresponds to their exemplary maleness: "When she is man's helpmate, a function pertaining to woman alone, then she is not the image of God. Conversely, man is by himself alone the image of God, just as fully and completely as when the woman is associated with him into one".<sup>76</sup> In fact, the traditional incompatibility of Godhead and femaleness remains unchallenged by Augustine's inclusive definition of *imago Dei* in male disguise.

It is important to note that when describing God's final restoring of perfect humanity through Christlike resurrection, Augustine in *De civitate Dei* introduces a "feminist" exegesis of Eph. 4, 13. With explicit reference to creational unity and wholeness, he interprets perfect manhood, *uir perfectus*, in terms of human fulfilment, according to inclusive *homo* of Gen. 1, 26-27b and *conformatio* as expressed in Gen. 2, 7, 18, 21-23. Since femaleness is part of God's unique creation, women will not be restored to Christlike humanity by resurrecting as males. Women shall consequently resurrect as female human beings, although their creational procreative finality will be obsolete: "A woman's sex is natural and no vice, but in the resurrection her nature will be immune from coition and childbearing. Her female members will subsist with the former purpose transformed to a new beauty, so that no male concupiscence will be aroused. Femaleness shall praise the wisdom and goodness of God, who first made a woman, and who liberated her from the corruption into which she fell". Citing Matt. 22, 30, Augustine firmly rejects any encratite interpretation of such sexless bliss in terms of all-male perfection. Echoing Rufinus' critique of Jerome's resurrected angelic maleness<sup>77</sup>, Augustine stresses that in the resurrection there shall be no marriage, but the Lord did not say that there will be no women: *Nuptias ergo Dominus futuras esse negavit in resurrectione, non feminas.*<sup>78</sup>

## VI. Female Godlikeness

In medieval matristics, the early Christian and patristic stratagems of becoming male in Christ or claiming asexual Godlikeness are relinquished. Perspicaciously challenging the correlated andromorphic or metasexual Godlanguage in order to connect Godhead and femaleness, leading women writers seek to establish a model of female Godlikeness at the divine level. Three church Mothers are especially important innovators: Hildegard culminates female monastic culture, Birgitta displays imitable intention but doctrinal inviability, Julian is a pioneer of feminist theology. These women of God all invoke divinely inspired revelations in order to actualise their God-given empowerment. Like so many surplus daughters of noble parents, Hildegard was given to God and educated by the learned anchoress Jutta of Sponheim. Later a Benedictine and elected abbess, Hildegard's wide range of knowledge is comparable to Avicenna's, covering cosmology, anthropology, ethics and medicine. She also composed liturgical hymns and music. In contrast to heroically unwashed ancient church Mothers, like Melania the Elder, Paula and Olympias<sup>79</sup>, hygienic Hildegard designed the plumbing of her new monasteries in order to provide convenient bathing facilities.

In Hildegard's main theological work, *Scivias* (1151), God's revelatory *Sapientia* appears as a female figure.<sup>80</sup> The whole universe is visualised as being continuously upheld by this shaping *Creatrix*, permeating *Caritas* and providing *Scientia*.<sup>81</sup> When Hildegard describes God's transcendence with male imagery and God's immanence with female imagery, she builds on previous sapiential tradition. Connected to I Cor. 1, 23-4, where God's incarnated, suffering Son and God's revealing Wisdom converge, medieval use of female metaphors to describe Christ's human nature reformulates earlier Christology. In this perspective, Hildegard's vision is original in the sense that God's

*Sapientia* provides a model of perfect female humanity, *feminea forma*, at the divine level. Hildegard's mariology is consequently rather subdued, although Mary as new Eve is the prime example of female human wholeness, realised through virginity.

Despite her validation of human femaleness as reflecting divine Wisdom, Hildegard considers creational gender hierarchy to be confirmed by women's bio-social inferiority. It is significant that this energetic abbess rejects women's ordination to sacramental priesthood. Combining malecentred gynecology and traditional Adam-Christ typology, Hildegard argues that women's feebleness and receptive role in procreation make them incapable of performing sacramental consecration of bread and wine. In consequence, priestly activity is defined as a male sex role, with Christ as the exemplary high priest. Nevertheless, Hildegard concludes with an innovative interpretation of traditional marriage imagery, where the virgin or widow as bride of Christ assimilates his priestly eminence, just as the loving woman incloses her husband's body.<sup>82</sup>

It is important to note that Hildegard's empirical sexology in *Causae et Curae* contrasts with her firm preference of monastic *enkrateia*.<sup>83</sup> In fact, Hildegard associates moral and spiritual freedom with a dualistic concept of the human being. From a present feminist perspective, human autonomy and holistic valuation of both body and spirit are equally indispensable tenets. From Hildegard's ascetic standpoint these values are mutually exclusive, since the soul achieves salvation by divorcing itself from bodily desires. Striving to heal Christianity's fundamental split between Godhead and femaleness, Hildegard does not challenge the correlated basic conflict between Godlove and sexual love. This contradictory God-language makes Hildegard unusable as foremother for 20th-century feminist theology.

Although authorised by Eugenius III to pursue her visionary writing (1147) and a staunch papalist against Frederick Barbarossa, this autonomous abbess never obtained canonisation.

Hildegard's process between 1233-7 was abandoned unfinished, with eventual new attempts in 1243 and 1317. Her cult was recognised for Germany in 1940.

In contrast, the aristocratic widow Birgitta was speedily canonised by the Roman pope Bonifatius IX in 1391, since her *Reuelaciones* were invoked against the rivals in Avignon. Given this papalist bias, Birgitta's writings were contested at the Councils of Constance (1415) and Basle (1436). Her canonisation was confirmed in 1415 by one of three papal contenders, Johannes XXXIII, and sanctioned by the universal pope Martinus V in 1419. The conciliarist Jean Gerson, learned chancellor of Paris University, attacked Birgitta's claim of divine inspiration.<sup>84</sup> Later, he reproved Birgitta and Caterina of Siena (died 1380) for having seduced Gregorius XI to leave Avignon for Rome, a move which provoked the schism. Typically, Gerson argues from the absence of ancient matristic writings to the God-given norm of female silence. Women, even the most holy, are not permitted to teach at all: "Where are the writings of most learned and pious females, like Paula and Eustochium? Certainly, nothing is preserved because they did not have the presumptuousness to write". (*Ubi sunt scripta tot eruditissimarum ac devotissimarum foeminarum: Paulae, Eustochium similiiumque? Certe nulla supersunt, quia nulla praesumpserunt*).<sup>85</sup>

In fact, Birgitta is a striking example of religious feminism.<sup>86</sup> This medieval church Mother is the first and only woman in Christian history who constructs a gynecocentric double order. Birgitta invests her *Regula Saluatoris* with evangelical authority by claiming Christ's direct dictation. Imitating Mary's celestial hegemony as *caput et domina*, each abbess shall rule her monastery, with 60 nuns and a spatially segregated personnel of 13 priests, 4 deacons and 8 lay brothers.<sup>87</sup> Inadmissible in the androcentric church, Birgitta's *Regula* was never canonically approved in its original form and Urbanus V suppressed the revealed character already in 1370. Birgitta's monastic project became further thwarted by



subsequent alterations and the growing autonomy of male Birgittines.

Like Hildegard, Birgitta seeks to provide a model of female Godlikeness, but instead of feminising the Godhead she attempts to divinise the female by making Mary Christotypic. Striving to correct the gender hierarchy of traditional typology, where Christ's new Eve reenacts the ancillary role of Adam's helpmate, Birgitta inserts Mary as an active partner in salvation history. According to her *Reuelaciones*, Mary is predestined to share Christ's redemptive suffering.<sup>88</sup> In order to complement the lack of biblical mariology, Birgitta writes new liturgical readings for her nuns' daily office in Mary's honour, presenting this *Sermo Angelicus* as dictated by an angel on Christ's behalf. Thus given scriptural value, Birgitta's text amplifies her equivalent new Adam-new Eve typology.<sup>89</sup>

Despite Birgitta's feminist intention to counteract the fundamental incompatibility of Godhead and femaleness, her Godlanguage remains trapped in traditional androcentrism, since Mary is empowered by her Son, God is named Father and Christ is bridegroom. Nevertheless, it is important to observe that Birgitta's mariocentrism is quite exceptional among women mystics, who are overwhelmingly focused on Christ. Conversely, medieval enhancement of Mary is a typical product of male theology, which displays the mother-son bonding of Mediterranean "*mammismo*".

Like most medieval church Mothers, Birgitta invokes her salvational Godgiven authority to promote both church reform and individual conversion. In contrast, Birgitta is audaciously original in perceiving herself as elected instrument for God's revelatory unfolding, on a par with prophets, apostles and evangelists.<sup>90</sup> Keenly aware of theological complexity, Birgitta understands Scripture as means of conjectural revelation, to be corrected and completed by subsequent tradition through historically shifting cultures.<sup>91</sup> Being called to serve as God's bride and channel, Birgitta understands herself as chosen instrument for

this divine pedagogy in her time and place.<sup>92</sup> Birgitta experiences her revealing function as mariotypic, imitating Mary's role in the incarnation of Christ.<sup>93</sup> In fact, Birgitta's *Reuelaciones* were transmitted despite her innovative teaching of God's conjectural revelation. Birgitta's affirmation of herself as revelatory instrument was diligently concealed during her canonisation process. In consequence, Birgitta's ingenious concept of divine inculturation escaped both her conciliarist opponents and papalist defenders. Birgitta's survival in church history is ensured through ecclesiastical curtailment of her theology and monastic project. From a 20th-century perspective, Birgitta's mariocentrism is inapplicable because of Christological deviation, but her aim to validate human femaleness can inspire feminist theology. Birgitta's perspicacious understanding of both Scripture and tradition as incarnated discourse makes her a model of theological inculturation.

Julian of Norwich's Godlanguage represents an outstanding matristic achievement. This erudite anchoress connects Godhead and femaleness by reshaping the traditionally atypical use of female metaphors describing Christ's human nature.<sup>94</sup> Defining Christ as Mother, Julian attributes this quality not only to his incarnated humanity, but extends Christ's creating and redemptive motherhood to the divine level as Person of the Trinity. Known under the male saint's name of the church adjoining her anchorage, Saint Julian in Conisford, Lady Julian was included in the liturgical calendar of the Anglican communion in 1980. A radical reform in her own Roman Catholic church is needed before this pioneer of feminist theology can be canonised!

In 1373, when deadly sick at the age of thirty and a half years, Julian received a healing vision of God's all-embracing mercy, acted out through Christ's redeeming death on the cross. Julian describes this event in two versions of *Showings*, a short one soon after her vision and a longer account completed twenty years later, resulting from theological reflection on her mystical experience. Apparently little read in the 15th and 16th centuries,

Julian's writings have fortunately survived: the long version in a few manuscripts from the mid 17th century onwards, the short version in a single manuscript from around 1450, which was identified by chance in 1909. Compared with more widely diffused Middle English devotional writings, like those of Richard Rolle and Walter Hilton, Julian's *Showings* are markedly sober and intellectually demanding. Julian demonstrates her thorough knowledge of biblical, patristic and medieval sources in Latin, as well as of vernacular literature. This breadth of learning points to advanced monastic training, Julian was probably a Benedictine before she became a recluse.

It is important to observe that Julian's fundamental trust in universal salvation is strikingly opposed to Augustine's, and later Luther's, anguished seeking for a merciful God. In order to verbalise her visionary experience of God's recreating love: "that all things will be well"<sup>95</sup>, Julian elaborates her concept of divine Motherhood.<sup>96</sup> Like Hildegard's divine *Sapientia*, Julian's doctrine of "our Mother Christ" as "our Mother God all Wisdom" starts from sapiential Christology in its patristic and medieval formulation of Christ's gynecomorphic human nature, incarnating himself through maternal mercy. Julian's God-language is original in the sense that she transposes Christ's motherhood to the preexistent level of triune Godhead, where "the second Person of the Trinity is our Mother in nature in our substantial creation, in whom we are founded and rooted, and he is our Mother of mercy in taking our sensuality".<sup>97</sup> Accordingly, Julian applies her concept of divine wholeness to the human level, since the initial creation and redemptive incarnation unify the spiritual and bodily elements of humanity. It is important to note that Julian's use of the terms *substannce* and *sensualityte* does not imply dualistic anthropology. On the contrary, Julian's innovative discourse aims at healing the androcentric duality of traditional doctrine. In Julian's *Showings*, trinitarian interaction is verbalised by means of human wholeness, in the sense that both male and female metaphors describing God correspond to

both Godlike women and men. Julian's consistent naming of Christ the Mother as "he" points to this interchangeability.

Julian depicts Christ's maternal qualities in conformity with her culture's traditional female role, where the mother is defined as protecting, nurturing and compassionate. Nevertheless, by placing Christ's metaphoric motherhood in his unified divine humanity, Julian overcomes the gender hierarchy of classical typology, with Christ's church or Mary as subordinate new Eve. Focusing on God the Mother, Julian's mariology is consequently quite discreet. The main achievement of Julian's doctrine is to provide a fully Godlike, Christomorphic and female role model for women. This effective discarding of Christianity's fundamental exclusion of femaleness from the Godhead makes Julian a precursor of actual feminist theology, not only in intention, but also in doctrinal content. Julian's sophisticated attitude towards her own Godlanguage is equally imitable. She calls her *Showings* an "ABC", that is a conjectural verbalisation of God's unspeakable redeeming creativity.<sup>98</sup>

## VII. Patristic Innovation and Matristic Achievement

This survey of patristic innovation and matristic achievement illustrates the gradual inclusion of women in fully human Godlikeness, as realised by interpretation of Scripture through Christian tradition. Starting from exclusively male Godlikeness and women's salvational "becoming male" in Christ, "feminist" church Fathers define women as asexually Godlike already at creation in spite of their non-theomorphic femaleness. It is essential to observe that the 20th-century holistic definition of *imago Dei*, where both women and men are Godlike *qua* male or female human beings, represents a radical break with traditional Christian Godlanguage. Nevertheless, the basic concepts of God as andromorphic or metasexual are still prevailing. In fact, exclusively male Godlikeness survives in androcentric

typology, which remains fundamental in Orthodox and Catholic Christology and ecclesiology. Early Christian gender models, with Christ as Godlike new Adam and Mary/church as non-theomorphic new Eve, are consequently invoked against women's priestly ordination in the non-Protestant majority of Christendom.<sup>99</sup>

In this situation of arrested *aggiornamento* to post-patriarchal culture, the ancient church Fathers' intent of including women in created Godlikeness is imitable. The medieval church Mothers' achievement in providing a model of female Godlikeness by metaphorically feminising the Godhead is of exemplary value for theological inculturation. When both women and men are defined as theomorphic, God can correspondingly be described with male and female metaphors. Only when verbalised in terms of both women's and men's gendered experience does theology become a fully human Godlanguage.

## NOTES

- \* Extended version of main lecture held on Aug. 20, 1991, at the *Eleventh International Conference on Patristic Studies* in Oxford.
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## Birgitta of Sweden: a Model of Theological Inculturation\*

This article is based on my previous extensive analysis of Birgitta's theology.<sup>1</sup> The term inculturation is used in the sense of conjectural Godlanguage, i.e. theological discourse as verbalised according to historically shifting socio-cultural contexts.<sup>2</sup> Birgitta is interpreted in the framework of medieval religious feminism, which seeks to obtain fully human status by providing a combined Godlike and female role model for women. In this perspective, I examine Birgitta's Christotypic mariology and her innovative concept of God's continuous revelation. Birgitta's institutionalised survival, in terms of canonisation strategy and conciliarist critique, is also outlined. In conclusion, I evaluate Birgitta's Godlanguage from my standpoint of 20th-century Catholic feminist theology.

### **Religious feminism**

Nearly all women writers preserved from late Antiquity and the Middle Ages have been transmitted within the Christian tradition. During the last twenty years these church Mothers are focused by Women's Studies in religious and intellectual history. Using human genderedness as a main analytical category, in the sense of interaction between biologically programmed sex and socio-culturally expressed gender, this innovative scholarship highlights the influence of specifically female and male experience in human Godlanguage.

The fundamental incompatibility of Godhead and femaleness, which traditional Christianity shares with Judaism and Islam, presents a constant challenge to religious women throughout church history. God is normally described as andromorphic or metasexual, with corresponding male or asexual Godlikeness. It follows that traditional Christian anthropology excludes women from being created in God's image *qua* females.<sup>3</sup> Thus deprived of a model for female humanity at the divine level, the prime concern of both ancient and medieval church Mothers is to obtain complete religious capability by achieving fully human Godlikeness.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to observe that the present holistic definition of Godlikeness, as attributable both to women and men *qua* female or male human beings, is a recent inculturation which results from 20th-century doctrinal *aggiornamento*. In fact, traditional theological anthropology builds on two contrasting axioms: Female subordination is established by God's creative order. Human equivalence, in the sense of women's salvational parity with men, is realised by Christ's redemptive death and resurrection.<sup>5</sup> The ensuing conflict between women's creational inferiority and their redeemed equality is apparently accepted by all female authors who survive in the Christian tradition. Nevertheless, these matristic writers demonstrate an assertive exploitation of religious advancement. In the perspective of late Antiquity, women's salvational equivalence results from God's enhancement of creationally inferior femaleness to a level of perfect male humanity. Therefore, ancient church Mothers strive to actualise their redeemed parity with Godlike men by "becoming male" in Christ. This transformation into perfect maleness, which remains a basic theme in early Christian and patristic writings concerning holy women, as well as in the few extant matristic texts of late Antiquity, follows from and corresponds to classical androcentric Christology, where the divine Son is born and resurrected in exemplary male humanity. An important Christological shift occurs during the Middle Ages,

in terms of Christ's kenotic "becoming female", so that women attain salvational Christlikeness without gender-reversal. In a medieval perspective, female feebleness can imitate God's lowering of himself through the incarnate and suffering Christ. In this sense of displaying divine power, weak women can act as God's chosen instruments through prophetic charisma or mystical grace, thereby anticipating their salvational fulfilment. Considered to be creationally powerless, these *mulieres religiosae* invoke divinely inspired revelations in order to affirm their God-given empowerment.

Birgitta of Sweden (died 1373, canonised 1391) provides an outstanding example of such matristic feminism. Like the earlier Hildegard of Bingen (died 1179, unfinished process 1233-1237, cult recognised for Germany 1940), and the later Julian of Norwich (died after 1416, since 1980 included in the liturgical calendar of the Anglican communion), Birgitta presents her theological discourse in visionary form. Like the German abbess and the English anchoress, Birgitta seeks to reformulate traditional Godlanguage, which excludes femaleness at the divine level. All three church Mothers strive to establish a combined Godlike and female model for women. Hildegard elaborates early Christology, where God's revealing Wisdom and God's incarnated Son converge. In *Scivias*, she defines this *Sapientia* as an equally preexistent model for perfect humanity in female form, *feminea forma*.<sup>6</sup> In *Showings*, Julian connects Godhead and femaleness by reshaping the atypical, although traditional, use of female metaphors in Christian Godlanguage.<sup>7</sup> Describing Christ as Mother, Julian attributes this function not only to his incarnated human nature, but extends Christ's motherhood to the divine level as Person of the Trinity, "oure moder God alle wysdom".<sup>8</sup> Birgitta's opposite strategy is exceptional among medieval women mystics, who are mainly focused on Christ. Instead of metaphorically feminising the Godhead, Birgitta attempts to divinise femaleness by describing Mary as Christotypic.

## Christotypic Mariology

Striving to correct the gender hierarchy of traditional typology, where Christ's new Eve reenacts the ancillary role of Adam's helpmate, Birgitta makes Mary Christotypic by inserting her as active partner in salvation history. This insistence on Mary's participation in Christ's redemptive suffering is quite original, in the sense that Birgitta constructs an equivalent typology. According to traditional doctrine, creational androcentrism is transposed to the salvational order, so that Adam's fall is counteracted by Christ's death and resurrection. Eve's subordinate instrumentality in tempting Adam is here counterbalanced by Mary's receptive and nurturing role in Christ's incarnation.<sup>9</sup> Birgitta's definition of these two pairs is strikingly symmetrical, without the traditional parallel of androcentrism and Christocentrism. Mary is described as being predestined to participate in Christ's redemptive suffering. Therefore, the incarnated union between Christ and Mary is emphasised in terms of sharing the same heart. It follows that Mary's and Christ's pain during the crucifixion is fused in the sense of coredemptive activity: "*Propter hanc igitur voluntatem ego Deus, ab eterno filius Dei, factus sum homo in virgine, cuius cor erat quasi cor meum. Et ideo bene dicere possum, quod mater mea et ego quasi cum vno corde saluauimus hominem, ego paciendo corde et carne, ipsa cordis dolore et amore.*"<sup>10</sup> Birgitta also contrasts Christ's and Mary's jointly suffering and saving heart with Adam's and Eve's disastrous sharing of the same apple: "*Propterea audacter dico, quia dolor eius erat dolor meus, quia cor eius cor meum. Sicut enim Adam et Eua vendiderunt mundum pro uno pomo, sic filius meus et ego redemimus mundum quasi cum uno corde.*"<sup>11</sup>

Intending to fill the lack of biblical mariology, Birgitta writes new liturgical readings for her projected order's daily office in Mary's honour. Claiming this *Sermo Angelicus* to be

dictated by an angel on Christ's behalf, Birgitta amplifies her equivalent new Adam-new Eve typology. Consequently, Birgitta underlines Adam's foreknowledge of Mary's role in counteracting the first woman's fall.<sup>12</sup> Birgitta's gynecocentric reformulation of the New Testament comparison between Isaac and Christ is even more daring. The Old Testament covenant with Abraham through his promised son Isaac (Gen.17, 1-21) is in Birgitta's text fulfilled through Mary, who is predestined to bear God's Son. Birgitta believes that Abraham, quite unpatriarchally, rejoiced more in his future female descendant Mary than in his male heir Isaac: "*Creditur quoque Abraham de hac futura filia magis quam de Ysaac, suo filio, exultasse atque maiori caritate ipsam quam Ysaac, suum filium, dilexisse.*"<sup>13</sup>

In this context of salvation through a woman, another feminist formula is noteworthy. Relating her vision in Bethlehem, Birgitta elaborates the story of the shepherds at the manger (Luke 2, 8-12) in a strikingly non-androcentric manner. Presupposing the unbiblical possibility of a female saviour, *saluatric*, the shepherds asked Mary to display the infant's sex so that they could verify if the baby was male or female: "*Quem cum vidissent, prius voluerunt inquirere, vtrum masculus vel femina esset, ex eo, quod angeli eius annunciauerunt, quod saluator mundi natus erat, et non 'saluatric' dixerant.*"<sup>14</sup>

In fact, Birgitta is the first and only woman in Christian history who projects a gynecocentric double order, claiming her *Regula Saluatoris* to be directly dictated by Christ. He wants to plant a new vineyard, since the old one had ceased to produce good grapes and should therefore be burned (allusion to John 15, 1-6).<sup>15</sup> The primary aim of Birgitta's monastic project is to honour Christ's mother Mary, who mediates grace even for the conversion of Gentiles.<sup>16</sup>

Representing Mary on earth, the abbess is elected by all members of the order to function as the monastery's *caput et domina*. Imitating Mary's celestial hegemony as head and queen of Christ's apostles and disciples, the abbess rules the



monastery's 60 sisters and supervises its 13 priests, 4 deacons and 8 lay brothers. With their common approbation, she selects among the priests a confessor to all, who directs the male members.<sup>17</sup>

It is essential to observe that Birgitta's *Regula*, which was inadmissible in the androcentric medieval church, was never approved and realised in its original form. Already in 1370, Urbanus V suppressed the *Regula's* claim to revelatory status and altered Birgitta's plan of a unified double monastery in Vadstena. Birgittine monasteries became more and more estranged from Birgitta's own monastic project by subsequent alterations and the friars' growing autonomy.

Despite her feminist intention to counteract Christianity's traditional incompatibility of Godhead and femaleness, Birgitta's mariocentrism remains restricted by androcentric Godlanguage, in the sense that God is named Father, Christ is called bridegroom and Mary is empowered by her Son. Unlike Hildegard's womanlike divine Wisdom and Julian's God our Mother, Birgitta's Christotypic mariology does not sever the fundamental connection between Godlike maleness and manlike Godhead.

### **Continuous revelation**

Like most medieval church Mothers, Birgitta invokes her salvational God-given authority to promote both ecclesiastical reform and individual conversion. When Hildegard and Julian justify their message by referring to the divine inspiration of *Scivias* and *Showings*, they repeat the current medieval theme of God's choosing frail women in order to confound mighty men. Hildegard and Julian do not understand their mission as revealing new knowledge, but to reactivate Christian tradition by verbalising it anew. In contrast, Birgitta is audaciously original when she perceives herself as a mariotypic instrument of God's

revelatory unfolding, on a par with prophets, apostles and evangelists.

Birgitta interprets her function as revelatory channel of salvation in the sense of imitating Mary's role in the incarnation of Christ. This is exemplified by her experience of mystical pregnancy during Christmas night (probably in 1344). Birgitta felt a marvellous exultation in her heart, like the movements of a living child: "*Nocte natalis Domini tam mirabilis et magna aduenit sponse Christi exultatio cordis, vt vix se pre leticia tenere posset, et in eodem momento sensit in corde motum sensibilem admirabilem, quasi si in corde esset puer viuus et voluens se et reuoluens.*"<sup>18</sup> Fearing such quickening to be an illusion, Birgitta asked her confessor and other friends to verify the occurrence by their eyes and touch. This important event is equally reported in the process testimony of prior Petrus Olavi (1380), stating that the fetus' movements were concretely felt by magister Mathias and himself, who palpated Birgitta through her clothes.<sup>19</sup> It is of note that phenomena of spiritual pregnancy and giving birth are rather common among medieval women mystics, displaying their intimate union with Christ. On the contrary, Birgitta's mariotypic interpretation of her mystical motherhood as revelatory reenactment is completely exceptional.

Shortly after her husband's death (probably in 1344), Birgitta received her vocation to be a medium of divine revealing for the rescue of all Christians. The trinitarian Christ, incarnated through Mary, crucified and resurrected in order to save all souls, calls her to be his bride and channel: "*Scias, quia non loquor propter te solam, sed propter salutem omnium Christianorum .... Tu quippe eris sponsa mea et canale meum, audies et videbis spiritualia et secreta celestia, et spiritus meus remanebit tecum vsque ad mortem.*"<sup>20</sup>

It is important to observe that this initial vocation of Birgitta as Christ's revelatory instrument, *sponsa et canale*, is placed among her *Reuelaciones Extrauagantes*, which were not submitted to the examining commissions appointed by Gregorius XI

(1377) and Urbanus VI (1378). Birgitta's editor and prudently strategic promoter, the eremitical ex-bishop and papalist Alphonso of Jaén, participated in both proceedings. It is therefore significant that another extravagant piece, where Birgitta expressly compares her revealing mission with Gospel writing and normative exegesis, was found tucked into Alphonso's breviary after his death. This strong affirmation of Birgitta's God-given authority extends the title "evangelist" even to her redactor Alphonso! Here, Birgitta defines God's continuously unfolding revelation as acted out by Christ and his friends together. Like an artistic carpenter, Christ produces and decorates a beautiful image, to be further embellished by the colouring of his successive collaborators. Birgitta thereby inserts herself into the incarnate salvational process, directed by the Holy Spirit, where Christ's words are persistently reinterpreted and reenforced: "*Nam sicut cor tuum non semper est capax et feruidum ad proferendum et scribendum illa, que sentis, sed nunc voluis et reuoluis ea in animo tuo, nunc scribis et rescribis illa, donec venis ad proprium sensum verborum meorum, sic spiritus meus cum euangelistis et doctoribus ascendebat et descendebat, quia nunc ponebant aliqua emendanda, nunc aliqua retractanda, nunc iudicabantur et reprehendebantur ab aliis. Et tamen alii postea venerunt, qui subtilius discusserunt et lucidius explanauerunt verba eorum. Attamen omnes euangeliste mei a spiritu meo per infusionem habuerunt verba, loquebantur et scripserunt. Item dic eidem hermite, quod faciat et impleat officium euangeliste.*"<sup>21</sup>

Birgitta's acute awareness of the varying complexity of Christian doctrine is masterly displayed in her discussion of crucial themes, the *Liber Quaestionum*. Seeking to insert her own religious experience into the process of God's unfolding revelation, Birgitta's understanding of herself as Christ's instrumental bride and channel presupposes that salvation is actualised by his incarnated and resurrected humanity. In consequence, Birgitta explains the divine Son's incarnation in

terms of God's merciful accommodation to human limits: "Therefore, in order that man might better understand me, I, God the merciful, showed myself to him in a form like himself that could be seen and touched - namely, in my humanity, in which the Godhead exists but, as it were, veiled, - in order that man might not be terrified by a form like himself. For, insofar as I am God, I am not corporeal and not corporeally portrayed; therefore, it was in my humanity that I could be heard and seen more tolerably by man."<sup>22</sup>

With original perspicacity, Birgitta interprets the gradual verbalisation of Scripture as correlated to this incarnated disclosure in human shape. Biblical discordances are resolved by invoking the Holy Spirit's variety of gifts. Birgitta compares divine action to a delicate balance, constantly adjusted to varying human capacity. Scripture is thus explained as means of God's incarnate revelation, to be corrected and completed by subsequent tradition: "Therefore, when I, God's Son, visible in the flesh, preached different things in different places, I had different imitators and hearers; for some followed me out of love, others to find opportunity and others because of curiosity. And some of those who followed me were subtle by nature; others were simpler. Therefore, I spoke simple things by which the simple were instructed; and I also spoke higher things at which the wise wondered. Sometimes, too, I spoke in parables and obscurely - about which some received an opportunity of speaking. Sometimes I repeated things previously said, and sometimes I expanded or condensed them. Therefore, it is no wonder if those who arranged the narrative of the gospels have set down things that are different, but nevertheless true, because some of them set down word for word and others set down the sense of the words, but not the words themselves. Others wrote earlier things later. Some wrote more about my divinity. And each one of them wrote just as the Holy Spirit enabled him to speak."<sup>23</sup>

This conjecturality of biblical revelation equally applies to Christ's revealing words through Birgitta, in the sense that her

prophetic message will also finally prove to be true: "Be not disturbed if I speak one word obscurely and another more expressly; or if I now say that someone is my servant or son or friend and, another time, the contrary is found. For my words can be interpreted in diverse ways: just as I said to you of one man that his hand would become his death, and of another, that he would approach my table no more. These things are said either because I am going to tell you why I have spoken thus or because you, in fact, will see the final truth - just as it is now clear in the case of those two. Sometimes, too, I say things obscurely in order that you may both fear and rejoice - fearing that they may come to pass in another way because of my divine patience, which knows the change of hearts, and rejoicing too because my will is always fulfilled. So too, in the Old Law, I said many things that were to be understood more spiritually than corporeally - as concerning the temple and David and Jerusalem - in order that carnal mankind might learn to desire spiritual things."<sup>24</sup>

In several of her *Reuelaciones*, Birgitta presents herself as a revelatory medium on a par with prophets, evangelists and apostles. The manifestation of Christ through Birgitta is part of God's ongoing revelation, as actualised in her time and place: "*Omnia nempe misteria incarnationis mee antea innotuerunt prophetis, eciam stella, que precedebat magos, qui credentes verbis prophete meruerunt videre, quod crediderunt, et visa stella cicius certificati sunt. Sic nunc verba mea prius debent annunciariet postea, cum venerint opera, euidencius credetur eis.*"<sup>25</sup> Therefore, Christ speaks to Birgitta, like God to Moses, but his words are not believed by all. In the same way as some Jews trusted God but did not have faith in Moses, some Christians now reject Christ's words through Birgitta.<sup>26</sup> In another comparison between Moses and Birgitta, Christ specifically states that she does not need to veil her face in his combined divine and incarnated presence, since her spiritual eyes have been opened. Christ will also show her his suffering and

resurrected body, just as he appeared to Mary Magdalene and Peter: "*Audies eciam vocem meam, que loquebatur in rubo Moysi. Hec eadem nunc loquitur in anima tua.*"<sup>27</sup> In a broad survey of divine pedagogy, leading angels and humankind towards salvation, Christ locates Birgitta's proclamation of God's justice and mercy as part of the unfolding revelatory process. Through her, the fulfilment of Christ's new Law, announced by Moses, is to be made manifest.<sup>28</sup>

In order to elucidate divine justice and mercy, which appear more or less clearly in Scripture, it is of note that Birgitta provides a strikingly non-Scandinavian description of God as producer of liquor from wine. Here, Mary explains that God's word is moving upwards and downwards like wine in distillatory tubes (*fistulae*), thus displaying God's exalted *iustitia* and condescending *misericordia*.<sup>29</sup>

### **Canonisation strategy and conciliar critique**

It is important to observe that Birgitta's ingenious concept of divine inculturation in human shape obviously escaped both her papalist defenders and her conciliarist opponents. Proposals for Birgitta's canonisation initiated in 1377 under Gregorius XI, who had entered Rome from Avignon the same year. Proceedings continued under Urbanus VI, whose election in 1378 provoked the schism between the sees of Rome and Avignon. Birgitta's canonisation process was carried out during 1379/80, but her holiness was still canonically pending when Urbanus VI died in 1389. Nevertheless, recent research demonstrates that Birgitta's canonisation was primarily motivated by papal politics. Her revealed insistence on the pope's return to Rome served to legitimate the pontificate of Urbanus VI, a strategy elaborated mainly by Birgitta's editor Alphonso of Jaén. Birgitta was canonised in 1391 by the Roman pope Bonifatius IX, who because of his French rival Clement VII did not represent the

whole Western church. Birgitta's canonisation was sanctioned in 1415 by the pope in Pisa, Johannes XXIII, one of three papal contenders (1410-15). Only in 1419 was Birgitta's sainthood canonically confirmed by a leader of the entire Roman Catholic church, Martinus V.

Bonifatius IX's canonisation *Bulla* inserts Birgitta in salvation history by affirming that this *mulier fortis* is called from the far North (contrary to Jer. 1, 14: From the North disaster shall flare up; *Omne malum ab aquilone*, cf. 4, 6; 6, 1) to work in Christ's vineyard.<sup>30</sup> Birgitta's pious life and posthumous miracles are invoked in standard hagiographical fashion, but Birgitta's writings are barely mentioned. In consequence, the papal *Bulla* does not validate Birgitta's doctrine as such.

Because of the papalist rationale for Birgitta's canonisation, her *Reuelaciones* were severely criticised at the councils of Constance and Basle. In 1415, Birgitta's official sainthood and the divine inspiration of her writings were contested in Constance by the learned conciliarist and chancellor of Paris university, Jean Gerson.<sup>31</sup> In 1434, 123 articles were extracted from Birgitta's *Reuelaciones* and submitted to examination in Basle. This material was thoroughly analysed and defended by the Spanish Dominican and papalist Juan de Torquemada, made cardinal by Eugenius IV in 1439. It is essential to note that none of the censured articles concerns fundamental themes of Birgitta's theology. In general, passages were selected as being hostile to institutional church authority. Birgitta's original understanding of herself as channel for God's continuous revelation is therefore not discussed at all in Torquemada's *Defensiones* from 1435.<sup>32</sup> In consequence, the whole debate runs like a "*dialogue des sourds*", where both Birgitta's conciliarist opponents and papalist defenders manifest an equal lack of comprehension of her doctrinal content. The importance of ecclesiastical politics is here obvious, and Birgittine claims to distribute the plenary indulgence given at the Roman church of

San Pietro in Vinculi are a central issue. In a revelation addressed to Urbanus V, Birgitta presents this privilege as instituted for her projected order by Christ himself.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, Birgittine friars invoked the revelatory status of Birgitta's writings to regain an important economic base, which had been granted by Urbanus VI in 1378 and was suppressed by Martinus V in 1418. The council's negative decision was pronounced in 1436 by the conciliarist leader and French cardinal Louis d'Allemand. The *Vincula* and Franciscan *Portiuncula* indulgences are refused, and as a branch of Augustine's order (institution of new monastic orders had been prohibited by the IV Lateran council in 1215) the Birgittines can only enjoy privileges accorded to those who follow his *Regula*, like Augustinian hermits and Dominicans. Although endorsing Birgitta's canonised sainthood, the verdict states that Birgitta's *Reuelaciones* must not be divulged without corrections conforming them to true Catholic doctrine. Both title and content are misleading, since Birgitta's writings are often dubious or imprecise. Especially condemned is the temerarious assertion of some Birgittine friars that Birgitta's *Reuelaciones* have the same revelatory status as the Gospel.<sup>34</sup> It is essential to observe that this interpretation, attributed to presumptuous friars, does in fact correspond to Birgitta's understanding of herself as instrumental for God's continuous revealing. Birgitta's original concept of incarnate revelation was clearly ignored by the examining commission. Despite repeated Birgittine efforts, this conciliar judgment of Birgitta's writings was never revised. It is noteworthy that Sixtus IV's *Motu proprio* of 1484, where the *Vincula* indulgence was reestablished in Vadstena, does not imply ecclesiastical approbation of Birgitta's *Reuelaciones*.

I find it necessary to insist on these historical facts in order to emphasise that Birgitta's canonisation was realised and her apparent institutional success has been ensured despite her innovative doctrine of revelation.



## Feminist evaluation

From a 20th-century perspective, Birgitta's religious feminism displays imitable intention and inapplicable content. Birgitta seeks to validate human femaleness by invoking Mary's Christotypic mediating of divinity. Birgitta's construction of an equivalent typology, with Mary acting as *coredemptrix*, is Christologically deviant. Differing from medieval church Mothers like Hildegard and Julian, who define women as fully Godlike through metaphorical feminisation of Christ as divine Wisdom and trinitarian Mother, Birgitta restricts women's redemptive empowerment to identification with Christ's mother, Mary. Instead of describing the Godhead as equally gynecomorphic and andromorphic, Birgitta's mariocentrism provides a vicarious connection between divinity and femaleness. Despite her exemplary feminist motivation, Birgitta's refurbishing of traditional Godlanguage is trapped in the patriarchal scheme of Mediterranean "*mammismo*", where Mary is empowered by her Son. Recent pontifical invocations of mariology in defence of typological androcentrism demonstrate the futility of Birgitta's solution.<sup>35</sup>

In fact, the medieval matristic effort to provide a combined Godlike and female role model for women is effectively achieved by Julian of Norwich. Her doctrinal content remains exemplary for verbalising divine totality in terms of human wholeness, by introducing models of both female and male Godlikeness at the divine level.

On the other hand, Birgitta's perspicacious understanding of God's unfolding revelation, actualised by means of incarnated discourse through Scripture and tradition, makes her an exemplary foremother of present theological inculturation. Defining human Godlanguage as verbalised according to historically shifting socio-cultural conditions, 20th-century theology vitalises the patristic view of scriptural revelation as being adjusted to conjectural human existence. Likewise, Birgitta

explains the incoherence and obscurity of biblical texts and the complexity of subsequent interpretations by pointing to God's ongoing disclosure. From the perspective of contemporary Catholic feminist theology, Birgitta's audacious claim to channel this salvational flow in her own time and place is particularly pertinent, in terms of validating female religious experience as God-given and consequently normative. Following the collapse of androcentricity in our Western culture, both female and male religious experience must be valued as indispensable for a fully human discourse on God and Godlike humankind.

Birgitta's Catholic trust in God's interaction with created and redeemed humanity, as realised through divine accomodation to conjecturally shifting human cultures, will prove to be indispensable for the future survival of Christianity.

## NOTES

- \* Extended version of lecture held on Oct. 4, 1991, at the International Study Meeting in Rome, *Santa Brigida Profeta dei Tempi Nuovi*.
- 1. Kari Elisabeth Børresen: Birgitta's Godlanguage. Exemplary Intention, Inapplicable Content. In ed. Tore Nyberg: *Birgitta, her Works, and her Five Abbeys in the Nordic Countries*. Odense 1991, 21-72.
- 2. The term inculturation often serves to describe varying ethnic liturgies, but is particularly pertinent to the deployment of theological ideas. Cf. acculturation, i.e. crosscultural contact and adjustment between individuals or groups; enculturation, i.e. individual appropriation of a given culture.
- 3. Ed. Kari Elisabeth Børresen: *Image of God and Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition*. Oslo 1991. This collection of articles analyses the gradual inclusion of women in fully human Godlikeness, as realised by the interpretation of Scripture through Christian tradition. The main stages are: A. Men's exclusive Godlikeness in the creational order (based on Gen. 1, 26-27a and 2, 7, invoking I Cor. 11, 7). This early Christian variant, with corresponding Adam-Christ typology, is normative until the 5th century and persists (use of Ambrosiaster) in medieval canon law. B. Patristic definition of asexual

*imago Dei*, identifying women as Godlike already from creation despite their non-theomorphic femaleness (Gen. 1, 27b connected to the previous image-text, Gen. 1, 26-27a, invoking Gal. 3, 28). Elaborated from the 3rd to the 5th century (by Clement of Alexandria and Augustine), this sexless privilege in andromorphic disguise continues through the Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation, coexisting with earlier typology. C. Initiated by 19th-century feminist exegesis, the holistic definition of human Godlikeness becomes normative in 20th-century theological anthropology, to be irreconcilable with androcentric typology. Cf. note 35.

4. Kari Elisabeth Børresen: Ancient and Medieval Church Mothers. In the present volume, 245-275.
5. Kari Elisabeth Børresen: *Subordination and Equivalence*. The Nature and Role of Woman in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Washington, DC 1981.
6. Eds. Adelgundis Führkötter, Angela Carlevaris: *Hildegardis Scivias*. Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis 43, 43 A. Turnhout 1978. Trans. Columba Hart, Jane Bishop: *Hildegard of Bingen. Scivias*. The Classics of Western Spirituality. New York 1990.
7. Eds. Edmund Colledge, James Walsh: *A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich* 1-2. Studies and Texts 35. Toronto 1978. Trans. Edmund Colledge, James Walsh: *Julian of Norwich. Showings*. The Classics of Western Spirituality. New York 1978.
8. Kari Elisabeth Børresen: Julian of Norwich: a Model of Feminist Theology. In the present volume, 295-314.
9. Kari Elisabeth Børresen: *Anthropologie médiévale et théologie mariale*. Oslo 1971. Marie dans la théologie catholique. = *Concilium* 19, Paris 1983, 93-106.
10. Extr. 3, 5. Ed. Lennart Hollmann: *Reuelaciones Extrauagantes*. SSFS. 2, V. Uppsala 1956.
11. Rev. I, 35,3-7, cit. 7. Ed. Carl-Gustaf Undhagen, ed.: *Reuelaciones Liber I*. SSFS. 2, VII, 1. Uppsala 1978.
12. Sermo 7, 1-21. Ed. Sten Eklund: *Sermo Angelicus*. SSFS. 2, VIII, 2. Uppsala 1972.
13. Sermo 8, 6-9, cit. 9.
14. Rev. VII, 23, 1-3. Ed. Birger Bergh: *Reuelaciones Liber VII*. SSFS. 2, VII, 7. Uppsala 1967.
15. Regula 15-21. Ed. Sten Eklund: *Regula Saluatoris*. SSFS. 2, VIII, 1. Uppsala 1975.
16. Extr. 3, 12-3.

17. Regula 150-152; 167-170. Extr. 22, 2.
18. Rev. VI, 88, 1-8, cit. 1. Ed. Birger Bergh: *Reuelaciones Liber VI*. SSFS. 2, VII, 6. Uppsala 1991.
19. Acta 500, cf. 484. Ed. Isak Collijn: *Acta et Processus Canonizacionis beate Birgittae*. SSFS. 2, I. Uppsala 1924-31.
20. Extr. 47, 1-4, cit. 2-3.
21. Extr. 49, 1-8, cit. 6-8.
22. Rev. V, int. 11, 18-19. Ed. Birger Bergh: *Reuelaciones Liber V*. SSFS. 2, VII, 5. Uppsala 1971. Trans. Albert Ryle Kezel: *Birgitta of Sweden. Life and Selected Revelations*. The Classics of Western Spirituality. New York 1990. Cit. 125-126.
23. Rev. V, int. 16, 15-25, cit. 20-25. Kezel, 150.
24. Rev. V. rev. 10, 1-5, cit. Kezel, 142-143.
25. Rev. I, 32, 5-7, cit. 6-7.
26. Rev. I, 60, 4.
27. Rev. II, 10, 37-40, cit. 40. Transc. Carl-Gustaf Undhagen: *Reuelaciones Liber II*. From *Revelationes Sanctae Birgittae*. Impressit B. Ghotan. Lubece 1492.
28. Rev. II, 17, 45-46.
29. Rev. VIII, 48, 6-11. Transc. Birger Bergh: *Reuelaciones Liber VIII*. From *Revelationes Sanctae Birgittae*. Lubece 1492.
30. In ed. Gonsalvo Durante: *Revelationes Sanctae Birgittae* 1, 12-19. Romae 1628.
31. De probatione spirituum 5,11. *Oeuvres complètes* 9, 179, 183-4. Paris 1973. Cf. De examinatione doctrinarum 3 (1423) where Gerson warns against false doctrines by invoking Gregorius XI, who on his deathbed (1378) denounced irrational visionaries. These *idiotae* and *mulierculae* (i.e. Birgitta, Caterina of Siena and Peter of Aragon) had seduced him to return to Rome, thus endangering the church with imminent schism: "Hic positus in extremis, habens in manibus sacrum Christi corpus, protestatis est coram omnibus, ut caverent ab hominibus, tam viris quam mulieribus, sub specie religionis visiones loquentibus sui capitis; quia per tales ipse seductus esset, dimisso suorum rationabili consilio, ut se et Ecclesiam ad discrimen schismatis tunc imminentis traxerit, nisi misericors provideret sponsus Ecclesiae Christus; quod horrendus usque adhuc nimis heu patefecit eventus". *Oeuvres complètes* 9, 469-470.
32. In ed. J.D. Mansi: *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* 30, 699-814. Venetiis 1792.

33. Rev. IV, 137, 5. Ed. Hans Aili: *Reuelaciones Liber IV*. SSFS. 2, VII, 4. Uppsala 1992.
34. In Carl Silfverstolpe: *Om kyrkans angrepp mot Revelationes Sanctae Birgittae*, 48-50. Stockholm 1895.
35. Kari Elisabeth Børresen: *Image ajustée, typologie arrêtée. Analyse critique de "Mulieris dignitatem"*. In the present volume, 343-357.

## Julian of Norwich: a Model of Feminist Theology

### **Male Godlanguage**

All human discourse about God's activity in relation to us, *quoad nos*, is based on bio-socio-culturally conditioned experience. Since both Scripture and subsequent biblical interpretation are shaped in androcentric societies, traditional Christian theology is mainly verbalised through male gendered Godlanguage. In the Hebrew Bible, God is overwhelmingly andromorphic, described with male metaphors as king, warrior, judge and patriarchal husband. In the New Testament, God is named Father and Christ is called Son and Lord. Correspondingly, the first male, Adam, is defined as Godlike human prototype, whereas the first female, Eve, is derived and therefore not theomorphic. Creational gender hierarchy is transposed to the order of salvation, with Christ as new Adam, and church/Mary as new Eve. This typology remains fundamental in Orthodox and Catholic Christology and ecclesiology.<sup>1</sup> Between the 3rd and the 5th century, "feminist" church Fathers managed to include women as Godlike already at creation, in spite of non-theomorphic femaleness. Defining *imago Dei* as incorporeal and therefore sexless, this prerogative was attributed to women's rational souls, without affecting creational male precedence.<sup>2</sup> The ensuing conflict between women's asexual equivalence and female subordination is axiomatic in theological anthropology until the 20th century.<sup>3</sup>

## **Gynecomorphic imagery**

Notwithstanding this basic androcentricity of traditional Christian doctrine, God's activity towards us is in exceptional cases depicted with female metaphors. Such atypical theology is rooted in a few scriptural texts: Isaiah compares Yahweh with a woman in travail, gasping and panting (42, 14). God behaves like a breast-feeding mother: "Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you" (49, 15). This divine mothering is further described: "As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you, you shall be comforted in Jerusalem" (66, 13). Hosea's picture of Yahweh's terrible love for Israel, as a mother-bear robbed of her cubs (13, 8), is quite suggestive.

In the New Testament, two parables use female imagery: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened" (Matt. 13, 33; cf. Luke 13, 20-21). "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost'. Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15, 8-10). An important text for traditional use of female metaphors is Jesus' comparison of himself with a mother-hen, protecting her brood under her wings (Matt. 23,37; cf. Luke 13, 34). The epistles' images of giving birth (Gal. 4,19) and milk-feeding (I Cor. 3, 1-2; I Tess. 2, 7-9; Hebr. 5, 12-13; I Peter 2,2) influence traditional use of female metaphors.<sup>4</sup>

## Female metaphors describing God/Christ

In patristic and medieval exegesis, references to biblical texts with gynecomorphic imagery are sparse. When used, female metaphors are often interpreted in terms of androcentric typology, with significant fluctuation from divine Wisdom to mother church. Nevertheless, some church Fathers identify divine Wisdom and the incarnate Word, mainly referring to Jesus as mother-hen, and combined with imagery of God's protective wings in the Psalms.

Preaching on Psalm 91,4: "He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge", Augustine (died 430) explicitly refers to Christ as protective Mother-Wisdom. Combining the mother-hen with quotations of John 1, 14 and Phil. 2, 6-8, he assimilates maternity and incarnation. Wisdom has been feeble for our sake, because the Word became flesh: "*Fugiamus sub alas matris Sapientiae, quia et ipsa Sapientia infirmata est propter nos; quia Verbum caro factum est*".<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that this interpretation conforms to androcentric symbolism, where the human element is gynecomorphic, precisely because it is considered to be subordinate, feeble and vulnerable. The theme is pursued when Augustine invokes I Cor. 1, 25: "the weakness of God is stronger than men", in the sense of Christ as Wisdom of God being weakened by the incarnation: "*mater nostra sapientia dei, per carnis susceptionem infirmata quoddammodo*".<sup>6</sup> This interpretation is quoted in several medieval commentaries on Matt. 23, 37, as by Bede (died 735), Peter Lombard (died 1160) and Thomas Aquinas (died 1274).<sup>7</sup> Interpreting Psalm 59, 6, Augustine cites Matt. 23, 37 and Phil. 2, 6-8, thereby defining the *kenōsis* of Christ in terms of motherly love: "*materna caritas quae inuenitur infirmitas*". Augustine stresses that the incarnate and crucified Word, who like a mother-hen gathers all nations under her wings, does not therefore give up his divine majesty: "*Ergo hoc maternae infirmitatis est, non amissae maiestatis*".



This womanlike lowering does not suppress Christ's fatherly dignity, his being equal with God.<sup>8</sup>

The theme of Christ as both Father and Mother is explored in Augustine's commentary on Psalm 102, 7, where he refers to the mother-pelican, wounding her breast in order to quicken her dead small ones with her own blood. From the 3rd century, this image was used to illustrate the redemptive death and resurrection of Christ. Invoking the mother-hen and quoting Paul's paternal (I Cor. 4, 15) and maternal (Gal. 4, 19) functions, Augustine concludes that Christ has fatherly authority and motherly affection. Just like Paul he is both Father and Mother: "*Habet enim paternam auctoritatem, maternum affectum, sicut et Paulus et pater est et mater est*".<sup>9</sup> This interpretation is amply paraphrased by Anselm of Canterbury (died 1109) in a prayer addressed to Paul, where he calls the apostle an affectionate mother. By his preaching, Paul gives birth to and feeds the faithful: "*Quae est illa affectuosa mater, quae se ubique praedicat filios suos iterum parturire? Dulcis nutrix, dulcis mater, quos filios parturis aut nutris, nisi quos in fide Christi docendo gignis et erudis? Aut quis Christianus post te doctrina tua non est in fide natus et confirmatus?*" Therefore, Paul is a model of apostolic motherhood: "*Nam etsi benedicta fides ista ab aliis quoque apostolis nobis nata sit et nutrita: utique magis a te, quia plus omnibus in hoc laborasti et effecisti. Cum ergo illi sit nobis matres, tu magis nostra mater*". Further, with reference to Jesus as mother-hen, Anselm emphasises that Christ is the saving Mother. On the cross Christ gives birth by dying and dies in birth-pangs: "*Sed et tu Iesu, bone domine, nonne et tu mater? An non est mater, qui tamquam gallina congregat sub alas pullos suos? Vere, domine, et tu mater. Nam et quod alii parturierunt et peperunt, a te acceperunt. Tu prius illos et quod peperunt parturiendo mortuus es et moriendo peperisti. Nam nisi parturisses, mortem non sustinuisses; et nisi mortuus esses, non peperisses. Desiderio enim gignendi filios ad vita mortem gustasti, et moriens genuisti. Tu per te, illi iussi et adiuti a te.*"

*Tu ut auctor, illi ut ministri. Ergo tu, domine deus, magis mater".* Consequently, both Christ and Paul are powerful, authoritative fathers and affectionate, merciful mothers: "*Ambo ergo matres. Nam estis patres, tamen et matres. Vos enim effecistis, tu per te, tu per illum, ut nati ad mortem renasceremur ad vitam. Patres igitur estis per effectum, matres per affectum. Patres per auctoritatem, matres per benignitatem: Patres per tuitionem, matres per miserationem*".<sup>10</sup>

Such complementary parenting, expressed in terms of sexual division of roles in patriarchal society, appears in Augustine's commentary on Psalm 27, 10: "For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me up". God's depleting himself in the incarnated Word is explained in the sense of God's motherly compassion, as actualised through Christ's human nature. Augustine specifies that God is Father by creating and governing, Mother by cherishing, suckling and sustaining: "*Pater est, quia condidit, quia uocat, quia iubet, quia regit; mater, quia fouet, quia nutrit, quia lactat, quia continet*".<sup>11</sup> In this perspective of divine motherhood deployed by Father-Son interaction, Clement of Alexandria (died before 215) provides a remarkable text. He uses the terms "Mother" and "woman" to describe God the Father's eternal birthing of the Son as prerequisite to the Word's incarnation, motivated by divine mercy: "God in his very self is love, and for love's sake he became visible to us. And while the unspeakable part of him is Father, the part that has sympathy with us is Mother. By his loving the Father became of a woman's nature, a great proof of which is he whom he gave birth to from himself; and the fruit that is born of love is love".<sup>12</sup>

## **Female Godlanguage**

Julian of Norwich (died after 1416) provides an outstanding example of female gendered Godlanguage. This erudite

anchoress succeeds in healing Christianity's fundamental rift between Godhead and femaleness by reshaping the atypical use of female metaphors describing God. Julian's theology represents a unique achievement, because she extends metaphorical motherhood to Christ as second Person of the Trinity. Not confined to Christ's human nature, Julian's central concept "God our Mother" therefore describes trinitarian activity *quoad nos*.<sup>13</sup>

On May 13, 1373, when deadly sick at the age of thirty and a half years, Julian was miraculously healed by a revelation of God's all-embracing mercy, acted out through Christ's redeeming death on the cross. Julian described this event in two versions of *Showings* in the vernacular, a short one soon after her visions and a longer account completed twenty years later, resulting from theological reflection on her mystical experience.<sup>14</sup>

Julian's focus on Christ's passion is typically late-medieval, but she does not share 14th-century fascination with Christ's suffering as such. In contrast to the period's anguished search for a merciful God, Julian's basic thrust in universal salvation is expressed in Christ's words and her commentary: "I will make all things well, I shall make all things well, I may make all things well and I can make all things well; and you will see that yourself, that all things will be well. When he says that he 'may', I understand this to apply to the Father; and when he says that he 'can', I understand this for the Son; and when he says 'I will', I understand this for the Holy Spirit; and when he says 'I shall', I understand this for the unity of the blessed Trinity, three persons in one truth; and when he says 'You will see this yourself', I understand this for the union of all men who will be saved in the blessed Trinity".<sup>15</sup> It is noteworthy that Julian shrewdly writes "all men who will be saved", thereby avoiding the explicit affirmation that this redemption includes all human beings. Her long version adds a prudent definition of redeemed humanity: "men in general, that is to say all who will be saved".<sup>16</sup> In both versions, Julian understands the salvational solidarity of humankind as caused by God's creative upholding:

"For in mankind which will be saved is comprehended all, that is, all that is made and the maker of all; for God is in man and so in man is all".<sup>17</sup> Julian emphasises the totality of Christ's saving love: "For the longing and desire of all mankind which will be saved appeared in Jesus, for Jesus is in all who will be saved, and all who will be saved are in Jesus, and all is of the love of God".<sup>18</sup>

Julian is fully aware that her fundamental belief in divine love affronts traditional concepts of sin, damnation and God's jealous justice.<sup>19</sup> Augustine's and later Luther's self-centred seeking for a combined sovereign and merciful God is pertinently contrasted: "Though the persons of the blessed Trinity be all alike in their attributes, it was their love which was most shown to me, and that it is closest to us all. And it is about this knowledge that we are most blind, for many men and women believe that God is almighty and may do everything, and that he is all wisdom and can do everything, but that he is all love and wishes to do everything, that is were they fail. And it is this ignorance which most hinders God's lovers, for when they begin to hate sin and to amend themselves according to the laws of Holy Church, still there persists a fear which moves them to look at themselves and their sins committed in the past. And they take this fear for humility, but it is a reprehensible blindness and weakness, and we do not know how to despise it, like any other sin which we recognize, if we knew it for what it is, because it comes from the enemy, and it is contrary to truth. For of all the attributes of the blessed Trinity, it is God's will that we have most confidence in his delight and his love".<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, Julian seeks to exceed doctrinal boundaries by elaborating her concept of God's Motherhood. Based on atypical theology as expressed by Anselm and imagery of Christ's maternal humanity known from English devotional literature, Julian enriches Christian tradition by means of innovative female Godlanguage.<sup>21</sup> With strategic sophistication, Julian affirms the priority of Christ's message as revealed in *Showings* and her

concomitant acceptance of the church's common teaching: "And by the same judgment (of the church) I understood that sinners sometimes deserve blame and wrath, and I could not see these two in God, and therefore my desire was more than I can or may tell, because of the higher judgment which God himself revealed at the same time, and therefore I had of necessity to accept it. And the lower judgment had previously been taught me in Holy Church, and therefore I could not in any way ignore the lower judgment".<sup>22</sup>

In the first version, Julian carefully balances her female lack of teaching authority according to I Cor. 14, 34-35 and I Tim. 2, 11-12 with an appeal to God's revelatory will: "But God forbid that you should say or assume that I am a teacher, for that is not and never was my intention; for I am a woman, ignorant, weak and frail. But I know very well that what I am saying I have received by the revelation of him who is the sovereign teacher. But it is truly love which moves me to tell it to you, for I want God to be known and my fellow Christians to prosper, as I hope to prosper myself, by hating sin more and loving God more. But because I am a woman, ought I therefore to believe that I should not tell you of the goodness of God, when I saw at that same time that it is his will that it be known?"<sup>23</sup> This typically medieval reference to God's election of feeble women to manifest himself is not reproduced in the second version, written when Julian's saintly reputation was well established.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, the longer variant insists on her conformity with ecclesiastical teaching, probably revealing clerical scribes at work in manuscript transmission.<sup>25</sup>

### **God our Mother**

Fruit of prolonged meditation on her revelatory experience, Julian's doctrine of God's motherhood appears in the second version of *Showings*, where she seeks to clarify the theological

content.<sup>26</sup> The concept of motherhood is here introduced to describe God's effective compassion.<sup>27</sup> According to Julian's definition: "Mercy is a compassionate property, which belongs to motherhood in tender love".<sup>28</sup> This notion is linked to terms of "courteous, familiar love", which in both versions express God's gentle nearness and caring warmth.<sup>29</sup> The mother metaphor serves to verbalise the trinitarian wholeness at work in redemption: "So Jesus Christ, who opposes good to evil, is our true Mother. We have our being from him, where the foundation of motherhood begins, with all the sweet protection of love which endlessly follows. As truly as God is our Father, so truly is God our Mother ... Our great Father, almighty God, who is being, knows us and loved us before time began. Out of this knowledge, in his most wonderful deep love, by the prescient eternal counsel of all the blessed Trinity, he wanted the second person to become our Mother, our brother and our saviour. From this it follows that as truly as God is our Father, so truly is God our Mother. Our Father wills, our Mother works, our good Lord the Holy Spirit confirms".<sup>30</sup>

Julian's doctrine of *oure moder Cryst* as *oure moder god alle wysdom* starts from sapiential Christology in its patristic and medieval formulation of Christ's gynecomorphic human nature, incarnating himself through maternal mercy. Julian's God-language is original in the sense that she transposes Christ's motherhood to the preexistent level of the triune Godhead. This corrective completing of the andromorphic imagery found in traditional theology is succinctly exposed by this magisterial text: "And so in our making, God almighty is our loving Father, and God all wisdom is our loving Mother, with the love and the goodness of the Holy Spirit, which is all one God, one Lord. And in the joining and the union he is our very true spouse and we his beloved wife and his fair maiden, with which wife he was never displeased; for he says: I love you and you love me, and our love will never divide in two.

I contemplated the work of all the blessed Trinity, in which contemplation I saw and understood these three properties: the property of the fatherhood, and the property of the motherhood, and the property of the lordship in one God. In our almighty Father we have our protection and our bliss, as regards our natural substance, which is ours by our creation from without beginning, and in the second person, in knowledge and wisdom we have our perfection, as regards our sensuality, our restoration and our salvation, for he is our Mother, brother and saviour; and in our good Lord the Holy Spirit we have our reward and our gift for our living and our labour, endlessly surpassing all that we desire in his marvellous courtesy, out of his plentiful grace. For all our life consists of three: in the first we have our being, and in the second we have our increasing, and in the third we have our fulfillment. The first is nature, the second is mercy, the third is grace.

As to the first, I saw and understood that the high might of the Trinity is our Father, and the deep wisdom of the Trinity is our Mother, and the great love of the Trinity is our Lord; and all these we have in nature and in our substantial creation. And furthermore I saw that the second person, who is our Mother, substantially the same beloved person, has now become our Mother sensually, because we are double by God's creating, that is to say substantial and sensual. Our substance is the higher part, which we have in our Father, God almighty, and the second person of the Trinity is our Mother in nature in our substantial creation, in whom we are founded and rooted, and he is our Mother of mercy in taking our sensuality. And so our Mother is working on us in various ways, in whom our parts are kept undivided; for in our Mother Christ we profit and increase, and in mercy he reforms and restores us, and by the power of his Passion, his death and his Resurrection he unites us to our substance. So our Mother works in mercy on all his beloved children who are docile and obedient to him, and grace works with mercy, and especially in two properties, as it was shown,

which working belongs to the third person, the Holy Spirit. He works, rewarding and giving. Rewarding is a gift for our confidence which the Lord makes to those who have laboured; and giving is a courteous act which he does freely, by grace, fulfilling and surpassing all that creatures deserve.

Thus in our Father, God almighty, we have our being, and in our Mother of mercy we have our reforming and our restoring, in whom our parts are united and all made perfect man, and through the rewards and the gifts of grace of the Holy Spirit we are fulfilled. And our substance is in our Father, God almighty, and our substance is in our Mother, God all wisdom, and our substance is in our Lord God, the Holy Spirit, all goodness, for our substance is whole in each person of the Trinity, who is one God. And our sensuality is only in the second person, Christ Jesus, in whom is the Father and the Holy Spirit; and in him and by him we are powerfully taken out of hell and out of the wretchedness on earth, and gloriously brought up into heaven, and blessedly united to our substance, increased in riches and nobility by all the power of Christ and by the grace and operation of the Holy Spirit".<sup>31</sup>

Julian's holistic Godlanguage is intended to describe the whole Trinity acting *quoad nos*, in creation, incarnation and redemption. Identifying Christ with Wisdom, Julian elaborates the biblical theme expressed in I Cor. 1, 23-24, 30, where God's preexistent Wisdom and God's crucified Christ converge.<sup>32</sup> Calling Christ bridegroom, Julian refers to traditional typology of Christ as new Adam, based on Rom. 5, 12; II Cor. 11, 2 and Eph. 5, 32. This classical theme is also used in Julian's elaborate parable of a lord and his servant, representing God and his incarnated, suffering and resurrected Son.<sup>33</sup> Here, Julian's interpretation is remarkable in connecting Christ's saving humanity with fallen and redeemed humankind: "In the servant is comprehended the second person of the Trinity, and in the servant is comprehended Adam, that is to say all men. And therefore when I say 'the Son', that means the divinity which is



equal to the Father, and when I say 'the servant', that means Christ's humanity, which is the true Adam. By the closeness of the servant is understood the Son, and by his standing left is understood Adam. The lord is God the Father, the servant is the Son, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit is the equal love which is in them both. When Adam fell, God's Son fell; because of the true union which was made in heaven, God's Son could not be separated from Adam, for by Adam I understand all mankind".<sup>34</sup>

In Julian's familial analogy, the Trinity of "fatherhood", "motherhood" and "lordship" serves to exemplify God's activity as creator, redeemer and giver of grace. Julian applies this trinitarian interaction to the human level, since sustaining creation and redemptive incarnation unify the spiritual and bodily elements of humanity. It is important to note that Julian's use of the terms *substance* and *sensuality* does not imply dualistic anthropology. On the contrary, Julian's innovative Godlanguage aims at healing the androcentric duality of traditional doctrine. The human composite of body, "sensual soul" and intellect is thus unified through the intimate relation between God and humankind: "God is closer to us than our own soul, for he is the foundation on which our soul stands, and he is the mean which keeps the substance and the sensuality together, so that they will never separate".<sup>35</sup> In Julian's doctrine, human wholeness is guaranteed by the union of Godhead and humanity in Christ as second Person of the Trinity: "And so in Christ our two natures are united, for the Trinity is comprehended in Christ, in whom our higher part is founded and rooted; and our lower part the second person has taken, which nature was first prepared for him".<sup>36</sup> Incorporating human "sensuality", the incarnate Christ restores its perfect harmony with human "substance".<sup>37</sup> Julian's trinitarian motherhood equally guarantees the recreated wholeness of all creatures, to be actualised in redeemed humanity: "God is essence in his very nature; that is to say, that goodness which is natural is God. He is the ground, he is the substance, he is very essence or nature,

and he is the true Father and the true Mother of natures. And all natures which he has made to flow out of him to work his will, they will be restored and brought back to him by the salvation of man through the operation of grace. For all natures which he has put separately in different creatures are all in man, wholly, in fulness and power, in beauty and in goodness, in kingliness and in nobility, in every manner of stateliness, preciousness and honour".<sup>38</sup>

In order to describe the intimate union between God and Godlike humankind, Julian uses a suggestive metaphor of interacting trinitarian-human pregnancy: "And I saw no difference between God and our substance, but, as it were, all God; and still my understanding accepted that our substance is in God, that is to say that God is God, and our substance is a creature in God. For the almighty truth of the Trinity is our Father, for he made us and keeps us in him. And the deep wisdom of the Trinity is our Mother, in whom we are all enclosed. And the high goodness of the Trinity is our Lord, and in him we are enclosed and he in us. We are enclosed in the Father, and we are enclosed in the Son, and we are enclosed in the Holy Spirit. And the Father is enclosed in us, the Son is enclosed in us, and the Holy Spirit is enclosed in us, almighty, all wisdom and all goodness, one God, one Lord".<sup>39</sup> In the same manner, Julian applies the physiological bond between mother and child to exemplify the incarnate Christ's closeness to us, realised in his mother's womb. This text also specifies the priority of Christ's motherhood, in relation to Mary's maternal function: "For in the same time that God joined himself to our body in the maiden's womb, he took our soul, which is sensual, and in taking it, having enclosed us all in himself, he united it to our substance. In this union he was perfect man, for Christ, having joined in himself every man who will be saved, is perfect man. So our Lady is our mother, in whom we are all enclosed and born of her in Christ, for she who is mother of our saviour is mother of all who are saved in our saviour; and our saviour

is our true Mother, in whom we are endlessly born and out of whom we shall never come".<sup>40</sup> Mary's motherhood is here described as instrumental and secondary. Given her central concept of Christ as trinitarian Mother, Julian's mariology is correspondingly discreet: "Our Mother in nature, our Mother in grace, because he wanted altogether to become our Mother in all things, made the foundation of his work most humbly and most mildly in the maiden's womb".<sup>41</sup>

Already in her first version of *Showings*, Julian insists on the union between God and creation, exemplified by his love for the church: "God showed me the very great delight that he has in all men and women who accept, firmly and humbly and reverently, the preaching and teaching of Holy Church, for he is Holy Church. For he is the foundation, he is the substance, he is the teaching, he is the teacher, he is the end, he is the reward for which every faithful soul labours; and he is known and will be known to every soul to whom the Holy Spirit declares this. And I am certain that all who seek in this way will prosper, for they are seeking God".<sup>42</sup> In the long version, Julian uses birthing and childrearing metaphors to describe how God's sacramental grace flows from Christ's redemptive motherhood, to be channeled by the mother church.<sup>43</sup> Since the church is assimilated to the body of Christ, their respective maternal functions are fused: "And therefore it is a certain thing, and good and gracious to will, meekly and fervently, to be fastenend and united to our mother Holy Church, who is Christ Jesus. For the flood of mercy which is his dear blood and precious water is plentiful to make us fair and clean. The blessed wounds of our saviour are open and rejoice to heal us. The sweet gracious hands of our Mother are ready and diligent about us; for he in all his work exercises the true office of a kind nurse, who has nothing else to do but attend to the safety of her child".<sup>44</sup> It is important to observe that Julian alludes to John 19, 34 without combining this text with Eve's formation from Adam's rib in Gen. 2, 21-23, a standard theme in patristic exegesis. Therefore, Julian's church is not defined as

the male Saviour's spouse according to androcentric typology, but understood as mediating Christ's redemptive motherhood.

Julian's hermeneutical shrewdness is remarkable. When she describes the trinitarian Christ with the formula "he is our Mother", her discourse may be influenced by the basic androcentricity of language as such.<sup>45</sup> I presume that Julian deliberately adopts the paradoxical combination of a male personal pronoun and a female noun in order to exemplify the conjecturality of human Godlanguage. She compares the experience of God accessible in this life to an elementary ABC: "God is the foundation of our natural reason; and God is the teaching of Holy Church, and God is the Holy Spirit, and they are all different gifts, and he wants us to have great regard for them, and to accord ourselves to them. For they work continually in us, all together, and those are great things; and of this greatness he wants us to have knowledge here, as it were in an ABC. That is to say that we can have a little knowledge of that of which we shall have fulness in heaven, and that is to further us".<sup>46</sup> In the same manner, Julian characterises her parable of the lord and his servant: "Also in this marvellous example I have teaching within me, as it were the beginning of an ABC, whereby I may have some understanding of our Lord's meaning, for the mysteries of the revelation are hidden in it, even though all the showings are full of mysteries".<sup>47</sup>

### **Holistic theology**

Accommodating to 20th-century Western culture, contemporary theological anthropology defines both women and men as created in God's image *qua* male and female human beings. It is important to observe that this new concept of holistic Godlikeness in equivalent human diversity represents a radical break with previous definitions of creational *imago Dei* as male or asexual. Anticipated by the Norwegian feminist Aasta

Hansteen (died 1908),<sup>48</sup> holistic Godlikeness is introduced in our century by Protestant theologians and endorsed by Catholic teaching. Up to now, the sexless patristic variant persists in Orthodox doctrine. Nevertheless, God is still depicted as manlike or metasexual, with resulting incoherence between updated anthropology and outdated theology. When both women and men are valued as theomorphic, God is correspondingly to be described by both male and female metaphors. In this situation of arrested *aggiornamento*, Julian's creative Godlanguage is of exemplary value for theological inculturation. Julian's discourse is based on her female experience, thereby completing and enriching the male verbalisation of traditional theology. Only when expressed in terms of both women's and men's equivalent gendered experience does theology become a fully human discourse about God.

Julian's thorough knowledge of patristic and medieval theology and her outstanding position in the history of Christian doctrine is clearly attested by the editors of *Showings*.<sup>49</sup> From my perspective of contemporary feminist theology, Julian's main achievement is to provide a fully Godlike, Christomorphic and female role model for women at the divine level. Describing God's activity *quoad nos* with both male and female metaphors, Julian seeks to verbalise divine totality in terms of human wholeness. Elaborating the atypical use of female metaphors in Christian tradition, Julian depicts Christ's maternal qualities in conformity with her culture's traditional female role, where the mother is protective, nurturing and compassionate. Extending Christ's metaphoric motherhood from his humanity to his divine nature as second Person of the Trinity, Julian's Godlanguage is profoundly original. Applying female metaphors to describe "our Mother God all Wisdom", Julian supersedes androcentric Christology and the correlated typological gender hierarchy, where Christ is primary new Adam and the church or Mary is subordinate new Eve. Understanding Christ's *kenōsis* as motherly, Julian interprets *homo factus est* in a new holistic

sense of perfect humanity, thereby exceeding the traditional androcentrism of perfect manhood, *vir perfectus*. Transposing male and female qualities from the human to the divine level, Julian's innovative holistic theology overcomes Christianity's basic incompatibility between Godhead and femaleness. In Julian's *Showings*, trinitarian interaction is verbalised in terms of human wholeness, so that male and female metaphors describing God correspond to Godlike women and men. Julian's female gendered discourse makes her an exemplary foremother of feminist theology, both in intention and doctrinal content.

## NOTES

1. It follows that daughters of non-Godlike Eve cannot represent Christ as priests. Female human beings are deemed unable to perform cultic mediation *in persona Christi* and are consequently excluded from priestly ordination in the non-Protestant majority of Christendom. See Kari Elisabeth Børresen: *The Ordination of Women: To nurture tradition by continuing inculturation*. = *Studia Theologica* 46, København 1992, 3-13.
2. Ed. Kari Elisabeth Børresen: *Image of God and Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition*. Oslo 1991.
3. Kari Elisabeth Børresen: *Subordination and Equivalence*. The Nature and Role of Woman in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, Washington, DC. 1981. Updated version of French original: *Subordination et Equivalence*. Nature et rôle de la femme d'après Augustin et Thomas d'Aquin, Oslo, Paris 1968.
4. Kari Elisabeth Børresen: L'usage patristique de métaphores féminines dans le discours sur Dieu. = *Revue théologique de Louvain* 13, Louvain 1982, 205-220. God's Image, Man's Image? Female Metaphors describing God in the Christian Tradition. = *Temenos* 19, Helsinki 1983, 17-32.
5. En. Ps. 90, II, 2. CCSL 39, 1267.
6. Quaest. Ev. I, 36. CCSL 44 B, 28; cf. Tract. Joh. XV, 7. CCSL 36, 157.

7. Bede: In Matt. Exp. IV, 23. PL 92, 101. Peter Lombard: Com. Ps. 58, 5; 90, 4. PL 191, 543, 894. Thomas Aquinas: In Matt. 23. Opera omnia 11, 268.
8. En. Ps. 58, I, 10. CCSL 39, 736-737.
9. En. Ps. 101, I, 8. CCSL 40, 1431-1432.
10. Oratio 10. Ed. F.S. Schmitt: *S. Anselmi Opera omnia* II, 3. Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt 1968, 39-41.
11. En. Ps. 26, II, 18. CCSL 38, 164.
12. Quis dives salvetur 37,1-2. GCS 17, 184. Rectified citation: Ed. G.W. Butterworth: *Clement of Alexandria: The rich man's salvation*. London, Cambridge, MA. 1968, 347.
13. Kari Elisabeth Børresen: Christ notre Mère, la théologie de Julienne de Norwich. = *Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft* 13, Mainz 1978, 320-329. This article was written before the publication of Julian's Middle English text in critical edition, cf. note 14. Updated and enlarged version: Cristo nostra Madre. La teologia di Giuliana di Norwich. In Kari Elisabeth Børresen: *Le Madri della Chiesa*. Il Medioevo, 205-220. La Dracma 3. Napoli 1992.
14. Eds. Edmund Colledge, James Walsh: *A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich* 1-2. Toronto 1978. Roman numerals refer to the short version in 1, Arabic numerals to the long version in 2. Trans. Edmund Colledge, James Walsh: *Julian of Norwich. Showings*. New York 1978. Page numbers in brackets refer to the translation.
15. XV, 249, cit. (151); 31, 417 (229); cf. XIII, 245 (149); 32, 422 (231); 63, 618 (305).
16. 36, 438, cit. (239); cf. 75, 680 (326).
17. VI, 221, cit. (134); 9, 323 (192).
18. 51, 538, cit. (276).
19. XIV, 247-248 (149-151); 50, 510-512 (265-267).
20. XXIV, 274-275, cit. (168).
21. Ed. Ch. Dumont: *Aelred de Rievaulx: La Vie de recluse* 26; 31. Sources Chrétiennes 76. Paris 1961, 104, 132. Ed. Mabel Day: *The Ancrene Riwe*. Early English Text Society Original Series 225. London 1952, 103, 180. Ed. W. H. Thompson: *De wohunge of ure Lauerd*. Early English Text Society Original Series 241. London 1958, 2, 43-47.
22. 45, 487-488, cit. (257).
23. VI, 222, cit. (135).
24. The self-made emulator of holiness, Margery Kempe from Lynn (died after 1438), reports in her dictated autobiography (discovered 1934) a

- visit to Julian for spiritual advice (1413/1415). Eds. Sanford Brown Meech, Hope Emily Allen: *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Early English Text Society Original Series 212. London 1940, 42-43.
25. 9, 321-323 (191-192); 33, 427-429 (234-235); 46, 490-494 (258-259).
  26. The motherhood metaphor is found in: 48, 502 (262); 52, 546 (279); 54, 563 (285); 57-63, 580-618 (292-305); 74, 675 (325); 83, 724 (340).
  27. 47-49, 495-509 (260-265).
  28. 48, 502, cit. (262).
  29. III, 211 (130); IV, 212 (130); VII, 224 (136); 10, 335 (196); 39, 452 (245); 40, 454 (246); 53, 554-555 (282); 61, 605 (301); 74, 676 (325); 77, 694-695 (331); 83, 722-723 (339).
  30. 59, 589-593, cit. (295-296).
  31. 58, 582-588, cit. (293-295).
  32. See Ulrich Wilckens: *Weisheit und Torheit. Eine exegetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu I Kor 1 und 2*. Beiträge zur Historischen Theologie 26, Tübingen 1959. Concerning the medieval tradition, see Barbara Newman: *Some Medieval Theologians and the Sophia Tradition*: = *The Downside Review* 108, Bath 1990, 111-130.
  33. 51, 513-545 (267-278).
  34. 51, 532-533, cit. (274).
  35. 56, 570-571, cit. (288-289).
  36. 57, 577-578, cit. (291).
  37. 55, 565-569 (286-288).
  38. 62, 610-613, cit. (302-303).
  39. 54, 561-564, cit. (285).
  40. 57, 579-580, cit. (292).
  41. 60, 594-595, cit. (297). Mary is also mentioned in: IV, 214 (131); V, 217 (132); X, 234 (142); XIII, 242-243 (146-147); 6, 305 (185); 7, 310-311 (187); 25, 398-401 (221-223); 44, 483 (255-256); 51, 534, 539-540 (274-275, 277).
  42. XVI, 252, cit. (152-153); repeated in 34, 431, with the prudent formulation, cit. (235-236): "And I truly hope that all those who seek in this way will prosper, for they are seeking God".
  43. 60-62, 594-613 (297-303).
  44. 61, 607-608, cit. (301-302).
  45. It is noteworthy that Julian uses inclusive language when naming Christians "man and woman/men and women", as in: VI, 220-221 (134); XVII, 256 (154-155); XX, 264 (161); XXIII, 272 (167); XXIV, 274 (168); 8, 319 (190); 10, 326 (193); 14, 353 (204); 34, 431 (235); 39, 449 (244); 62, 613 (303); 65, 627 (308).
  46. 80, 707-708, cit. (335).



47. 51, 539, cit. (276).
48. *Kvinden skabt i Guds Billede* (Woman created in God's image). Christiania 1878, 5-7, 14. Bente Nilsen Lein: Aasta Hansteen som feministisk teologisk tenker. = *Kirke og Kultur* 85, Oslo 1980, 200-215. Cf. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Matilda Joslyn Gage: *History of Woman Suffrage* I, Rochester, NY 1889, 796-797. Elizabeth Cady Stanton: *The Woman's Bible* I, New York 1895, 14.
49. Concerning Julian's theological learning see eds. Colledge, Walsh, 1, 43-59. Referring to *Showings* 59, 1, 151: "her magisterial teaching on the motherhood of God, teaching which stands as a unique theological achievement in the Church's spiritual traditions." Cf. previous commentators' eagerness to safeguard Julian's conformity with traditional doctrine, for example Paul Molinari: *Julian of Norwich. The teaching of a 14th century English mystic*, London 1958. Julian's concept of God's motherhood is loyally presented, but its innovative character is not accentuated, 169-176.

## Caritas Pirckheimer (1467-1532) et Vittoria Colonna (1490-1547)\*

### I. Deux femmes face à la Réforme

Pour illustrer le discours féminin sur Dieu au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle il serait utile de comparer deux femmes catholiques qui furent affectées par la Réforme: Caritas Pirckheimer en territoire luthérien et Vittoria Colonna en ambiance romaine. Très influentes dans leurs milieux respectifs, la patricienne allemande Caritas et l'aristocrate italienne Vittoria ont toutes deux exercé au maximum le pouvoir féminin admissible à l'époque.<sup>1</sup>

Barbara Pirckheimer est née en 1467 la fille aînée de Johannes Pirckheimer et de Barbara Löffelholz. Elle est donc soeur du célèbre humaniste Willibald Pirckheimer.<sup>2</sup> Tout comme Vittoria, qui sera fiancée pour un mariage politique à sept ans, Barbara n'a guère choisi librement son genre de vie. Mise au couvent des clarisses à douze ans pour recevoir l'éducation des filles de l'élite sociale de Nuremberg, Barbara y prendra le voile sous le nom de Caritas, probablement à seize ans. Très bien instruite, comme le montrent ses écrits et son latin élégant, Caritas sera élue abbesse en 1503, âgée de trente-six ans. Son monastère de *Sancta Clara* fut réformé dès le milieu du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle et servit de modèle pour l'observance franciscaine en Allemagne.<sup>3</sup> *Sancta Clara* se liait également à la culture monastique féminine du Moyen Age. Les moniales menaient une vie de piété liturgique fervente, étudiaient l'Écriture ainsi que des auteurs patristiques et médiévaux, tout en observant une stricte clôture. La *cura monialium* était assurée par des frères franciscains, tandis que le *Rat* de la ville de Nuremberg exerçait

le contrôle financier du monastère, par l'entremise d'un *Pfleger* ou curateur. Lorsque cette *Reichsstadt* eut opté pour le luthéranisme en 1525, il est significatif que seuls deux monastères féminins, les dominicaines de *Sancta Catherina* et les clarisses, protestèrent fortement, tandis que les monastères masculins favorisèrent ou acceptèrent ce changement confessionnel.<sup>4</sup> *Sancta Clara* persista tenacement dans l'ancienne foi jusqu'à la mort de la dernière nonne en 1596, toujours sous des abbesses de la famille Pirczheimer. Caritas eut pour successeur sa soeur Klara, plus tard suivie par la fille de Willibald, Katharina.<sup>5</sup> Dès 1525, le conseil de Nuremberg retira la charge aux franciscains et assigna des prédicateurs luthériens afin de convertir les clarisses. Etant exclues elle-mêmes du sacerdoce en raison de l'*impedimentum sexus*, les moniales subissaient par conséquent la privation complète des sacrements pour le reste de leurs jours.

Quant à la biographie de Vittoria, il faut surtout noter ce qui concerne son discours sur Dieu. Mariée en 1509 à l'âge de dix-neuf ans, Vittoria démontre une formation littéraire solide, mais son savoir théologique paraît moins profond que celui de Caritas et elle n'écrit pas le latin. Devenue veuve en 1525 à trente-cinq ans, presque au même âge où Caritas est élue abbesse, Vittoria acquiert, comme celle-ci, une position de pouvoir. Ces deux destins féminins sont en effet marqués par des événements subis plus que choisis: mariage et mort du mari, vie monastique et charge d'abbesse. Par contre, Vittoria reste veuve par choix personnel, évidemment pour garder son autonomie à la fois économique et intellectuelle. De même, Caritas décide librement d'agir en *defensor fidei* contre le conseil de Nuremberg, mais au prix d'une dépendance pénible envers le *Pfleger* devenu ennemi idéologique, et sans aucun appui extérieur.

La passion de Vittoria pour Ferrante d'Avalos, son mari notoirement infidèle, qui est exposée dans ses *Rime amorose*, se transforme ensuite en amour pour un autre *Sole*, le Christ, amour exprimé par les *Rime spirituali*.<sup>6</sup> Plus dense au point de vue

théologique, la correspondance de Vittoria la montre politicienne habile, tant dans les affaires mondaines que dans les stratégies ecclésiastiques.<sup>7</sup> Il est donc paradoxal que Vittoria semble être sans cesse en quête de direction spirituelle; après le dévot Bernardino Ochino elle trouve le noble équilibre de Reginald Pole. Au contraire, Caritas s'affirme déjà comme jeune nonne en guide spirituel d'hommes importants, le canoniste Sixtus Tucher et l'historien Conrad Celtis. Sans doute par l'intermédiaire de son frère Willibald, Caritas cloîtrée fut très admirée par l'entourage humaniste.<sup>8</sup> Le dialogue d'Erasme entre un moine stupide et une femme docte, *abbatis et eruditae*, invoque des femmes nobles en Espagne et en Italie, comme Vittoria, avec les filles de Thomas More, ainsi que les soeurs de Willibald Pirckheimer et d'Ambrosius Blaurer.<sup>9</sup>

Malgré une appréciation déclinante de son oeuvre poétique, Vittoria a fermement gardé sa place dans l'histoire littéraire italienne. Obscurcie par le style des *Rime* et les conventions épistolaires, la pensée théologique de Vittoria se trouve en outre lacunaire. Le dossier préparé sous Paul IV concernant le cardinal Pole, archevêque de Cantorbéry accusé d'hérésie, dont le procès ne fut jamais effectué, inclut du matériel relatif à Vittoria, en tant que fille spirituelle et disciple.<sup>10</sup> Six lettres de Vittoria adressées à Pole sont récupérées dans la collection *Quinternus litterarum marchionissae Piscariae*, récemment trouvée à l'Archivio del S. Officio et complétant ainsi la seule connue auparavant.<sup>11</sup> Néanmoins, leur correspondance accessible reste fragmentaire et le *Carteggio* ne fournit que deux lettres de Pole à Vittoria.

Par contre, la carrière de Caritas a été graduellement oubliée; ce *Fortleben* manqué ne correspond pas du tout à son importance lors de la Réforme en Allemagne. Redécouverts au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, les écrits de Caritas sont accessibles en édition critique depuis 1961-66.<sup>12</sup> Soixante-neuf de ses lettres sont conservées, toutes fraîches et directes. Son journal des années de lutte 1524-28, les *Denkwürdigkeiten*, est d'une vivacité

remarquable. Le procès de canonisation de Caritas Pirckheimer a été postulé en 1932 et repris en 1961, mais il est frappant que les *Acta* concernant cette abbesse autonome ont disparu en 1969, "*gelten als verschollen*", après avoir été consignés au monastère des franciscains, *Sancta Anna*, à Munich!<sup>13</sup>

## II. La théologie de Vittoria Colonna

Dans son oeuvre poétique, Vittoria reprend plusieurs thèmes de la doctrine traditionnelle. Ses *Rime amorose* préconisent un mariage à fidélité unilatérale, apparemment peu adonné à l'*eros* charnel et demeuré sans enfants. L'idéal présumé de la femme à la fois aimante et frigide correspond bien à un *topos* important d'hagiographie, qui fut exemplifié par Dauphine de Puimichel (morte en 1360), renommée sainte bien que non canonisée à côté de son mari, Elzéar de Sabran (mort en 1323).<sup>14</sup> La scission si fondamentale du christianisme entre amour pour Dieu et amour sexuel détermine la valorisation du mariage en tant que *sacramentum*. Le lien de fidélité est primordial et l'activité sexuelle n'est tolérée qu'en vue du bien de la procréation, tout en neutralisant le mal de la *concupiscentia*.<sup>15</sup> Par conséquent, l'amour vrai dans le mariage ne se réalise que par continence, un idéal imitable pour Vittoria qui vivait souvent éloignée de son mari. Cet antagonisme traditionnel entre amour divin et sexualité conjugale se retrouve transformé en dédain du mariage dans la poésie des troubadours, où la femme désirée est mariée à celui qu'elle n'aime pas. En lisant les effusions de Vittoria pour son mari-soleil, il me semble qu'elle renverse ce modèle de l'amour courtois. Selon la formule de Benedetto Nicolini, elle "*incielava il marito*", devenu d'autant plus désirable qu'inaccessible par la mort.<sup>16</sup>

Lorsque Vittoria dans ses *Rime spirituali* transfère l'image du *Sole* radieux de Ferrante à la figure du Christ, époux céleste,

elle s'insère dans la tradition à la fois androcentrique et théocentrique du symbolisme nuptial. Cette transposition du couple Adam-Eve de l'ordre créateur à l'ordre du salut reste fondamentale dans la christologie et l'ecclésiologie: Christ est le nouvel Adam et l'église ou Marie est la nouvelle Eve. Par analogie de subordination féminine, l'âme croyante devient gynécomorphe en dépendant du Dieu Créateur et du Christ Rédempteur; un symbolisme qui pour les hommes, tel qu'il est exprimé chez Origène et Bernard de Clairvaux, implique un curieux *gender reversal*. D'autre part, la mariologie des *Rime spirituali* excède nettement cette typologie traditionnelle, en se liant au maximalisme marial du Moyen Age en déclin. La figure de *gran Madre* ou *Madre divina* apparaît en effet mal conciliable avec le christocentrisme exprimé par Vittoria. Ce même décalage se retrouve dans le *Carteggio*, comme dans une lettre à Costanza d'Avalos Piccolomini, où Marie est placée presque au niveau divin de son Fils: "*chè solo all'infinito figlio è di poco inferiore l'eterna madre*".<sup>17</sup>

Les convenances androcentriques sont d'ailleurs bien respectées dans la correspondance. Vittoria est louée par Paul III parce qu'elle manifeste une âme virile dans son corps de femme: "*virilem animum in femineo corpore apertissime ostendisti,..*".<sup>18</sup> Vittoria a clairement intériorisé ce thème traditionnel de faiblesse féminine qu'elle répète dans une lettre adressée au cardinal Gasparro Contarini, écrite en défense des capucins. Vittoria y invoque son autorité en tant que chrétienne, contrebalançant son ignorance de femme: "*Et quanto la feminil ignorantia et soverchio ardir mi toglie di credito, tanto la raggione et il solo interesse cristiano, qual me muove, mi presta d'autorità*".<sup>19</sup> Il est important de noter que par son admiration pour François d'Assise comme modèle des capucins, Vittoria se rallie au concept proprement catholique de réforme, dans le sens de retour à une pureté primitive, non encore souillée par les abus. Quand Vittoria se réfère à l'Évangile en tant que source normative, elle comprend ce renouvellement comme l'actualisation d'un idéal

déjà sanctionné par l'église. Il ne s'agit donc pas de réforme au sens protestant d'innovation doctrinale en invoquant l'Écriture. Le rôle important de Vittoria dans cet effort de ressourcement catholique me semble déterminé plus par son rang socio-culturel que par son originalité théologique. Lorsque le capucin Ochino se sert de Caterina Cibo et de Vittoria Colonna pour promouvoir et protéger son ordre, il applique en effet une stratégie vieille comme l'église. Les femmes riches et influentes ont toujours été utilisées pour réaliser les buts de leurs directeurs spirituels. Les exemples fournis par Jérôme manoeuvrant ses matrones romaines et Jean Chrysostome sa noble Olympias sont sans cesse imités!

Depuis 1540, l'amitié établie entre Vittoria et Reginald Pole paraît cruciale pour son discours sur Dieu. Les extraits publiés du procès contre le prélat Pietro Carnesecchi, exécuté comme hérétique sous Pie V en 1567, apportent des détails sur la relation des deux personnages, également suspects. Interrogé sur la doctrine de la *marchesa*, Carnesecchi affirma qu'elle tenait à la justification par la grâce et la foi au Christ, tout en pratiquant largement des oeuvres de charité. Selon Carnesecchi, Vittoria suivait ainsi le conseil (plein de *common sense*) qu'elle avait reçu de Pole, à qui elle se fiait comme à un oracle; il faut croire comme si on devait être sauvé par la foi seule et agir comme si les bonnes oeuvres devaient assurer le salut: "*cioè che ella dovesse attendere a credere come se per la fede sola s'havesse a salvare, et d'altra parte attendere ad operare come se la salute sua consistesse nelle opere, ..*".<sup>20</sup> Carnesecchi a encore précisé que Vittoria aurait voulu approfondir ce thème avec le cardinal, mais sans succès. Elle évitait d'ailleurs de déranger Pole par une trop grande *curiosità*. Interrogé sur les lectures éventuellement hérétiques de Vittoria, Carnesecchi affirma que Pole exhortait celle-ci à brider sa curiosité, en respectant les limites imposées à son sexe féminin: "*et che dovesse stare dentro a i termini convenienti al sesso e alla humiltà et modestia sua, ..*".<sup>21</sup> Carnesecchi a aussi souligné la modération du cardinal quant aux pratiques d'ascèse, dissuadant Vittoria de l'usage du

jeûne et du cilice; ce genre médiéval de *poenitentia* l'avait réduit à n'avoir que *la pelle in sul osso*.<sup>22</sup> L'influence bénéfique de Pole est également décrite par Vittoria dans une lettre à Giulia Gonzaga Colonna. Elle dépend donc du cardinal pour sa santé, tant de l'âme que du corps, antérieurement en péril par *superstitione* et *mal governo*.<sup>23</sup> A ce propos, les formules employées dans deux lettres au cardinal Giovanni Morone sont suggestives. Vittoria y utilise le terme *cahos* pour décrire son angoisse, à la fois physique et mentale, lorsqu'elle se trouve réduite à ses propres ressources, insistant ainsi sur le précieux apport de Pole.<sup>24</sup>

Les seules lettres publiées de Pole à Vittoria indiquent une émotion-vicaire de la part du cardinal de dix ans plus jeune qu'elle. Répondant aux condoléances de Vittoria après la mort de Margaret Pole, décapitée sous Henri VIII en 1541, Pole souligne la signification christocentrique de la résistance contre ce pharaon, tout en s'appuyant sur Vittoria comme *Ersatz* de sa mère perdue: "*in matris loco ipsam suscepi,..*".<sup>25</sup> Sa seconde lettre est écrite au retour du concile de Trente, que le cardinal a quitté le 28 juin 1546, au commencement du débat sur la justification, sans doute par indisposition spirituelle autant que physique.<sup>26</sup> Pole y répète la qualification maternelle à son égard: "*come alla mia madre,..*".<sup>27</sup> Il est à noter qu'une des lettres retrouvées de Vittoria, écrite en 1541, porte la signature *serva et madre*, tandis que les autres emploient la formule *serva obligatissima*.<sup>28</sup>

Dans un article sur le cardinal et la *marchesa*, assez pauvre à ce sujet par son manque de documentation disponible, Hubert Jedin note l'absence de commentaire explicite concernant la justification parmi les écrits de Vittoria. Néanmoins, il juge probable qu'elle a partagée, avec Pole, l'interprétation proposée par Gasparo Contarini.<sup>29</sup> Ces deux cardinaux ont participé à la commission de réforme ecclésiastique désignée par Paul III, proposant le *Consilium de emendanda ecclesia* en 1537.<sup>30</sup> Malheureusement, la forte opposition de la *curia* papale, désirant



surtout conserver ses avantages économiques, a bloqué la réalisation de ce projet.<sup>31</sup>

En tant que légat du pape, Contarini a joué un rôle primordial durant le dialogue de Ratisbonne en 1541, où les interlocuteurs catholiques et luthériens ont réussi à rédiger un document commun sur la justification par la foi au Christ.<sup>32</sup> Contarini a ensuite défendu cette déclaration dans l'*Epistula de iustificatione*, en appliquant le concept *iustitia duplex*.<sup>33</sup> Sans poursuivre la discussion sur la catholicité de cette *iustitia*, à la fois inhérente dès la création et imputée par la rédemption, je constate que l'accentuation christocentrique de Contarini se rattache à la tradition patristique de *theōsis*. Ici, l'incarnation humaine du Fils divin établit la divinisation de l'humanité, réalisée par la mort et la résurrection du Christ. Un autre cardinal réformateur, Nicolas de Cuse, a bien formulé cette doctrine dans son dialogue sur l'unicité de la foi en un seul Dieu, *De pace fidei*, écrit après la chute de Constantinople en 1453.<sup>34</sup> Invoquant Rom. 4, 3 et Gal. 3, 6, Paul expose la justification par la foi en déclarant au savant Tartare: "*Oportet ut ostendatur non ex operibus sed ex fide salvationem animae praestari. Nam Abraham, pater fidei omnium credentium, sive Christianorum sive Arabum sive Iudaeorum, credidit Deo et reputatum est ei ad iustitiam: anima iusti haereditabit vitam aeternam*". L'apôtre poursuit avec allusion à Gal. 2,16: "*Sed quia non iustificatur ex operibus in conspectu Dei omnis vivens, sed ex gratia, dat cui vult id quod vult Omnipotens. Tunc si quis dignus esse debet ut assequatur repromissionem quae ex pura gratia facta est, necesse est ut credat Deo. In hoc igitur iustificatur, quia ex hoc solo assequetur repromissionem, quia credit Deo et expectat ut fiat verbum Dei*". Inspiré par Jac. 2, 17, 26, Nicolas laisse Paul préciser que cette foi salvifique est nécessairement vivifiée par les bonnes oeuvres: "*Sine fide impossibile est quem placere Deo. Oportet autem quod fides sit formata; nam sine operibus est mortua*".<sup>35</sup>

Cet exposé christocentrique sur la justification et l'interaction entre foi et oeuvres qui en résulte, anticipent le point central des controverses provoquées par Martin Luther. Dans ce contexte, il est important de noter une formule adressée par Contarini à Pole en 1537, où le christocentrisme luthérien est interprété dans ce sens traditionnellement patristique, c'est-à-dire comme foncièrement vrai et donc catholique: "*et pero il fundamento dello aedificio de Luterani e verissimo, ne per alcun modo devono dirli contra, ma accettarlo come vero e catholico, immo come fundamento della religione christiana*".<sup>36</sup>

Les lettres retrouvées de Vittoria à Pole indiquent en effet que son *evangelismo* coïncide avec un tel luthéranisme proprement catholique. L'introduction de Concetta Rainieri remarque que Vittoria a probablement lu les commentaires de Luther sur les épîtres aux Romains et Galates. Ces oeuvres sont écrites avant la rupture, donc d'un "*Lutero cattolico*".<sup>37</sup> Vittoria insiste sur la justification par la foi: "*per fede felicissimo.. è fatto a me giustizia, sapientia, santificatio et redemptio...*".<sup>38</sup> Le rôle de Pole dans son itinéraire spirituel est sans cesse souligné, comme dans la lettre déjà connue: "*Si che tanto è a me parlare con V.S. come un intimo amico del sposo, che mi prepara per questo mezzo et mi chiama a lui et vole che ne ragioni per accendermi et consolarmi*".<sup>39</sup> La foi de Vittoria reste foncièrement orientée vers le Christ Sauveur, ainsi qu'elle l'exprime encore à Pole, tout en lui rappelant son besoin d'être guidée: "*et qual dolcezza mi pò concedere che al grandissimo merito di Christo nel qual Dio mi guarda non mi debbia parer conveniente meritando lui sempre ogni bene per tutti i membri suoi; sì che niente desidero in questo mondo considerando il mondo, et niente mi manca per sicurtà de goder quell'altro, considerando Christo*".<sup>40</sup>

Cette foi christocentrique apparaît également dans un traité adressé par Vittoria à l'ami de Pole, le prélat Alvisé Priuli. Elle utilise ici un symbolisme traditionnel de la vie chrétienne vue comme voyage en mer agitée, avec la foi au Christ crucifié

comme timon, l'espérance du salut comme voile et l'amour éternel de Dieu pour l'humanité comme mât indestructible.<sup>41</sup> Le chaos de l'existence terrestre est ainsi illuminé par le Christ étoile, la croix sert de boussole qui, avec l'Écriture, dirige le chrétien vers la sécurité du port céleste.<sup>42</sup> Cette foi ancrée dans le Christ, *il vero Christo qual nudo et puro*, s'exprime aussi dans une méditation de Vittoria sur le Vendredi saint. D'inspiration franciscaine, elle échappe aux connotations sado-masochistes de ce genre médiéval. Relativement sobre, le texte est surtout intéressant par ses références scripturaires aux femmes de grande foi, comme la samaritaine, la syro-phénicienne, Marthe, Marie Madeleine et Marie, mère du Seigneur.<sup>43</sup> Plus retenue que la mariologie des *Rime spirituali*, une méditation de Vittoria sur l'*Ave Maria* est encore centrée sur la grâce du Christ; c'est dû sans doute à son ressourcement scripturaire.<sup>44</sup>

Le texte évangélique concernant la femme adultère exaucée par le Christ est analysé par Vittoria dans deux lettres, probablement adressées à Ochino. Elle y souligne la rémission des péchés par la foi et la grâce. Vittoria accentue cette primauté du Christ par une citation de la liturgie pascale: "*o felix culpa, quae tantum et talem meruit habere redemptorem!*"<sup>45</sup> Attribuée traditionnellement à Ambroise, une telle formule implique la divinisation salvifique de l'humanité, propre de l'anthropologie patristique.<sup>46</sup>

La figure de Marie Madeleine, que Vittoria conformément à la tradition latine combine avec Marie de Béthanie et la pécheresse oignant les pieds de Jésus, est bien visible dans la correspondance.<sup>47</sup> Écrivant à Morone, Vittoria la définit *discipula amata dal Sig.re*, qui par son intimité avec le Christ est appelée à fortifier la foi des autres disciples en tant que témoin privilégié de la résurrection. Cette vocation de Marie Madeleine, à la fois missionnaire et pastorale, est ensuite proposée comme modèle au cardinal, qui doit consolider ses frères en ce temps troublé.<sup>48</sup> Dans une lettre à Costanza d'Avalos Piccolomini, Marie Madeleine est louée en compagnie de Catherine d'Alexandrie.

Ces femmes sont des exemples glorieux des vertus majeures: la première par la contemplation et la foi apostolique, la seconde par la virginité et le martyre. Vittoria se rattache ici à la tradition qui qualifie Marie Madeleine d'*apostola apostolorum*, par son annonce de la résurrection du Christ.<sup>49</sup> D'autre part, il est important de remarquer que Vittoria interprète cette prérogative en un sens plus autonome que l'exégèse traditionnelle, renversant ainsi la logique de l'argument. Afin de confirmer son rôle d'apôtre, le Christ choisit Marie Madeleine comme première annonciatrice du mystère de sa résurrection: "*Et per certificarla che era sua apostola, le comandò che fosse la prima annunciatrice de la aspettata novella et del mirabil mistero della sua resurrettione*".<sup>50</sup>

### III. La théologie de Caritas Pirckheimer

Trente lettres adressées à Caritas par son admirateur Sixtus Tucher (mort en 1507) ont été traduites du latin en allemand et publiées par l'humaniste Christoph Scheurl en 1515. Malheureusement, les lettres de Caritas à Tucher ont disparu. Cette survivance unilatérale est comparable au défaut des écrits matristiques. En effet, il nous reste environ cent lettres écrites à des femmes par les pères de l'église comme Jean Chrysostome, Jérôme et Augustin, mais aucune lettre de leurs correspondantes n'a été jugée digne d'être conservée. Néanmoins, il ressort clairement des lettres adressées par Tucher que Caritas lui fournit un appui et une inspiration dans sa vie de prélat.

Le même caractère fort et indépendant de Caritas apparaît dans ses deux lettres latines à l'humaniste Conrad Celtis.<sup>51</sup> En 1494 il a retrouvé une partie de l'oeuvre de Hrotsvith von Gandersheim, et Caritas le remercie de l'envoi de son édition. Il est à noter qu'elle reprend le *topos* traditionnel de la faiblesse féminine comme instrument privilégié de la puissance divine,

exemplifié par cette érudite chanoinesse du X<sup>e</sup> siècle. Plus originale, Caritas félicite Celtis de son beau travail de "*Her-story*", présentant Hrotsvith au monde savant. Caritas conclut en louant le féminisme du Créateur et Sauveur, qui distribue ses dons de manière non androcentrique, un fait justement mis en évidence par le généreux Celtis: "*Plane non possum non fateri, fecisse vos contra consuetudinem multorum eruditorum vel forte potius superbiorum, qui abusive nituntur omnia verba, facta ac dictamina mulierum in tantum parvipendere, quasi uterque sexus non unum haberet conditorem, redemptorem ac salvatorem, non animadvertentes manum summi artificis adhuc non esse abbreviatam*".<sup>52</sup> Ensuite, Celtis a dédié à Caritas son histoire de Nuremberg, *Norimberga*, accompagnée d'une Ode en son honneur. Caritas y est louée comme modèle de virginité érudite, imitant les vestales romaines et les grandes moniales du Moyen Age, tout en partageant le savoir humaniste de son père et de son frère Willibald.<sup>53</sup> Dans sa réponse, Caritas exhorte Celtis à poursuivre la recherche de Dieu, effort qui prolonge et parfait la philosophie profane. Préférant la *mystica theologia*, Caritas affirme la priorité de la foi sur la seule raison: "*Quippe ratio humana debilis est et falli potest, fides autem vera et sana conscientia falli non potest*". Il faut donc se tourner des écrits païens vers la sainte Ecriture, qui seule révèle la vérité: "*Si ergo omnia vana sunt praeter deum timere, colere et amare, cui servire regnare est, utique vanitati non est adhaerendum, sed omni celeritate ad certissimam veritatem, quae in sacra scriptura recondita est, recurrendum*".<sup>54</sup> Il est significatif que les franciscains qui dirigeaient les moniales de *Sancta Clara* cherchaient à entraver une telle correspondance d'avant-garde, interdisant en 1504 à Caritas d'écrire le latin; ce qu'elle continua de faire, quoique la majorité de ses lettres conservées soient en allemand.<sup>55</sup>

L'insistance de Caritas sur l'Ecriture et sur la foi au Christ n'implique pas du tout qu'elle apprécie Martin Luther. Dans une lettre assez haute en couleurs elle félicite Hieronymus Emser de

ses écrits contre cet ex-moine subversif, dont l'hérésie infecte la ville de Nuremberg. Caritas l'a fait lire au réfectoire de *Sancta Clara*, tout en distribuant ses livres à d'autres monastères et même aux laïcs.<sup>56</sup> Quelques mois auparavant, Caritas avait exhorté sa nièce Felicitas Henssin Imhoff à persévérer dans la vraie foi, malgré le luthéranisme en vigueur à Augsbourg. Prévoyant que personne ne pourrait la séparer de cette vérité dans laquelle elle veut mourir, Caritas précise: "*von dem sol mich auch nymant pringen, in dem will ich auch sterben, an den halt dich auch*".<sup>57</sup>

La résistance de *Sancta Clara* contre la Réforme imposée par le conseil de Nuremberg est décrite dans le journal, *Denkwürdigkeiten*, où Caritas inclut ses vingt-sept lettres écrites en défense du monastère. Le mercredi de la semaine de la Passion en 1525, l'abbé pro-luthérien du monastère bénédictin *Sanctus Aegidius* est envoyé par le *Rat* pour exhorter Caritas et ses nonnes à accepter les nouvelles directives. L'abbesse s'oppose de manière catégorique, en comparant les pasteurs déserteurs comme ce Friedrich Pistorius aux loups dévorant les brebis. Caritas et ses moniales se confient au bon Pasteur, le Christ, en refusant unanimement d'agir contre leur conscience. Respectant leurs vœux monastiques, elles désirent rester dans l'unité de l'église catholique et membres de leur ordre des clarisses: "*Aber auf daz wer wir nit gewillt, daz wir den leuten folgen sollten in den dingen, dy wider unsser gewissen und unsser gelub wern, denn wir hetten das miteinander beschlossen, daz wir uns durch nymant wollt lossen treiben von der einigkeit der cristlichen kirchen und unsser ordens*".<sup>58</sup>

Depuis la dernière messe célébrée à *Sancta Clara* le mardi après Pâques 1525, les moniales demeurent sans aucun réconfort sacramentel jusqu'à la fin de leur vie. Tout recrutement interdit, le conseil de Nuremberg entend supprimer le monastère par la mort des vieilles nonnes et la rentrée en famille des plus jeunes. Il devient donc très important pour le *Rat* de forcer Caritas à délier ses filles de leurs vœux, émis entre ses mains d'abbesse.

Le conseil soutient que la vie monastique est totalement futile et sans aucun mérite, mais les moniales persistent immuables.<sup>59</sup> Ensuite, quatre matrones de la ville interviennent pour faire sortir leurs filles, dont trois sont enlevées par force le jour du *Corpus Christi* 1525.<sup>60</sup> Ces tracasseries sont encore vivement exposées par Caritas dans une lettre, probablement adressée au franciscain Caspar Schatzgeier, *Custos* à Munich.<sup>61</sup>

Contre les pressions exercées par le conseil, Caritas signifie au *Pfleger* Kaspar Nützel qu'il serait impossible de forcer les clarisses à violer leur foi donnée par la grâce de Dieu. La libre conscience ne peut se plier aux lois humaines. Les moniales lisent l'Écriture, sachant très bien que la justification n'est opérée que par la grâce résultant de la mort salvifique du Christ seul. Les bonnes oeuvres n'ont donc pas de mérite en soi, mais sont valorisées comme fruits de foi vivante: *"dann das ist unsser geglaub, uber den, so wir von den heiligen apostlen gelert sind, das wir die rechtfertigung allein got zu geben und dem verdinst und leyden Cristi. Derselb ist unsser gerechtigkeit und gar nit unsser wercken, dann wir lessen und wissen woll, das auss den wercken nymant rechtfertigt wird, sunder allein auss dem gelauben, dann hetten wir durch unssere werck kunen sellig werden, so wer der herr Cristus vergebens fur uns gestorben, aber das wissen wir herwiderumb auch, so der mensch durch die genad gottes und nit durch sein verdinst rechtfertigt ist, das er dann als ein gutter paum gut frucht tregt, die ein anzaigen seins rechten und worn geglaubens geben, dann auss iren fruchten, spricht der herr Cristus, werd ir sy erkennen, dann wo die werck des gelaubens und zuvor die pruderlich lieb nit ist oder sich ereugent, do ist der gelaub auch nichts, ob er auch so gross wer, das sich die perg darvon bewegten und darumb, so wir wissen, das wir durch den gelauben, wie uns der heilig Paulus lert, rechtfertigt sind, wissen wir auch, das wir zufrid mit got sind"*.<sup>62</sup> Par cette doctrine de la justification centrée sur le Christ, Caritas fait preuve d'une foi traditionnellement catholique.

Parmi les prédicateurs luthériens imposés au monastère pour convertir les nonnes à la nouvelle orthodoxie, dont Caritas se plaint d'avoir dû supporter plus de cent-onze sermons, l'ex-vicaire général des augustins, Wenzelaus Linck, en prêcha une douzaine au printemps 1525. Sans doute percevant son manque de succès, il envoya deux traités à l'abbesse tenace par l'intermédiaire du *Pfleger*.<sup>63</sup> Linck insiste d'abord sur l'inefficacité de la vie monastique, en invoquant la justification par la foi seule.<sup>64</sup> Très au point, la réponse de Caritas le combat avec ses propres armes en soulignant la foi christocentrique des clarisses: "*Es ist die warheit, das wir wissen und genczlich gelauben, das die refertigung allein durch das verdinst Jesu Cristi geschicht,..*". Par conséquent, Caritas conclut que la vie du cloître n'est réalisable qu'avec l'aide de la grâce, n'ayant pas de mérite en dehors du don de Dieu.<sup>65</sup> En second lieu, Linck insiste sur la priorité de l'Écriture, où voeux monastiques et culte des saints sont privés de fondement.<sup>66</sup> Caritas réplique que les saints ne sont vénérés que comme modèles de vie chrétienne, tandis que le Christ incarné reste le seul Médiateur entre Dieu et l'humanité: "*Ich wayss wol und all mein swester, das zwischen got und dem menschen kein ander mitler ist dan der mensch Cristus, das man aber die lieben heiligen nit eren sol, wie zy zu eren sind, das acht ich auch nit recht, dan Augustinus, Jeronimus, Cyprianus und ander leren mich ein anders*". Se référant ainsi aux Pères de l'église, Caritas affirme que les voeux monastiques engagent à la fidélité envers le Seigneur; sa fonction d'abbesse ne lui donne pas le pouvoir de les annuler. Avec ironie, elle remarque que pour lui faire imiter Linck, le *Pfleger* aurait du mal à lui trouver un mari, maintenant qu'elle est devenue vieille (cinquante-huit ans) et laide: "*dieweil ich alt und ungeschaffen pin*".<sup>67</sup> Dans ce contexte, il faut se rappeler que plusieurs prédicateurs luthériens étaient des moines défroqués et mariés, désirant justifier leur changement de vie par des arguments doctrinaux. Le marché matrimonial était autrement défavorable pour les nonnes d'âge mûr ou avancé. D'ailleurs, la



carrière de la jeune veuve Wibrandis Rosenblatt, qui successivement épousa trois réformateurs, c'est-à-dire Oecolampadius, Capito et Bucer, ne fut certes pas très attirante!<sup>68</sup> En bon modèle de féminité protestante, Wibrandis leur enfanta dix enfants, tout en élevant sa fille du premier mariage avec la descendance déjà procurée par ses maris prolifiques.

Il ressort clairement des *Denkwürdigkeiten* que Caritas surpasse ses interlocuteurs et adversaires, tant par l'intellect que par le coeur. Ce n'est qu'une seule fois qu'elle fait face à un homme de son propre niveau, lors de la visite à *Sancta Clara* de Philipp Melanchton.<sup>69</sup> Il est à noter que Caritas accepte cette rencontre en novembre 1525 avec satisfaction, ayant entendu qu'il respecte la justice et le droit de conscience: "*Das herr Philipus Mellanthen hieher beruft ist, hör ich fast gern, dann ich langst von im gehört hab, das er ein frum, redlich, aufrecht man sey und ein liebhaber der gerechtigkeit, glaub nit, das im alle ding werden gefallen, besunder, daz man die leut mit gewalt zum glauben wil notten und zu den dingen, die wider ir gewissen sind*".<sup>70</sup> Dans son compte-rendu de leur entretien, Caritas souligne que les deux se sont trouvés d'accord sur tous les points, sauf en ce qui concerne la valeur de la vie monastique et l'obligation des vœux: "*Wir concordirten zu peder zeyten in allen puncten, dann allein der gelubt halten kunt wir nit eins werden; er meynet ye, sy pünden nichcz, man wer sy nit schuldig zu halten, so maynet ich, was man got gelobt het, wer man schuldig zu halten mit seiner hilf. Er was bescheidner mit seiner red denn ich noch keinen lutterischen gehört hab; was im ser wider, das man die leut mit gewalt nattet. Er schyd mit gutter freuntschaft von uns*".<sup>71</sup> Selon cette description, Melanchton s'opposait donc à une orthodoxie forcée. En effet, le conseil de Nuremberg semble ensuite se contenter de l'administration économique du monastère, modérant ainsi ses préoccupations doctrinales. Néanmoins, en 1527 le *Rat* reprend les pressions afin que les moniales renoncent à remplir leurs vœux.<sup>72</sup> Une seule

nonne quitte volontairement *Sancta Clara*, cette Anna Schwarz qui épousera l'ex-abbé Pistorius en 1532.<sup>73</sup>

Le monastère récalcitrant continue de subir la prédication luthérienne. Avec son humour habituel, Caritas remarque qu'un ex-chartreux a consolidé les clarisses dans l'ancienne foi, mieux qu'aucun franciscain ne l'aurait pu faire: "*denn er hat uns mer bestettigt in dem alten gelauben dann keyn parfuss het mugen thun,..*". Ses sermons ont en effet démontré la fausseté du luthéranisme, dont Dieu dans sa grâce la protège: "*hab wir gemerckt, was obentewr in der lutterey steckt, daz ich mich mit der hilf gottes meyn leben lang vor der lutterey huten wil*".<sup>74</sup> D'autre part, Caritas se lamente continuellement de la privation des sacrements imposée par le conseil de Nuremberg. Au milieu des chrétiens les moniales demeurent sans confession, eucharistie et extrême onction. Avec sa crudité franconienne, Caritas dit qu'elles sont réduites à mourir comme du bétail: "*Auch ist das ye ein cleglichs ding und unsser aller leiden, das wir nun schyr 3 gancze jar miten unter cristen siczen on alle cristliche sacrament, das ye ein elend ding ist, besunder in todsnotten, das wir müssen sterben als das viech;..*".<sup>75</sup> En 1530, sa dernière lettre conservée répète cette plainte douloureuse de l'isolement sacramentel, sans espoir pour l'avenir. Ecrivant au prieur Kilian Leib à Rebdorf, Caritas conclut: "*Das thut mir nichts wirscher in der Lutherey, denn dass sie die heilige sakrament so peinlich zerreißen. Ich hoff auch kein besserung, wenn schon der keyser kombt, die weil man die prediger also last wüetten. Gott erleucht alle verblente herzen, dessen Genad ich Ewer Ehrwürden ewiglich befehle*".<sup>76</sup>

Les clarisses sont par conséquent contraintes de persévérer dans une solitude complète, sans messe ni sacrements. En tant que femmes incapables d'accéder au sacerdoce, il ne leur reste que de chanter l'office liturgique. Un livre de prières datant du temps de Caritas montre une piété d'inspiration médiévale, mais sobre et plutôt conventionnelle.<sup>77</sup> Il est à noter que la mariologie y est très discrète, avec deux courtes pièces seulement.

#### IV. Deux devancières de théologie féministe

Actuellement, les *Women's Studies* sont à l'avant-garde dans le domaine des sciences religieuses en considérant tout discours sur Dieu en fonction du caractère sexué de l'expérience humaine. Ce *genderedness*, à la fois biologiquement programmé et culturellement structuré, sert de catégorie analytique principale pour toute verbalisation théologique, tant des hommes que des femmes. Dans cette perspective, Caritas et Vittoria sont à évaluer comme devancières de la théologie contemporaine fondée sur l'expérience des femmes, *feminist theology*. Avec toutes celles qui ont survécu dans la tradition chrétienne, Vittoria et Caritas internalisent plus ou moins le discours sur Dieu formulé en fonction du *genderedness* masculin, ensuite défini et transmis comme *sana doctrina*. En comparaison avec les théologiennes du Moyen Age, dont les écrits furent normalement retouchés, transposés en latin, rédigés ou même censurés par des confesseurs et des clercs, Caritas et Vittoria présentent l'avantage d'avoir elles-mêmes formulé leur pensée. Néanmoins, à la suite de ces Mères de l'église, Vittoria et Caritas se conforment stratégiquement aux convenances androcentriques en vigueur dans leurs milieux respectifs.

Comme Vittoria, Caritas est dépourvue d'autorité ecclésiale, réservée aux hommes ayant reçu le sacrement de l'ordre. Sa charge d'abbesse ne lui attribue qu'une juridiction déléguée. Lorsque Vittoria s'appuie sur des cardinaux courageux, Caritas se trouve sans aucune aide, son seul appui est le Christ. Caritas exige pour les moniales de *Sancta Clara* la liberté d'agir selon leur conscience en tant que catholiques, tout en respectant le choix du luthéranisme effectué par le *Rat* de Nuremberg. Il est important de noter qu'une telle tolérance est extraordinaire au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, où aucun réformateur protestant ou cardinal catholique ne pouvait imaginer la possibilité d'une coexistence

des différentes confessions dans un même territoire.<sup>78</sup> Livrée au Christ, Caritas se trouve donc en avance par une attitude que son église catholique n'acceptera officiellement qu'au concile de Vatican II, avec la déclaration sur la liberté religieuse, *Dignitatis humanae* (7-12-1965). Primauté de l'Écriture, exégèse patristique valorisée, justification christocentrique, tolérance œcuménique, tels sont les grands thèmes de ce concile réformateur qui se trouvent anticipés dans les écrits de Caritas Pirckheimer.<sup>79</sup> Parlant de Dieu sur la base de son expérience de femme, Caritas se montre un modèle de théologie pour notre temps. Cette abbesse perspicace et fidèle ne sera donc canonisée que par une église catholique vraiment réformée. Paradoxalement, l'institution craint de réchauffer les conflits vécus à Nuremberg au lieu d'admirer la théologie novatrice de cette *foremother*, sans doute considérée comme trop autonome.

En tant que catholique traditionnelle, Vittoria partage avec Caritas la doctrine christocentrique de la justification, accentuant la priorité de la foi donnée et le ressourcement scripturaire. Parce qu'elle a davantage internalisé un discours masculin, dont son symbolisme nuptial et sa mariologie sont des exemples frappants, la théologie de Vittoria est moins imitable aujourd'hui. D'autre part, la persistance de Vittoria Colonna en face des répressions à l'intérieur de l'église romaine est malheureusement redevenue exemplaire dans la situation présente. Le Saint Office actuel, la *Sacra Congregatio pro Doctrina Fidei*, fait des efforts pour paralyser la liberté de recherche et le renouvellement à la fois critique et loyal, *faithful dissent*, des théologiens catholiques.<sup>80</sup> Ordres et congrégations divers, surtout féminins, sont soumis à un strict contrôle institutionnel, afin d'enrayer les initiatives d'*aggiornamento* inspirées du concile de Vatican II.<sup>81</sup> Plusieurs femmes, à la fois théologiennes et religieuses, sont par conséquent spécialement contrariées dans leur action. Elles peuvent donc s'inspirer tant de Vittoria que de Caritas!

En conclusion, il est important de souligner que le manque d'autorité institutionnelle a précisément permis à Caritas et

Vittoria de produire un discours authentique sur Dieu, sans ce genre d'argumentation adventice qui encombre la théologie, tant catholique que protestante, lors de la Réforme. Pour ces hommes insérés dans leur institutions respectives, la doctrine de la justification comportait *ipso facto* des conséquences pour leur pouvoir ecclésial. Le blocage du colloque oecuménique de Ratisbonne en est un exemple typique.<sup>82</sup>

Actuellement, les femmes vivant dans un contexte socio-culturel qu'on pourrait désigner post-patriarcal, se trouvent de plus en plus aliénées par l'église catholique institutionnelle.<sup>83</sup> Dans cette situation douloureuse, nos devancières Caritas et Vittoria sont guides et inspiratrices de *gendered Godlanguage*, c'est-à-dire de théologie fondée sur l'expérience humaine historiquement située, tant pour les femmes que pour les hommes.

## NOTES

- \* Version élargie d'une conférence donnée le 27 mai 1988, au congrès international organisé par l'Instituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici à Naples, *Vittoria Colonna e la Crisi del Rinascimento*.
- 1. Cf. R. De Maio: *Donna e Rinascimento*. Milano 1987.
- 2. G. Krabbel: *Caritas Pircckheimer*. Ein Lebensbild aus der Zeit der Reformation, Münster 1982.
- 3. H. Fürst, "Ecclesia semper reformanda"- Reformen des Klarissenklosters Nürnberg. In éd. G. Deichstetter: *Caritas Pircckheimer. Ordensfrau und Humanistin - ein Vorbild für die Ökumene*. Festschrift zum 450. Todestag, Köln 1982, 86-102.
- 4. G. Strauss: *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*. Bloomington, IN 1976, 178.
- 5. J. Pfanner: Caritas Pircckheimer - Biographie der Abtissin. In éd. G. Deichstetter, *Caritas Pircckheimer*, 45-60.
- 6. Ed. A. Bullock: *Vittoria Colonna: Rime*. Roma 1982.
- 7. Eds. E. Ferrero, G. Müller: *Vittoria Colonna: Carteggio*. Torino 1892.

8. C. von Imhoff, Die eigenwillige Nürnberger Abtissin - Caritas Pirckheimer und ihr Bruder Willibald. In éd. G. Deichstetter: *Caritas Pirckheimer*, 154-159.
9. *Colloquia*, in éd. L. E. Halkin, F. Bierlaire, R. Hoven: *Desiderii Erasmi Opera omnia* I, 3. Amsterdam 1972, 403-408. Réf. 407: "Neque tamen vsque adeo rarum est, quam tu putas, sunt in Hispania, sunt in Italia non paucae mulieres adprime nobiles, quae cum quouis viro queant contendere, sunt in Anglia Moricae, sunt in Germania Bilibaldicae et Blaurericae. Quod nisi caueritis vos, res eo tandem euadet, vt nos praesideamus in scholis theologicis, vt concionemur in templis. Occupabimus mitras vestras".
10. *Compendium*, in M. Firpo: *Il processo inquisitoriale del cardinal Giovanni Morone* 1. Roma 1981, 192.
11. Eds. S. M. Pagano, C. Ranieri: *Nuovi Documenti su Vittoria Colonna e Reginald Pole*. Collectanea Archivi Vaticani 24. Città del Vaticano 1989.
12. Ed. J. Pfanner: *Caritas Pirckheimer: Quellensammlung* 1. *Das Gebetbuch der Caritas Pirckheimer*. Landshut 1961. *Caritas Pirckheimer: Quellensammlung* 2. *Die "Denkwürdigkeiten" der Caritas Pirckheimer (aus den Jahren 1524-1528)*. Landshut 1962. *Caritas Pirckheimer: Quellensammlung* 3. *Briefe von, an und über Caritas Pirckheimer (aus den Jahren 1498-1530)*. Landshut 1966.
13. J. Gatz: Was unternahmen die Franziskaner für einen Caritas Pirckheimer-Prozess, *Vita Fratrum* 7, München 1970, 128-149, cit. 128.
14. Ed. J. Cambell: *Enquête pour le procès de canonisation de Dauphine de Puimichel, comtesse d'Ariano (+26-XI-1360)*. Torino 1978.
15. Kari Elisabeth Børresen: *Subordination and Equivalence. The Nature and Role of Woman in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas*, Washington, DC 1981.
16. B. Nicolini: Sulla religiosità di Vittoria Colonna, in *Ideali e passioni nell'Italia religiosa del cinquecento*. Bologna 1968, 37-68, cit. 41.
17. Ep.169 (avant 1545), in *Carteggio*, 295-299, cit. 297.
18. Ep. 79 (13-3-1537), in *Carteggio*, 131-132, cit. 132. Cf. *Michelangelo Buonarroti: Rime* n. 235, éd. E. Borelli, Milano 1975, 268: "Un uomo in una donna, anzi uno dio per la sua bocca parla,..".
19. Ep. 71 (1536), in *Carteggio*, 110-122, cit. 111.
20. *Estratti dagli Atti del Processo del Santo Ufficio*, in O. Ortolani: *Pietro Carnesecchi*. Firenze 1963, 171-260, cit. 190.
21. *Estratti*, in O. Ortolani: *Pietro Carnesecchi*, 235.

22. *Estratti*, in O. Ortolani: *Pietro Carnesecchi*, 232-233, cit. 232.
23. Ep. 142 (8-12-1541), in *Carteggio*, 238-240, cit. 239.
24. Ep. II (22-12-1542) et Ep. XI (20/23-5-1545), in *Nuovi Documenti*, 139-142,161-164, cit. 140,162. Cf. Ep. 161 et Ep. 172, in *Carteggio*, 272-273, 305-307.
25. Ep. 139 (1541), in *Carteggio*, 231-235, cit. 234.
26. D. Fenlon: *Heresy and Obedience in Tridentine Italy. Cardinal Pole and the Counter Reformation*. London 1972, 134-136. Cf. *Estratti*, in O. Ortolani: *Pietro Carnesecchi*, 247: "la signora Marchesa di Pescara se ne rallegrò meco come di cosa che fusse tornata mirabilmente a proposito del sudetto signore, dicendo che Dio haveva quasi miracolosamente disposto et ordinato così, acciò che il Cardinale non fosse intervenuto a tal decreto,..".
27. Ep. 174 (4-10-1546), in *Carteggio*, 309-312, cit. 311. Cf. *Estratti*, in O. Ortolani: *Pietro Carnesecchi*, 189: "Non solamente era noto et amico a quella signora, ma faceva professione di amarla et honorarla come madre, et lei e converso teneva il Cardinale per figliolo, et come tale mostrò di tenerlo in effetto, havendo lasciato herede di nove o dieci millia ducati,..".
28. Ep. I (21-6-1541), in *Nuovi Documenti*, 95.
29. H. Jedin: Il cardinal Pole e Vittoria Colonna, in *Chiesa della fede chiesa della storia*. Brescia 1972, 513-530.
30. In *Concilium Tridentinum*. Diariorum Actorum Epistolarum Tractatum nova collectio XII, Freiburg Br. 1929, 131-145.
31. B. McClung Hallman: *Italian Cardinals, Reform, and the Church as Property*, Berkeley, CA 1985.
32. *Liber Ratisbonensis* art. 5. *Corpus Reformatorum* 4. Halle 1837, 198-201.
33. Ed. F. Hünemann: *Gasparo Contarini: Gegenreformatorische Schriften (1530 c.-1542)*. *Corpus Catholicorum* 7. Münster Wf. 1923, 23-34.
34. Kari Elisabeth Børresen: *Nicolaus Cusanus' dialog De pace fidei*. Om trosfreden. Oslo 1983.
35. *Nicolaus de Cusa: De pace fidei* 16, in éds. R. Klibansky, H. Bascour: *Opera omnia* 7. Hamburgi 1959, 50-56, cit. 51, 52, 54-55.
36. *Cardinali Polo de paenitentia*, in éd. F. Dittrich: *Regesten und Briefe des Cardinals Gasparo Contarini*. Braunsberg 1881, 353-361, cit. 358.
37. C. Ranieri: *Storia e analisi dei testi*, in *Nuovi Documenti*, 65-88, cit. 78.
38. Ep. III (1544), in *Nuovi Documenti*, 98-99, cit. 98.

39. Ep. VIII (15-7-1543), in *Nuovi Documenti*, 153-155, cit. 154. Cf. Ep. 154, in *Carteggio*, 263-265.
40. Ep. IV (25-12-1545), in *Nuovi Documenti*, 99-101, cit. 100.
41. Cf. H. Rahner: *Antenna Crucis*, in *Symbole der Kirche. Die Ekklesiologie der Väter*. Salzburg 1964, 239-564.
42. In B. Fontana: *Nuovi Documenti intorno a Vittoria Colonna*. = *Archivio della Reale società Romana di Storia Patria*, 10 1887, 611-617, cit. 616.
43. *Meditatione del Venerdì'Santo*, in P. Simoncelli: *Evangelismo italiano del cinquecento*. Questione religiosa e nicodemismo politico. Roma 1979, 423-428. Pour l'interprétation biblique, voir Adriana Valerio: *Bibbia, ardimento, coscienza femminile: Vittoria Colonna*, in *Cristianesimo al Femminile*. Donne protagoniste nella storia delle Chiese. La Dracma 1. Napoli 1990, 151-170.
44. *Meditatione sopra l'Ave Maria*, in P. Simoncelli: *Evangelismo*, 429-432.
45. Ep. 144 et Ep. 145 (1535-1542), in *Carteggio*, 241-245, 245-246, cit. 244.
46. B. Fischer: *Ambrosius der Verfasser des österlichen Exultet?* = *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft*, 2, Regensburg 1952, 61-74. Conclusion, 74: "dass es sicher nicht von Ambrosius verfasst ist, sondern wahrscheinlich aus dem gallischen Liturgiebereich stammt".
47. V. Saxer: *Le culte de Marie Madeleine en occident des origines à la fin du moyen âge*. Paris 1959, 2-6.
48. Ep. IX (22-6-1544), in *Nuovi Documenti*, 155-158, cit. 156. Cf. Ep. 164, in *Carteggio*, 277-279.
49. V. Saxer: *Le culte*, 340-350.
50. Ep. 170 (avant 1545), in *Carteggio*, 299-302, cit. 300-301.
51. A. Wienand: *Caritas Pirkheimer und Conrad Celtis*. In éd. G. Deichstetter: *Caritas Pirkheimer*, 129-139.
52. Ep. 45 (mars 1502), in *Quellensammlung* 3, 100-101, cit. 101.
53. Ode (avril 1502), in *Quellensammlung* 3, 103-104.
54. Ep. 47 (25-4-1502), in *Quellensammlung* 3, 105-106, cit. 105.
55. W. von Loewenich: *Ein Lebensbericht aus evangelischer Sicht*. In éd. G. Deichstetter: *Caritas Pirkheimer*, 28-44, réf. 30-31.
56. Ep. 60 (6-6-1522), in *Quellensammlung* 3, 121-124.
57. Ep. 59 (28-12-1521), in *Quellensammlung* 3, 120.
58. Denkw. 27, in *Quellensammlung* 2, 62-64, cit. 62.
59. Denkw. 30-32, in *Quellensammlung* 2, 69-76.
60. Denkw. 33-34, in *Quellensammlung* 2, 76-84.



61. Ep. 61 (18-6-1525), in *Quellensammlung* 3, 125-132.
62. Denkw. 40, in *Quellensammlung* 2, 93-96, cit. 93-94.
63. J. Lorz: Kommentar zu den beiden Unterweisungen des Wenzelaus Linck. In éd. G. Deichstetter: *Caritas Pirkheimer*, 119-127.
64. Denkw. 44, in *Quellensammlung* 2, 104-110.
65. Denkw. 45, in *Quellensammlung* 2, 110-115, cit. 111.
66. Denkw. 48, in *Quellensammlung* 2, 117-124.
67. Denkw. 49, in *Quellensammlung* 2, 125-131, cit. 127.
68. R. H. Bainton: Wibrandis Rosenblatt (1504-1564). In *Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy*. Minneapolis, MN 1971, 79-96. Cf. la notice d'Erasmus dans une lettre à Willibald Pirkheimer: "Ante pauculos dies Oecolampadius duxit vxorem, puellam non inelegantem, cupiens in quadragesima macerare carnem". Ep. 1977 (20-3-1528), in éd. H. M. Allen: *Opus Epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterdami* 7. Oxford 1928, 364-368, cit. 367-368.
69. G. Deichstetter: Caritas Pirkheimer und Philipp Melanchton. In éd. G. Deichstetter: *Caritas Pirkheimer*, 140-146.
70. Denkw. 43, in *Quellensammlung* 2, 100-104, ref. 103-104.
71. Denkw. 50, in *Quellensammlung* 2, 131-132, cit. 132.
72. Denkw. 54, in *Quellensammlung* 2, 137-143.
73. Denkw. 56, in *Quellensammlung* 2, 144-147.
74. Denkw. 54, in *Quellensammlung* 2, cit. 141.
75. Denkw. 54, in *Quellensammlung* 2, cit. 140.
76. Ep. 64 (7-3-1530), in *Quellensammlung* 3, 135-136, cit. 136.
77. Gebetbuch, in *Quellensammlung* 1.
78. K. Aland: Toleranz und Glaubensfreiheit im 16. Jahrhundert. In éd. M. Greschat, J.F.G. Goeters: *Reformation und Humanismus*. Robert Stepperich zum 65. Geburtstag. Witten 1969, 67-90.
79. G. Deichstetter: Caritas Pirkheimer - ein Vorbild für die Ökumene. In éd. G. Deichstetter: *Caritas Pirkheimer*, 67-75.
80. Cf. éd. C. E. Curran, R. A. McCormick: *Dissent in the Church*. Mahwah, NJ 1988.
81. Cf. éd. M. Kolbenschlag: *Authority, Community and Conflict*. Kansas City, MO 1986.
82. P. Matheson: *Cardinal Contarini at Regensburg*. London 1972.
83. Cf. l'expression de Theresa Kane, supérieure générale des *Sisters of Mercy* et présidente de *Leadership Conference of Women Religious*, dans son accueil de Jean Paul II à Washington, 7-10-1979: "As I share this privileged moment with you, Your Holiness, I urge you to be mindful of the intense suffering and pain which is part of the life of

many women in these United States. I call upon you to listen with compassion and to hear the call of women who comprise half of humankind. As women, we have heard the powerful messages of our church addressing the dignity and reverence for all persons. As women, we have pondered these words. Our contemplation leads us to state that the church in its struggle to be faithful to its call for reverence and dignity for all persons must respond by providing the possibility of women as persons being included in all ministries of our church. I urge you, Your Holiness, to be open to and to respond to the voices coming from the women of this country who are desirous of serving in and through the church as fully participating members". In éd. A. Lally Milhaven: *The Inside Stories, 13 Valiant Women Challenging the Church*. Mystic, CT 1987, 267-268, cit. 268.

IV

FEMINOLOGIE  
INSTITUTIONELLE

## Image ajustée, typologie arrêtée: Analyse critique de *Mulieris dignitatem*\*

La lettre apostolique *Mulieris dignitatem* de 1988 se présente comme une *meditatio* (I, 2), ayant l'apparence d'un traité édifiant.<sup>1</sup> Le contenu doctrinal de ce texte est remarquablement incohérent: L'auteur s'efforce de combiner une anthropologie théologique partiellement ajustée à la culture post-patriarcale, avec la synthèse foncièrement androcentrique du christianisme traditionnel, déployée dans la christologie, l'ecclésiologie et la mariologie. Il s'agit donc d'un document de transition, où les éléments disparates correspondent au différents niveaux d'inculturation.

En tant qu'historienne des idées théologiques, je suis frappée du décalage entre la nouvelle définition holistique de l'image de Dieu d'une part et la typologie classique de construction patriarcale de l'autre part.

### I. L'évolution doctrinale de l'Imago Dei

Commentant les récits de la création, l'auteur constate avec justesse que le concept de l'homme comme créé à l'image de Dieu est à la base de l'anthropologie chrétienne. D'autre part, il semble - à l'instar de plusieurs théologues féministes - ignorer l'histoire de l'exégèse de Gen. 1 et 2, dans la mesure où il présuppose la définition holistique de notre siècle comme déjà énoncée dans les textes bibliques *ad litteram*, pour être professée dès le début du christianisme. Au contraire, la formule: "*ambo*

*sunt humani, pariter vir et mulier, ambo ad imaginem Dei creati*" (III, 6, p. 1662), résulte d'une longue évolution doctrinale pour inclure les femmes dans l'humanité théomorphe.<sup>2</sup>

Sommairement, cette insertion graduelle se réalise par les étapes suivantes: *A.* Seuls les hommes sont créés à l'image de Dieu, tandis que les femmes deviennent également Christomorphes dans l'ordre du salut, cf. Gen. 1, 26-27a; Gen. 2, 7; I Cor. 11, 7; Gal. 3, 28; Eph. 4, 13. *B.* Du fait de la définition asexuelle de l'*imago Dei*, cette prérogative est attribuée aux femmes dès la création, mais en dépit de leur féminité non-théomorphe, cf. Clément d'Alexandrie et Augustin. *C.* Du fait de la définition holistique de l'*imago Dei*, qui comprend tout être humain en tant que masculin ou féminin, les concepts traditionnels de masculinité théomorphe ou d'image asexuelle sont abandonnés, cf. l'exégèse féministe du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle<sup>3</sup> et l'exégèse protestante, puis catholique du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle.

### **A. Adam théomorphe, Eve dérivée**

En présentant la nouvelle Eve, Marie, comme modèle de la vocation spécifiquement maternelle/virginale des femmes (VI, 17-22), *Mulieris dignitatem* se situe au premier stade de cette évolution doctrinale. Dans le christianisme, (comme dans le Judaïsme et l'Islam), divinité et féminité sont en principe incompatibles.

L'interaction du théocentrisme et de l'androcentrisme se manifeste par la corrélation entre Dieu andromorphe et homme théomorphe. L'être humain masculin, Adam, est donc considéré comme créé à l'image de Dieu en tant qu'être humain primaire et normatif. En conséquence, Eve est créée après, à partir de et pour Adam afin de lui servir d'aide subordonnée, plus précisément comme instrument de procréation. Dans cette perspective androcentrique, le texte sur l'image, Gen. 1, 26-27a, est interprété avec Gen. 2, 7 dans le sens d'Adam théomorphe,

tandis que le texte concernant la différenciation sexuelle et la bénédiction de fécondité, Gen. 1, 27b-28, est interprété avec Gen. 2, 18, 21-24 dans le sens d'Eve non-théomorphe, créée pour être épouse et mère.

Il est essentiel de savoir que jusqu'au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, l'anthropologie chrétienne a constamment affirmé la subordination des femmes comme instituée par Dieu dans l'ordre de la création et en conséquence normative, tant pour la société que pour l'église.<sup>4</sup> Depuis Vatican II, cette hiérarchie sexuelle est abandonnée en tant que norme de la société, mais reste maintenue dans l'église institutionnelle. Le *Codex Iuris Canonici* de 1983 (can. 1055-1165) renonce au caractère hiérarchique du mariage, constitutif de la législation canonique antérieure.<sup>5</sup> En contraste, l'exclusion des femmes du sacrement de l'ordre est conservée (can. 1024), reproduisant littéralement le *Codex Iuris Canonici* de 1917 (can. 968, 1), fondé sur le droit canonique médiéval.<sup>6</sup>

Il est important de noter que cette nouvelle insistance ecclésiastique sur l'équivalence entre femmes et hommes dans la société est régulièrement accompagnée de réserves provenant de ce qu'on appelle la "complémentarité" des deux sexes. Il s'agit en effet du maintien des rôles spécifiques pour les femmes; si le schéma classique de la primauté masculine est délaissé, la répartition corollaire des fonctions sociales selon le sexe des individus reste en vigueur.<sup>7</sup> Lorsque *Mulieris dignitatem* rejette la sujétion sociale des femmes comme peine du péché d'origine, selon Gen. 3, 16 (IV, 10), l'auteur occulte le fait que l'anthropologie chrétienne classique distingue entre subordination créationnelle et normative d'un côté, et domination pénale théoriquement corrigible de l'autre. Malgré l'accent sur la réciprocité de l'homme et de la femme dans le mariage (II, 7), avec mention du rôle paternel (VI, 18), *Mulieris dignitatem* se base dans son ensemble sur l'axiome anthropologique du christianisme traditionnel, c'est-à-dire que la maternité constitue la raison d'être même des femmes à cause de leur sexe dérivé.

Néanmoins, je constate avec satisfaction que l'encyclique *Humanae vitae* de 1968<sup>8</sup> est ici passée sous silence. En effet, l'autonomie procréatrice des femmes, qui n'est devenue possible qu'au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle par des moyens contraceptifs efficaces, est une condition *sine qua non* pour la coopération intégrale des deux sexes dans tous les domaines de la société humaine.

## B. Image asexuée

La seconde étape de la doctrine de l'*imago Dei*, où les femmes sont définies théomorphes dès la création parce qu'elles possèdent l'âme rationnellement asexuée, commence avec le stratagème "féministe" de Clément d'Alexandrie (mort avant 215). Il est le premier Père de l'église qui combine le texte sur l'image, Gen. 1, 26-27a, avec la différenciation sexuelle selon 1, 27b: "*masculum et feminam creavit eos*". Formule littéralement liée à la fécondité du verset suivant, 1, 28, Clément justifie ce déplacement de 1,27b en invoquant Gal. 3, 28: "*non est masculus et femina*". Il est à noter que ce texte est une citation négative de Gen. 1, 27b, dans le sens d'abolition rédemptrice de la distinction des sexes par retour à la perfection d'origine, qui est comprise à la fois comme unité présexuelle et parfaite masculinité Christomorphe. Clément invoque donc un texte qui supprime la féminité afin d'inclure les femmes comme théomorphes!

Passé sous silence par Clément, I Cor. 11, 7 sert dans l'exégèse antiochienne pour affirmer la subordination des femmes non-théomorphes, comme chez Diodore de Tarse (mort avant 394) et Jean Chrysostome (mort en 407). Augustin (mort en 430) est le premier Père de l'église qui affronte directement ce texte: "*Vir quidem non debet velare caput cum sit imago et gloria Dei. Mulier autem gloria viri est*". Partant de l'interprétation "féministe" de Clément, Augustin rattache Gen. 1, 27b à 1, 26-27a en invoquant Gal. 3, 28. Etant donné que

l'exégèse patristique comprend I Cor. 11, 7 *ad litteram* dans le sens d'*imago Dei* exclusivement réservée aux êtres humains masculins, Augustin a recours à une solution allégorique. Donnant priorité à l'image asexuée, attribuée aux femmes dès la création, Augustin interprète donc le *vir* théomorphe comme symbolisant la partie supérieure de l'âme humaine, adonnée à la contemplation de la vérité, tandis que la *mulier* privée de l'image divine symbolise la partie inférieure de l'âme, adonnée aux soins temporels. Il est important de noter que ce stratagème ingénieux ne supprime pas le clivage fondamental entre divinité et féminité. La *femina* n'est théomorphe que malgré son sexe féminin, tandis que le sexe exemplaire du *masculus* reflète l'excellence de sa propre *imago Dei*. Parce que la subordination créationnelle des femmes est imposée par leur féminité dérivée, leur possession de l'image asexuelle n'abolit pas la primauté des hommes mâles. En conséquence, la relation hiérarchique de type patriarcal reste ordonnée par Dieu.

Cette exégèse augustinienne de Gen. 1, 26-27b à la lumière de Gal.3,28, voilant allégoriquement I Cor. 11, 7, devient prépondérante dans la théologie du Moyen Age. D'autre part, il est important de savoir que l'interprétation littérale de I Cor. 11, 7 survit dans le droit canonique médiéval par la transmission d'Ambrosiaster (actif ca. 370-380), cité sous les noms d'Ambroise et d'Augustin. Dans le *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, valide jusqu'en 1917, l'argument principal pour la sujétion des femmes, tant dans la société que dans l'église, reste précisément leur manque d'*imago Dei*.<sup>9</sup>

### C. Image holistique

La troisième étape de la doctrine de l'image, reprise dans *Mulieris dignitatem* (II, 6-7), se rattache à l'exégèse "féministe" précédente, effectuée du III<sup>e</sup> au V<sup>e</sup> siècle.<sup>10</sup> D'autre part, cette nouvelle interprétation holistique de l'*imago Dei*, où l'être



humain sexué est théomorphe en tant que féminin ou masculin, est révolutionnaire par le fait qu'elle exige une corrélation entre divinité et féminité, en principe exclue dans le christianisme traditionnel. En effet, la nouvelle image holistique fait éclater la connexion exclusive entre masculinité primaire et excellence théomorphe. Dépassant la définition asexuelle de l'image, où les femmes ne sont théomorphes qu'en dépit de leur sexe subalterne, la hiérarchie des sexes perd finalement son caractère d'ordre créateur.

Etant donné l'interaction entre concept de divinité et définition de l'humain, Eve devenue entièrement théomorphe réclame que Dieu soit décrit comme gynécomorphe. Un tel antropomorphisme symétrique est donc invoqué dans *Mulieris dignitatem* (II, 8), en citant quelques métaphores exceptionnellement féminines dans l'Écriture. Il s'agit en effet d'un thème atypique, mais constant dans la tradition chrétienne, tant patristique que médiévale. Conformément à la typologie classique du divin andromorphe et de l'humain gynécomorphe, il est à remarquer que cette métaphorique féminine est normalement appliquée à la nature humaine du Verbe incarné.<sup>11</sup>

## II. Nouvel Adam, nouvelle Eve

La typologie classique du Christ nouvel Adam, où Marie/église sert comme nouvelle Eve, transpose la hiérarchie des deux sexes de l'ordre créateur à l'ordre du salut. Ce schéma androcentrique reste constitutif dans la doctrine et le symbolisme de l'église catholique, et encore plus dans l'église orthodoxe. Fortement accentué dans *Mulieris dignitatem* (VII, 23-25; VIII, 29), il est essentiel de savoir que cette "sexologie" théologique correspond au premier stade de l'évolution doctrinale de l'*imago Dei*, où Adam est théomorphe et Eve n'est pas créée à l'image de Dieu. Dans les textes bibliques, la dépendance d'Israël élu par Yahweh

et de l'église sauvée par le Christ est illustrée par la dépendance de l'épouse subordonnée vis-à-vis de son époux patriarcal, cf. Osée 2, 19-20; II Cor. 11, 2; Eph. 5, 32. Il est important de noter que cette analogie excède totalement la hiérarchie androcentrique des deux sexes, dans la mesure où la disparité du Dieu transcendant et de l'humanité créée est comparée avec la relation asymétrique des deux partenaires humains. D'autre part, une telle analogie n'est concevable que lorsque le mari seul est théomorphe.

La figure de Marie comme nouvelle Eve n'est élaborée qu'au II<sup>e</sup> siècle, par Justin (mort ca. 165) et Irénée (mort ca. 200). Chez Tertullien (mort ca. 220), cette fonction auxiliaire dans l'ordre salvifique est attribuée tant à Marie qu'à l'église. En imitant l'instrumentalité d'Eve dérivée vis-à-vis d'Adam créé à l'image de Dieu, cette nouvelle Eve représente l'humanité gynécomorphe vis-à-vis du Christ Rédempteur, qui est le nouvel Adam proprement théomorphe. L'interprétation de l'*imago Dei* comme privilège exclusif des hommes mâles est ici une prémisse évidente. C'est pourquoi la notion des femmes créées à l'image de Dieu n'existe pas dans les écrits de ces apologistes. Absente dans les textes bibliques *ad litteram*, cette interprétation n'est introduite qu'au III<sup>e</sup> siècle, où le "féminisme" de Clément reste encore exceptionnel. Il est à remarquer que l'insistance sur I Cor. 11, 7 pour combattre une telle nouveauté ne fleurit qu'à partir du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle. Je vois ici un parallèle au débat actuel concernant les femmes prêtres, en effet provoqué par l'innovation d'ordonner des femmes dans les églises non-catholiques.

### **Impedimentum sexus**

Il est donc significatif que *Mulieris dignitatem* invoque la typologie classique afin de corroborer l'incapacité culturelle des femmes, dans le sens qu'elles ne peuvent pas être ordonnées.

L'auteur se réfère à la déclaration *Inter insigniores* de 1976<sup>12</sup>, en précisant que les femmes sont incapables d'agir comme prêtres *in persona Christi* (VII, 26). Abandonnant la subordination créationnelle des femmes, tout en invoquant la tradition canonique et scolastique qui affirme le *status subjectionis* féminin comme évident, *Inter insigniores* se place dans une impasse logique. La déclaration conserve la norme traditionnelle de la non-ordination des femmes, mais sans maintenir ses prémisses. Le symbolisme typologique est appliqué sans préciser la cohérence entre Christ nouvel Adam et masculinité exclusivement théomorphe.

D'autre part, le texte de Bonaventure (mort en 1274) invoqué dans *Inter insigniores* est explicite sur ce point et sa conclusion mérite d'être citée: "*Item, nullus est possibilis ad ordines suscipiendos nisi qui Dei gerit imaginem, quia in hoc Sacramento homo quodam modo fit divinus, dum potestatis divinae fit particeps; sed vir ratione sexus est imago Dei, sicut dicitur primae ad Corinthios undecimo: ergo nullo modo mulier potest ordinari. .. In hoc enim Sacramento persona, quae ordinatur, significat Christum mediatorem; et quoniam mediator solum in virili sexu fuit et per virilem sexum potest significari: ideo possibilitas suscipiendi ordines solum viris competit, qui soli possunt naturaliter repraesentare et secundum characteris susceptionem actu signum hujus ferre*".<sup>13</sup>

Par conséquent, je trouve nécessaire de souligner que l'argument typologique du Christ époux, invoqué dans *Mulieris dignitatem*, est *intenable* sans la définition des femmes comme non-théomorphes. Inversement, il est *contradictoire* d'affirmer que les femmes créées à l'image de Dieu en tant qu'êtres humains féminins sont incapables d'agir comme femmes prêtres *in persona Christi*.<sup>14</sup>

Il faut d'ailleurs noter que l'interprétation du choix des douze Apôtres dans le sens d'un sacerdoce masculin excluant les femmes par volonté du Christ (VII, 26)<sup>15</sup>, est exégétiquement anachronique.<sup>16</sup> Au contraire, je constate avec intérêt que

*Mulieris dignitatem* s'inspire parfois de l'exégèse biblique de la théologie féministe.<sup>17</sup> L'attitude libératrice de Jésus est soulignée et les femmes dans les Evangiles sont mises en relief (VII, 12-16). Comme pour l'activité des femmes mentionnée dans les épîtres pauliniennes (VII, 27), il est à remarquer que cette "*Her-story*" concerne la période préinstitutionnelle de l'église, où le contexte socio-culturel androcentrique serait moins déterminant.

### De theotokos au Dieu Mère

Du point de vue post-patriarcal, la figure de Marie est un problème majeur dans le catholicisme, tant romain qu'orthodoxe. Valorisée comme mère de son Fils et assimilée à l'église, épouse du Christ, l'inculturation doctrinale de cette nouvelle Eve ressort manifestement du "*mammismo*" méditerranéen, phénomène socio-anthropologique d'origine préchrétienne.

*Mulieris dignitatem* impose constamment Marie comme modèle par excellence pour les femmes, dont la vocation spécifique est définie selon la "sexologie" typologique, c'est-à-dire comme maternité ou virginité (VI, 19-20; VIII, 29). Dans ce symbolisme nuptial la nouvelle Eve joue le rôle de l'humanité vis-à-vis du partenaire divin, le nouvel Adam. Lorsque Marie est portée aux limites de l'humain par les dogmes de 1854 (*immaculata conceptio*) et 1950 (*assumptio*), cette transposition de la hiérarchie des deux sexes de l'ordre créateur à l'ordre du salut reste inaltérée.<sup>18</sup>

Il est important de savoir que la fonction maternelle de Marie est dans la doctrine traditionnelle définie de manière androcentrique. Ainsi, le terme *theotokos* du concile d'Ephèse en 431 présuppose la gynécologie du temps, selon laquelle la mère est réceptacle passif de semence paternelle et fonctionne ensuite comme couveuse nourrisante pour le fœtus. Il s'agit de préciser le caractère divin de l'enfant mis au monde humainement par

Marie.<sup>19</sup> Le glissement terminologique postérieur, de celle qui enfante Dieu, *Deipara/Dei genitrix*, à mère de Dieu, *mater Dei*, est ici significatif. Introduit dans la théologie au VII<sup>e</sup> siècle, ce dernier terme est utilisé par les scolastiques comme synonyme de *Dei genitrix*. La désignation *mater Dei*, préférée dans *Mulieris dignitatem* (II, 3-4, VI, 19), n'apparaît dans un concile qu'à Vatican II, et alors comme synonyme de *genitrix Dei Filii*.<sup>20</sup>

En conséquence, il est essentiel de comprendre que l'invocation de Marie typologique comme modèle féminin est déficiente dans le sens que les femmes sont privées de modèle sur le plan divin. Contradictoire pour les femmes définies comme pleinement théomorphes par l'image désormais holistique, la nouvelle Eve devient parfaitement nocive dans la mesure où elle est utilisée pour conserver des rôles spécifiquement féminins de genre patriarcal.

Lorsque les femmes et les hommes sont également créés à l'image de Dieu dans leur humanité masculine et féminine, il faut utiliser des métaphores aussi bien féminines que masculines dans cette verbalisation humaine qu'est la théologie. L'Anglaise Julian of Norwich (morte après 1416) est ici une pionnière de théologie féministe. Dans ses *Showings*, elle décrit la maternité du Dieu trinitaire, actualisée par le Christ préexistant, incarné, crucifié et ressuscité.<sup>21</sup> Julian reprend le thème atypique du Christ humainement gynécomorphe afin d'illustrer la totalité de la miséricorde divine. Son discours sur Christ Mère est original dans le sens que cette maternité est décrite comme constitutive de la nature divine du Christ, en tant que Personne de la Trinité. Par cette nouvelle définition trinitaire de "*God our Mother*", Julian parfait les concepts traditionnels du Dieu andromorphe ou métasexuel. L'incommensurabilité traditionnelle entre divinité et féminité est finalement supprimée. De ce fait, le modèle théologique du féminin est transposé du plan humain de la *theotokos* au niveau divin du Dieu Mère.<sup>22</sup>

L'oeuvre de Julian était sans doute peu connue dans son temps, les manuscrits des *Showings* ont été préservés par un

hasard providentiel. Introduite dans le calendrier liturgique de l'église anglicane en 1980, Julian of Norwich serait une excellente candidate à canoniser par son église catholique, comme patronne d'inculturation théologique!

### III. Inculturation continuée

La corrélation entre divinité et humanité, tant féminine que masculine, où la totalité de Dieu est métaphoriquement verbalisée par la plénitude humaine, est à la fois condition pour et conséquence de la nouvelle *imago Dei* holistique. A propos de l'andromorphisme symétrique, *Mulieris dignitatem* souligne très justement le caractère humainement incarné de la Révélation: "*homine facto, Deus loquitur humano sermone, sententiis et imaginibus utitur humanis*" (III, 8, 1668). Tout discours humain est nécessairement conjectural en tant qu'inculturé dans les contextes historiquement changeants. De ma perspective du catholicisme féministe, le caractère unilatéralement masculin de cette verbalisation, tant dans l'Écriture que dans la tradition chrétienne, s'érige en obstacle entre les femmes et Dieu. La doctrine et le symbolisme traditionnels sont aujourd'hui encore plus inadéquats par le fait d'avoir été basés sur la seule expérience des hommes.

En effet, les écrits des femmes transmis en nombre limité dans la tradition chrétienne ont régulièrement été contrôlés, corrigés ou même censurés par l'église institutionnelle. Un tel pouvoir clérical expliquerait que ces femmes semblent toutes accepter l'axiome de la subordination féminine comme ordre créateur. D'autre part, la matristique de l'Antiquité et du Moyen Âge démontre des ingénieuses stratégies de survivance. Ces *mulieres religiosae* escamotent le schéma androcentrique par une affirmation tenace de leur équivalence rédemptrice. Il en résulte que leur activité charismatique est plus ou moins tolérée par

l'église institutionnelle, à condition qu'elles ne défient pas la primauté masculine comme norme créationnelle.

A ce propos, il est intéressant de noter que la liste des saintes femmes donnée dans *Mulieris dignitatem* inclut des exemples particulièrement énergiques, mais également entravés, comme Birgitta de Suède (morte en 1373) et l'Anglaise Mary Ward (morte en 1645) (VII, 27). Birgitta fut canonisée déjà en 1391, comme défenseur de la papauté romaine contre le rival à Avignon, mais son projet d'un ordre de femmes et d'hommes, avec l'abbesse comme *caput et domina*, ne fut jamais réalisé selon sa *Regula Saluatoris* originale.<sup>23</sup> Mary Ward insista pour fonder un institut de religieuses actives, avec une mère générale autonome sur le modèle de la compagnie des jésuites. Emprisonnée à Munich en 1631 par l'ordre du Saint-Office, elle ne fut réhabilitée comme fondatrice qu'en 1909.<sup>24</sup> En effet, le féminisme chrétien actuel trouve d'excellentes devancières au cours de l'histoire de l'église!<sup>25</sup>

Pour conclure: Tout discours sur Dieu et sa relation avec l'humanité ne devient pleinement humain qu'en se fondant sur l'expérience *et* des femmes *et* des hommes. La principale tâche de la théologie de notre temps est de verbaliser l'interaction du divin et de l'humain dans un langage qui ne soit ni androcentrique ni gynécocentrique, mais holistique. L'effort "féministe" des Pères de l'église pour insérer les femmes dans l'humanité théomorphe est ici exemplaire; non pas en reproduisant leur contenu doctrinal, mais en imitant leur réinterprétation du donné scripturaire. Par cette inculturation continuée la tradition chrétienne serait maintenue vivante en tant que créative et dynamique.

NOTES

- \* Version originale de l'article "Immagine aggiornata, tipologia arretrata". Dans éd. Maria Antonietta Macciocchi: *Le Donne secondo Wojtyła*. Milano 1992, 197-212.
1. AAS 80, 1988, 1653-1729.
  2. Cette évolution doctrinale est étudiée dans éd. Kari Elisabeth Børresen: *Image of God and Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition*. Oslo 1991. Les articles traitent: Génèse 1-2 (Phyllis A. Bird), Judaïsme (Anders Hultgård), Epîtres pauliniennes (Lone Fatum), Tradition de l'*enkrateia* (Giulia Sfameni Gasparro), Christianisme primitif (Kari Vogt), Interprétation patristique et scolastique de Gen. 1,27 et I Cor. 11,7 (Kari Elisabeth Børresen), Intérprétation de Luther et Calvin (Jane Dempsey Douglass), *Imago Dei* et herméneutique féministe (Rosemary Radford Ruether).
  3. La Norvégienne Aasta Hansteen: *Kvinden skabt i Guds Billede* (La femme créée à l'image de Dieu). Christiania 1878. Elle interprète l'homme comme créé à l'image du Père, la femme comme créée à l'image du Saint-Esprit, tandis que les deux sexes sont créés à l'image du Fils, en tant que représentant la plénitude de la nature humaine, 5-7. Elle explique que l'unicité de l'humanité, masculine et féminine, reflète l'unicité de la Trinité divine, 14. Remarquer la formule semblable dans *Mulieris dignitatem* (III, 7, 1665): "Quod homo, creatus uti vir et mulier, imago est Dei, non significat tantummodo quemvis eorum singillatim esse similem Deo, utpote ratione praeditum et liberum; significat etiam virum et mulierem, uti "unitatem duorum" creatos in communi humana natura, vocatos esse ad vivendum in amoris communionem sicque ad indicandam communionem amoris, quae in Deo est, cuius virtute tres Personae amant inter se in intimo unicae vitae divinae mysterio".
  4. Kari Elisabeth Børresen: *Subordination et Equivalence*. Nature et rôle de la femme d'après Augustin et Thomas d'Aquin. Oslo, Paris 1968. Traductions de la version revue: *Natura e ruolo della donna in Agostino e Tommaso d'Aquino*. Assisi 1979. *Subordination and Equivalence*. The Nature and Role of Woman in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Washington, DC, 1981. *Equivalencia y subordinación según san Agustín*. Naturaleza y papel de la mujer. = *Augustinus* 30, Madrid 1985, 97-197.
  5. Gertrude Reidick: *Die hierarchische Struktur der Ehe*, Münchener Theol. Studien III, Kan. Abt. 3, München 1953.



6. Ida Raming: *Ausschluss der Frau vom priesterlichen Amt: Gottgewollte Tradition oder Diskriminierung?* Köln 1973. *The Exclusion of Women from the Priesthood: Divine Law or Sex Discrimination?* Metuchen, NJ 1976.
7. Vat.II: Gaudium et spes 9,29,60. Adhortatio apostolica: Christifideles laici IV,49-50. = AAS 81, 1989, 486-492.
8. = AAS 60, 1968, 481-503. Promulguée sans tenir compte de la majorité des experts consultés.
9. Kari Elisabeth Børresen: *Imago Dei*, privilège masculin? Interprétation augustinienne et pseudo-augustinienne de Gen. 1,27 et I Cor. 11,7. = *Augustinianum* 25, Roma 1985, 213-234.
10. Kari Elisabeth Børresen: In defence of Augustine: how *femina* is *homo*. Dans éd. B. Bruning et al: *Collectanea Augustiniana*. Mélanges T.J. van Bavel. Louvain 1990, 263-280.
11. Kari Elisabeth Børresen: L'usage patristique de métaphores féminines dans le discours sur Dieu. = *Revue théologique de Louvain* 13, 1982, 205-220. God's Image, Man's Image? Female Metaphors describing God in the Christian Tradition. = *Temenos* 19, Helsinki 1983, 17-32.
12. = AAS 69, 1977, 98-116. Promulguée sans tenir compte de la majorité des experts consultés.
13. In IV Sent., dist. 25, art. 2, qu. 1, fund. 2, concl.
14. Kari Elisabeth Børresen: The Ordination of Women: to nurture tradition by continuing inculturation. = *Studia Theologica* 46, København 1992, 3-13.
15. Cf. Adhortatio apostolica: Christifideles laici IV,51. = AAS 81, 1989, 492-493.
16. Hervé Legrand: *Traditio perpetuo servata?* La non-ordination des femmes: Tradition ou simple fait historique? Dans éd. Paul De Clerk, Eric Palazzo: *"Rituels". Mélanges offerts au Père Gy*. Paris 1990, 393-416.
17. Voir l'oeuvre de pionnière d'Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza: *In Memory of Her. A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. New York 1983.
18. Kari Elisabeth Børresen: *Anthropologie médiévale et théologie mariale*. Oslo 1971.
19. Kari Elisabeth Børresen: Marie dans la théologie catholique. = *Concilium* 19, Paris 1983, 93-106.
20. Lumen gentium 53, cf. 66, 69. Le terme *Deipara* dans 57, 61, 63, 69 et *Dei genitrix* dans 66, 67.

21. Eds. Edmund Colledge, James Walsh: *A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich* 1-2, Toronto 1978. (Edition critique largement annotée du texte original en Middle English). *Julian of Norwich. Showings*, New York 1978. (Traduction du texte). La métaphore du Dieu Mère se trouve aux ch. 48, 52, 54, 57-63, 74, 83.
22. Kari Elisabeth Børresen: Christ notre Mère, la théologie de Julienne de Norwich. = *Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft* 13, Mainz 1978, 320-329.  
Julian of Norwich: a Model of Feminist Theology. Dans le volume présent, 295-314.
23. Kari Elisabeth Børresen: Birgitta's Godlanguage. Exemplary Intention, Inapplicable Content. Dans éd. Tore Nyberg: *Birgitta, her Works, and her Five Abbeys in the Nordic Countries*. Odense 1991, 21-72.  
Birgitta of Sweden: a Model of Theological Inculturation. Dans le volume présent, 277-294.
24. L'institut original fut condamné et supprimé par la bulle d'Urbain VIII, *Pastoralis Romani Pontificis*, 13-1-1631. Concernant la lutte des femmes pour participer à l'apostolat sans clôture, voir Joseph Grisar: *Maria Wards Institut vor römischen Kongregationen. (1616-1630)*. *Miscellanea Historiae Pontificiae* XXVII, Roma 1966.
25. Voir par exemple Adriana Valerio: *Cristianesimo al Femminile*. Donne protagoniste nella storia delle Chiese. La Dracma 1, Napoli 1990.

*Kari Vogt:*

## Catholicisme et Islam: Une rhétorique apologétique commune à propos de la femme\*

L'objet de cette courte confrontation est d'attirer l'attention sur certains aspects du vocabulaire et de l'argumentation employés dans *Mulieris dignitatem*. En lisant ce texte, j'ai en effet été frappé par des expressions et une thématique analogues à celles, bien familières, qu'utilise le discours islamique/islamiste<sup>1</sup> contemporains - tel qu'il s'est développé de la fin des années 1930 jusqu'à aujourd'hui. Malgré les différences profondes qui séparent les prémisses théologiques des deux religions, on ne peut nier les convergences d'une rhétorique essentiellement orientée vers l'apologétique. En effet, les deux rhétoriques prennent pour point de départ "une humanité en mutation profonde"<sup>2</sup> et soulignent la nécessité de voir le statut de la femme "réévalué à la lumière d'un critère supérieur".<sup>3</sup>

### **Vocabulaire et thématique apologétique**

Le titre même de "dignité de la femme" indique une idée directrice qui va se présisant dans le sens d'un "statut spécial de dignité"; ce statut découle lui-même d'une "spécificité" ou d'une "nature de la femme". "La vocation féminine" est aussi "une vocation spéciale", et à cette "vocation" correspond une "dignité" qui exige "respect". Dans le contexte islamique/islamiste, le même point de départ entraîne un grand nombre de variantes sur le thème: "aucune loi ou constitution humaine n'égale l'Islam pour ce qu'il a donné à la femme de respect et de droits"<sup>4</sup>; car

un trait caractéristique de l'Islam serait de tenir compte de la "véritable nature de la femme", et de "lui permettre de recouvrer le respect de la société".<sup>5</sup>

### **Ordre créateur et ordre du salut**

Dans les deux discours la thématique est articulée sous la distinction axiale entre ordre créateur et ordre du salut. Les deux réthoriques soulignent la situation subordonnée de la femme selon l'ordre créateur, en même temps qu'elles insistent sur l'égalité de l'homme et de la femme quant à l'ordre du salut. Autrement dit, dans les deux discours, il y a convergence pour établir l'égalité des sexes quant au salut, tout en précisant que la femme a un rôle "spécifique" à jouer dans ce monde, différent de celui de l'homme. Une telle distinction est fondatrice d'une culture et d'une pratique juridico-politique séculaire, car cette "égalité devant Dieu" n'implique nullement une disparition des différences sociales et juridiques existant entre les deux sexes. Ceux-ci sont, comme le précise Abu-l-Ala Mawdudi, "également pourvus et honorables"<sup>6</sup>; cette constatation est cependant loin de permettre une égalité dans les tâches ou dans les fonctions. *Mulieris dignitatem* précise que "les ressources personnelles de la femme ne sont certes pas moindres que celles de l'homme, mais elles sont seulement différentes"<sup>7</sup> et, souligne la lettre apostolique, une mauvaise compréhension de l'idée d'égalité ne mène la femme qu'à "déformer et perdre ce qui constitue sa richesse essentielle"<sup>8</sup>. Ces admonestations trouvent leurs parallèles, nombreux et tout aussi clairs, dans la littérature islamique.<sup>9</sup> En résumé, les deux réthoriques voient dans la "spécificité féminine" un argument de poids révélateur d'une hiérarchie sexuelle voulue par Dieu et qui doit donc être conservée, renforcée ou réinstaurée.

Les passages du Nouveau Testament se référant à l'ordre rédempteur du Christ sont bien connus; pour ce qui est de

l'apologétique islamique/islamiste, on fait avant tout référence à la sourate 4,124: "tous les croyants, hommes et femmes, qui font le bien: voilà ceux qui entreront au Paradis", ainsi qu'à la sourate 3,195: "je ne laisse pas perdre l'action de celui qui, parmi vous, homme ou femme, agit bien. Vous dépendez les uns des autres." Des deux côtés, les références aux textes sacrés sont complétées par des références aux femmes qui, tout au long de l'histoire, ont actualisé le message religieux de façon pertinente et exemplaire.<sup>10</sup> La littérature islamique/islamiste fait référence à A'isha ("l'une des sources les plus fiables du Hadith") ou à d'autres femmes de l'entourage du Prophète, ou encore, exemple classique, à la grande mystique Rabi'a-l-Adawiya (IX<sup>e</sup> siècle).<sup>11</sup> La littérature chi'ite, pour sa part, fait, bien sûr, allusion à la fille du Prophète, Fatima.

### **La dignité de mère et d'épouse**

Dans le cadre de la célébration du bicentenaire de la Révolution française de 1789, le bureau de Paris de la Ligue des Etats Arabes a publié un recueil de textes et de témoignages intitulé "Les Droits de l'Homme en Islam"; au paragraphe "Des femmes" on trouve cités deux versets du Coran et quatre hadiths.<sup>12</sup> Le Coran 9,71 ainsi que cette parole attribuée au Prophète: "Le Paradis est sous les pieds des mères", font allusion à la femme dans son rôle de mère et d'épouse, thématique fondamentale de l'apologétique islamique/islamiste comme de l'apologétique catholique. Dans les deux traditions, la femme est définie en fonction de sa maternité, renvoyant elle-même à des données biologiques irréductibles à celles de l'homme. On lit aussi dans *Mulieris dignitatem* que la maternité est un "processus biophysique", qui, nécessairement, est liée à une "disposition psychologique". C'est là un point-clef de toute l'argumentation, qu'elle soit catholique ou islamique/islamiste. En s'appuyant sur les textes sacrés, sur la Tradition, voire en se référant à l'analyse

scientifique,<sup>13</sup> on définit une "spécificité féminine" toujours liée à sa fonction instrumentale dans la procréation; la fonction créatrice chez la femme se trouve ainsi explicitement liée à une structure psycho-bio-physiologique. La lettre apostolique précise bien qu'il s'agit là d'une "créativité très importante"; en outre, le femme est plus particulièrement désignée pour accomplir des tâches caritatives. Là réside sa "mission civilisatrice"! Dans les textes islamiques/islamistes, on retrouve les mêmes formulations toujours basées sur la distinction axiale déjà mentionnée. On apprend ainsi que ce n'est qu'en respectant la vraie nature de la femme qu'on l'aidera à "assumer son rôle de mère et d'éducatrice des générations futures, jouissant d'une place d'honneur au sein de notre communauté".<sup>14</sup> Les deux réthoriques soulignent à plaisir que l'homme et la femme sont égaux en valeur, mais *complémentaires* dans leurs fonctions. Cette idée de complémentarité devient ensuite un argument en faveur d'une division du travail dont on connaît les conséquences dans nos sociétés encore de nos jours. *Mulieris dignitatem* conclue en mettant la femme en garde contre la tentation de "s'approprier les caractéristiques masculines, au détriment de sa propre originalité féminine".<sup>15</sup> Ce point d'importance n'est pas autrement précisé par la lettre apostolique, alors qu'il est amplement développé dans la littérature islamique/islamiste.<sup>16</sup>

Du fait du "statut de dignité spécifique" de la femme, l'homme se doit de traiter son épouse avec amour et respect. Ce point de vue est commun aux deux réthoriques, chacune brandissant ses textes sacrés. La lettre apostolique fait référence à l'Épître aux Ephésiens 5, 25: "Maris, aimez vos femmes", où la relation entre époux reflète la relation hiérarchique existant entre le Christ et l'église. Du côté islamique, c'est le Coran 9,71 qui est cité: "Les croyants et les croyantes sont amis les uns des autres", ce qui, en soi, insiste plus clairement que la référence chrétienne sur l'idée de réciprocité.

## Conclusion

En tant que catholique et historienne des religions, je ne puis qu'être frappée en constatant ce parallélisme, non seulement dans les "argumentations", mais aussi dans le vocabulaire et la thématique théologique fondatrice des énoncés précédents. Dans les deux cas, on revendique une "spécificité" qui n'est jamais explicitée par des considérations scientifiquement, historiquement ou anthropologiquement fondées. Les notions de "spécificité" ou de "nature féminine" sont utilisées de façon axiomatique pour perpétuer une condition féminine largement reconsidérée et modifiée dans la pratique juridique et sociale moderne.

En montrant l'option apologétique des rhétoriques catholique et islamique/islamiste, j'ai voulu réagir contre une opposition excessive de portée apologétique qui s'est imposée dans la littérature occidentale au sujet de "l'Islam" et du christianisme ou, plus généralement, de l'Islam et de l'Occident. Il est clair qu'en ce qui concerne le discours sur la "dignité" spirituelle ou morale des femmes, sur toute "spécificité" psychologique fondée ou non sur des "données" biologiques, les religions monothéistes continuent - du moins dans leurs expressions officielles - d'utiliser la thématique transcendantalisante des métaphysiques platoniciennes et néo-platoniciennes avec leurs abstractions valorisantes sur la condition humaine.

On ne saurait se contenter non plus sur un tel sujet, d'une sociologie fonctionnaliste, descriptive qui observe les rôles des femmes et des hommes en tant qu'agents sociaux ou sujets privés auxquels sont conférés des droits et assignés des devoirs. Il faudrait accéder à une sociologie *déconstructive*<sup>17</sup> qui dévoilerait comment des instances de pouvoir politique et/ou religieux assignent des rôles et des statuts, imposent la reproduction de ces rôles en ressassant justement les discours illusoire sur la "dignité", la "spécificité", les "droits de l'homme et du citoyen" que nous retrouvons dans nos deux rhétoriques apologétiques.

La déconstruction des instances de pouvoir qui décident de l'attribution des rôles et des status, doit être complétée par une anthropologie du droit, de la sexualité et des liens entre sexualité, économie et pouvoirs (stratégie des alliances matrimoniales, contrôle de la loi sur l'héritage, contrôle de la sexualité par le code de l'honneur, etc.) Ce n'est qu'en se fondant sur de telles analyses que le problème toujours posé de la condition féminine - et donc nécessairement masculine - pourrait recevoir des réponses nouvelles même, bien sûr, dans les pensées religieuses contemporaines.

On ne peut s'étonner que ces pensées ne parviennent pas encore à dépasser leurs thématiques apologétiques, puisque ni les discours féministes profanes, ni les discours scientifiques n'arrivent à ébranler des représentations séculaires qui continuent de commander nos langages, nos conduites et nos pensées.

## NOTES

\* Version élargie de l'article "La dignità specifica della donna nel Cattolicesimo e nell'Islam" dans éd. Maria Antonietta Macciocchi: *Le Donne secondo Wojtyła*, Milano 1992, 339-344.

1. Les qualificatifs *islamique*, *musulman* et *islamiste* doivent désormais être soigneusement distingués: le premier réfère aux doctrines et aux définitions idéales fournies par la pensée islamique dans ses grands oeuvres classiques (VII-XII<sup>e</sup> siècles); le second s'applique aux musulmans en tant qu'agents sociaux et historiques qui se réclament de références *islamiques*; le troisième enfin concerne tous les usages que l'idéologie de combat - combat de libération contre les doctrines coloniales et combats nationalistes pour les constructions nationales - a faits des enseignements islamiques à des fins politiques depuis les années 1950, mais plus encore depuis le triomphe politique de la Révolution, dite islamique en Iran.

Pour plus de précision sur cette terminologie, cf. Mohammed Arkoun: De l'islam à l'islamisme, de la religion à l'idéologie, dans éd. Camille et Yves Lacoste, *L'Etat du Maghreb*, Paris 1991, 369-374.



Pour le vocabulaire: *islamisme/islamiste*, remplaçant *fondamentalisme* ou *intégrisme*, voir Olivier Carré: Essai de typologie descriptive des mouvements radicaux d'inspiration musulmane, dans édts. Olivier Carré et Paul Dumont, *Radicalismes islamiques*. L'Harmattan, Paris 1985, 5-21, et Bruno Etienne, *L'Islamisme radical*, Hachette, Paris 1987, 8-36.

2. *Mulieris dignitatem* § 1.
3. Khursid Ahmad: Introduction, dans B. Aisha Lemu & Fatima Heeren, *Women in Islam*. Islamic Foundation, London 1976, 7. Texte traduit et publié également en arabe et en indonésien.
4. Mohammed Abdelhamid Abou Zaid: *Makanat al-mar'a fil islam*. Le Caire 1979, 72.
5. Iran. *Final Constitution*. Part 2, Status of Women, Teheran 1980.
6. Abul A'la Mawdudi: *Purdah and the Status of Women in Islam*. Islamic Publications. Lahore 1979, 157. (Première édition 1939.)
7. MD § 10.
8. MD § 10.
9. Voir par ex. Muhammed Qutb: Islam and Women, dans *Islam. The Misunderstood Religion*. Lahore 1980, 90-131. (Première édition, Le Caire 1964.)
10. MD § 10.
11. Lemu & Heeren, op. cit., 14-17.
12. *Les Droits de l'Homme en Islam*. Ligue des Etats Arabes. Paris 1989, 9.
13. MD § 18; Mawdudi, op. cit., 115-116.
14. Iran. *Final Constitution*, Part 2. Status of Women. Teheran 1980.
15. MD § 11.
16. Cf. Mawdudi, op. cit., Chap. 5 et 6: Tragic Consequences, 37-71.
17. On connaît les techniques actuelles de l'analyse des discours; on ne se contente pas d'étudier les formes manifestées de la rhétorique, on descend dans les mécanismes internes, les principes et les postulats implicites qui commandent l'articulation du sens en surface. La déconstruction des discours théologiques est une tâche neuve et nécessaire dans la mesure où ces discours viennent fonder des idéologies envahissantes aujourd'hui.