THE224 Christian Narrative 2 Redemption

Unit 5 Reading

Weinrich, “Women in the History of the Church: Learned and Holy, But Not Pastors”

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Women in the History of the Church:

Learned and Holy, but Not Pastors

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If it was once true that women were a neglected factor in church history, that imbalance is quickly being rectified. There is a spate of recent books on the history of women in the church that chronicle their institutions, their influence, and their contributions. As typical examples one may mention the three-volume collection of scholarly essays, *Women & Religion in America*, edited by Rosemary Ruether and Rosemary Keller, and the monograph *Holy Women in Twelfth-Century England*, by Sharon K. Elkins.[1] There is little doubt that such scholarship is making a significant contribution to our understanding of the church's past and, specifically, of the place and importance of women in it.

From within evangelical circles, the most important contribution to the history of women in the church is *Daughters of the Church*, by Ruth A. Tucker and Walter Liefeld.[2] This book offers historical vignettes about women who have in one way or another exercised active, public leadership roles in the centuries of the church's past. While striving to be objective, Tucker and Liefeld nevertheless exhibit a predilection for feminist interpretations of the evidence. Yet, that aside, they have amassed a considerable amount of material so that their book can nicely serve as a kind of women's "Who's Who in Church History."[3]

In a short article we cannot encompass the full breadth of women's contributions to the church's life and faith through the centuries. We do wish, however, briefly to indicate some of the ways women have contributed to the church as well as the unbroken teaching and practice of the church that the recognized teaching and sacramental ministry of the church is to be reserved for men.

I. "Daughters of the Church" in Word and Deed

A. Service of Prayer and Charity

It is, I suppose, impossible to escape the trap of describing the contributions of women, or of men, to the church primarily in terms of leadership and influence. After all, historical sources tend to focus on persons who did something or said something of extraordinary importance and therefore have been remembered and

recorded. Yet we ought not be oblivious to one-sided activistic assumptions. The life of faith can be "active" in prayer, contemplation, and charity, and there have been myriad women, and men, who have excelled in these "silent works."

In fact, the early church had a distinct group of women called "widows" who were dedicated to prayer and intercession.[4] The *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus (c. 210 A.D.) speaks of widows as "appointed for prayer" (chap. 11), and the *Didaskalia Apostolorum* (Syria, c. 230 A.D.) similarly speaks of the widows as having prayer as their primary duty: "for a widow should have no other care save to be praying for those who give and for the whole Church."[5] Other early Christian writers make clear that widows as a group held a place of considerable honor and dignity. Often they are listed along with the bishop, elders, and deacons (e.g., Origen, *Hom. in Luc.* 17), and Tertullian calls them an "order" and says that widows were assigned a place of honor within the assembled congregation (*On Modesty* 13.4).[6] Although prayer and intercession were the primary tasks of the widow, the *Didaskalia* indicates that by the third century the widows in some churches were engaged in charitable work. Such charity would consist in hospitality, working at wool to assist those in distress, and visiting and laying hands on the sick.[7] The *Apostolic Church Order* (Egypt, fourth century) evinces a similar two-fold division of prayer and service. Three widows are to be appointed: "Two of them are to dedicate themselves to prayer for all those in trial and to be ready for revelations. . . . The one is to be ready to serve, attending upon those women who are ill" (chap. 21).[8]

Especially in eastern Christianity (Syria, Chaldea, Persia), social mores that severely limited social access to women required the creation of a distinctly female diaconal ministry for the evangelization and care of women. The order of deaconess first takes concrete form in the *Didaskalia*.[9] The first duty of the deaconess was to assist the bishop in the baptism of women by anointing their bodies and ensuring that their nudity was not seen. Beyond this duty, the *Didaskalia* says that the deaconess had the responsibility of teaching and instructing the newly baptized women, apparently serving as a spiritual mother exhorting them to chastity. In addition, the deaconess was to visit Christian women in the homes of the heathen, to visit women who were ill, to bathe those women who were recovering from illness, and to minister to women in need.[10]

Subsequent ecclesiastical legislation in eastern Christianity reiterates these functions of the deaconess, but they add other responsibilities. The *Apostolic Constitutions* (Syria, fourth century) indicate that the deaconess supervised the seating and behavior of the female part of the worshiping community. She was a keeper of the doors to prevent men from mingling in the women's section of the church, and she served as intermediary between the male clergy and the women of the congregation (*Apost. Const.* 2.57ff.; 2.26; 3.15ff., 19).[11] The *Testament of Our Lord Jesus Christ* (Syria, fifth century), which gives to the widow what other legislation gives to the deaconess, does give the deaconess one duty, to bring communion to pregnant women unable to attend Easter mass (*Test.* II 20.7).

Such legislation reveals a feminine ministry of considerable significance and responsibility. Indeed, the importance of the deaconess is indicated by the fact that she was an ordained member of the clergy.[12] In other regions, where the separation of the sexes was not so strict, such a female diaconate was not required, but the title of deaconess was introduced as a degree of honor to enhance the dignity of a woman religious called upon to oversee a convent. Such a deaconess-abbess

not only would administer the life of the convent and oversee its charitable activities, but also could perform certain liturgical services in the absence of a priest.[13]

Typical of this kind of deaconess was Olympias. Born into wealth in fourth-century Constantinople, she used her wealth to found a convent that included a hostel for priests as well as a number of hospitals. Her fame was enhanced by her friendship with John Chrysostom, with whom she corresponded while he was in exile.[14] According to Palladius, Olympias "catechized many women."[15] Perhaps another such deaconess-abbess was a certain Mary who is known only from her tombstone (found in Cappadocia): "according to the text of the apostle, raised children, practiced hospitality, washed the feet of the saints and distributed her bread to those in need."[16] In the East where convents frequently were located in isolated places and priests might not be present, a deaconess-abbess could perform certain liturgical services: distribute communion to the nuns, read the Gospels and the holy books in a worship assembly, etc.[17]

Although the West never had a developed female diaconate[18] and the deaconess disappeared also in the East by the twelfth century, the deaconess ideal of charity and teaching for the sick and poor experienced a significant renewal in the nineteenth century. Indeed, Kathleen Bliss would write that in terms of its subsequent influence, the revival of deaconess in Germany in the early nineteenth century was "the greatest event in the life of women in the Church since the Reformation."[19] In Germany the deaconess trained primarily as a nurse and only secondarily as a teacher. The model for this nurse-deaconess was the deaconess home at Kaiserwerth begun in the 1830s by a Lutheran pastor, Theodore Fliedner. Its focus was the care of the sick poor, the orphan, discharged women prisoners, and the mentally ill.[20] Other deaconess training schools on the Kaiserwerth model began all over Germany, such as that in Neuendettelsau in 1854, but the success of Fliedner's enterprise was measured in international terms. By the mid-nineteenth century, Kaiserwerth nurses and teachers were staffing hospitals and schools in America, Constantinople, Smyrna, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Bucharest, and Florence.[21]

A different type was the Anglican deaconess, whose training was mostly theological and pastoral. The inspiration for this female diaconate came from Elizabeth Ferard, who—with six other women—founded the London Deaconess Institution in 1862. Unlike the German deaconess, who worked largely independently of the church, the Anglican deaconess was responsible to the bishop of the diocese in which she worked. Well trained theologically, the Anglican deaconess worked in the parish or taught in school.[22]

In her 1952 report on the function and status of women in the member churches of the World Council of Churches, Kathleen Bliss listed in addition to the deaconess these types of women parish workers: (1) the trained lay parish worker whose duties might include Sunday school and youth work, Bible study, home visitation, hospital visiting, preparation for confirmation, and social case work; (2) parish helpers; (3) directors of religious education; (4) trained youth leaders; (5) church social workers; (6) Sunday school organizers.[23] Throughout the history of the church thousands of dedicated women have carried on the tradition of prayer, Christian charity, and care begun in the early church by the widow and deaconess. Happily, the stories of some of these women are being told. An example of this is a recent book by Barbara Misner, who chronicles the history and work of eight different groups of Catholic women religious in America

between 1790 and 1850.[24] Among their "charitable exercises" she mentions especially the care of the sick, work during cholera epidemics, and care of orphans.

B. Service of Mind and Pen

Although the opportunity to exercise their literary and intellectual abilities could vary considerably given historical circumstances, Christian women nonetheless have bequeathed to the church a respectable literary and intellectual legacy. From the beginning, Christian women have been interested in the study of the Scripture and Christian theology. Already in the second century we hear of a young woman named Charito who was martyred with Justin Martyr, most probably because she was associated with Justin's school in Rome (*Martyrdom of Justin* 4). We know also that the lectures of Origen were well attended by women, the most famous being Mammaea, the mother of Emperor Alexander Severus, who had a military escort bring Origen to Antioch so she could test his understanding of the divine things (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.21.3ff.). Yet, it was the great Roman matrons of the fourth century whose combination of the ascetic life and the study of the Scriptures and the Church Fathers became, through the influence of Jerome, the ideal image of women dedicated to the religious life. Two of these highborn ladies, Marcella and Paula, founded circles of ascetic women in their homes whose central purpose was the intensive study of the Bible. Jerome became their mentor and introduced them to the study of the Old Testament in Hebrew. Paula learned Hebrew so well that she could chant the Psalms without a trace of Latin accent. Marcella is called by Jerome his "task-mistress" because she incessantly demanded of him complete explanations of Hebrew words and phrases.[25] "With her probing mind Marcella wished to have all the obscurities, especially the linguistic ones, of the text cleared up; and although their meetings were frequent, she often insisted on his setting down his solutions on paper."[26] Paula and Jerome eventually established monastic communities for women and for men in Bethlehem.

Another Roman ascetic matron who conjoined learning and monastic life was Melania the Elder. She, along with Rufinus of Aquileia, formed monasteries in Jerusalem. Palladius speaks of Melania's deep learning:

> Being very learned and loving literature, she turned night into day perusing every writing of the ancient commentators, including the three million (lines) of Origen and the two hundred and fifty thousand of Gregory, Stephen, Pierius, Basil and other standard writers. Nor did she read them once only and casually, but she laboriously went through each book seven or eight times. (*Lausiac History* 55)

A similar circle of studious women gathered in Constantinople around Theodosia, the sister of Amphilocius of Iconium. Olympias, deaconess and friend of John Chrysostom, was educated in this circle.

In this context we should mention also Macrina, whose strength as a woman ascetic and a theological mind is glorified by her brother, Gregory of Nyssa, in his *Life of Macrina*. Gregory's *On the Soul and the Resurrection* is presented as a Socratic dialogue between Gregory and Macrina in which Macrina is depicted as the protagonist and teacher.

The tradition of learned monastic women continued into the medieval period. Lioba (eighth century), sister of St. Boniface, "had been trained from infancy in the rudiments of grammar and the study of the other liberal arts." "So great was her zeal for reading that she discontinued it only for prayer or for the refreshment of her body with food or sleep: the Scriptures were never out of her hands." "She read with attention all the books of the Old and New Testaments and learned by heart all the commandments of God. To these she added by way of completion the writings of the Church Fathers, the decrees of the Councils and the whole of ecclesiastical law."[27] Princes and bishops, we are told, "often discussed spiritual matters and ecclesiastical discipline with her" because of her knowledge of the Scripture and her prudent counsel.[28] The Venerable Bede (eighth century) reports that Abbess Hilda of Whitby required those under her direction "to make a thorough study of the Scriptures" and that she did this to such good effect "that many were found fitted for Holy Orders and the service of God's altar."[29] Indeed, five bishops trained at Whitby under Hilda's direction.

The love of reading the Scriptures and the Church Fathers led convents also to the copying of manuscripts. In c. 735, St. Boniface wrote to Abbess Eadburga requesting that she have a copy of the epistles of Peter made in letters of gold. "For many times by your useful gifts of books and vestments you have consoled and relieved me in my distress."[30] Among other things, these words of Boniface reveal how logistically important and supportive English convents were to the Anglo-Saxon missionaries on the Continent.

Although the volume of theological and spiritual literature composed by Christian women is less than that written by Christian men, throughout the history of the church there have been capable women who have been productive with the pen. We have mentioned already women like Marcella and Olympias, who engaged in correspondence with Jerome and John Chrysostom. Their letters, unfortunately, no longer exist. However, a not inconsiderable body of writing by Christian women is extant.

Perhaps the earliest writing we have from a Christian woman is the account of Vibia Perpetua of her sufferings and visions as a Christian martyr. Martyred under Septimius Severus (c. 202 A.D.), Perpetua's personal account was included by an unknown redactor in the *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*, which became a model for later Acts of the martyrs, especially in North Africa.[31] One of the most fascinating documents of the early church is the travel diary of Egeria (late fourth century). Egeria, a noble woman from southern France, spent several years as a pilgrim in the East, traveling to Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Asia Minor. Taking notes along the way, she later wrote them up as her *Travels*. It is clear from her narrative that Egeria was steeped in the classics of the church, and "her language often echoes that of the Bible or of formal prayer."[32] Her account contains some of the most helpful and informative detail we possess of early monasticism and liturgy.

A rather unique contribution to Christian literature is the Virgilian cento by Proba. Born a pagan in fourth-century Rome, Proba was educated in the classical writers of Latin literature, especially in Virgil, whom she especially loved. In the fourth century it was fashionable to write cento poetry. A cento is a poem produced by piecing together lines from the works of another poet, resulting in a new poem with a new theme. After becoming a Christian, Proba wrote a cento, borrowing from the works of Virgil, in which she intended to present the whole of

the Biblical history.[33] About one-half of the 694 lines relates the beginning of the Old Testament (creation, fall, flood, the exodus), but then Proba moves to the gospel story of Jesus. Although Jerome harshly criticized it, and the Gelasian Decretal "On Books to be Received and not to be Received" (496 A.D.) placed it among the apocryphal writings, Proba's *Cento* became a popular school text in the Middle Ages.[34] Its frequent use is attested by the number of manuscripts containing it and the catalogues of monastic libraries.

Eudoxia is another Christian woman who produced a respectable literary output. The daughter of a pagan philosopher, Eudoxia was instructed "in every kind of learning" (Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 7.21). She was later baptized a Christian and became the wife of Emperor Theodosius II (408-450). The greater part of her writing has been lost.[35] However, much of a cento drawn from the works of Homer is extant, as is the so-called *Martyrdom of St. Cyprian*. The *Martyrdom* tells of a certain Antiochian magician named Cyprian who fails in his effort to tempt a young Christian virgin and is rather himself led to become a Christian. The story ends with the martyr death of Cyprian and of the young maiden under the Emperor Diocletian.[36]

The tradition of literary Christian women continued into the Middle Ages. Abbess Hildegarde of Bingen (1098-1179) was an extremely influential visionary and prophetess whose correspondence included "four popes, two emperors, several kings and queens, dukes, counts, abbesses, the masters of the University of Paris, and prelates including Saint Bernard and Thomas à Becket."[37] Commanded by a heavenly voice to write down her visions, Hildegarde wrote two major works, *Know the Ways of the Lord* (*Scivias*) and *Book of Divine Works*. Both works belong to the medieval genre that "combined science, theology, and philosophy in a description of the universe, internal (the human body) and external (the earth and the heavens)."[38] Her works evince a familiarity with Augustine and Boethius as well as with contemporary scientific writers. Portions of her *Scivias* were read by Pope Eugenius III and St. Bernard and elicited from the pope a letter of praise and approval.[39] In addition to her two major works and her extensive correspondence, Hildegarde wrote lives of St. Disibod and St. Rupert, hymns, books on medicine and natural history, fifty allegorical homilies, and a morality play.

In Spain, the Catholic Reformation had a major female voice in St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582). As a young woman she entered the Carmelite convent at Avila. There, later in life, she began to experience visions and ecstasies, and these in turn led her to propose a reform of the Carmelite order according to its original, more austere rule. Although there was powerful opposition to Teresa, support from Pope Paul IV and from King Philip II enabled her to establish many convents for her "discalced" (barefoot) Carmelite nuns. Of her most important writings, two are autobiographical. The *Life* describes her visions and discusses the centrality of prayer, and *Foundations* describe the establishment of her convents. Teresa wrote her most important mystical writings for her nuns. The *Way of Perfection* teaches the virtues of the religious (monastic) life and uses the Lord's Prayer as the vehicle for teaching prayer. The *Interior Castle* presents mature Teresian thought on the spiritual life. Growth in prayer enables a person to enter into deeper intimacy with God, who dwells in the soul or "interior castle" of the person. Some thirty-one poems and 458 letters of Teresa are extant.

Not all significant writing by women, however, issued from the religious orders. Marguerite Porete (c. 1300) was an important leader in the Beguine movement. The Beguines were pious laywomen who practiced poverty, chastity, and charity but belonged to no monastic order and took no vows. Their independence from church authority sometimes brought them into suspicion of heresy, and this was the fate of Marguerite as well. Nevertheless, her book, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, enjoyed considerable popularity in France, Italy, and England.[40] Another such woman was Mme. Jeanne Guyon, who—with Fenelon—was a spiritual leader in the Quietist movement in late seventeenth-century France. Her literary production amounted to some forty books, including a multi-volume commentary on the Bible.

In the nineteenth century, hymn writing by women came into its own.[41] Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743-1825) wrote *Hymns in Prose for Children*, which was popular for many years and was translated into French, Spanish, and Italian. "Praise to God, Immortal Praise" is one of her best-known hymns. Charlotte Elliot (1789-1871) wrote around 150 hymns, including "Just As I Am." Sarah Adams (1805-1848) wrote "Nearer, My God, to Thee." But in addition to her hymns Adams wrote also *Vivia Perpetua*, a dramatic poem about the conflict between paganism and Christianity, and *The Flock at the Fountain*, a catechism and hymnbook for children. Cecil Frances Alexander (1823-1895) wrote around four hundred hymns, mostly for children. Among her most beloved hymns are "There Is a Green Hill Far Away," "Once in Royal David's City," and "Jesus Calls Us O'er the Tumult." Frances R. Havergal (1836-1879), well trained in the classics and mistress of several foreign languages, composed over fifty hymns. These include "Take My Life and Let It Be," "I Am Trusting You, Lord Jesus," and "Now the Light Has Gone Away." From the twentieth century we may mention Dorothy F. Gurney (1858-1932), who wrote "O Perfect Love," and Julia C. Cory (1882-1963), who wrote "We Praise You, O God." And it is hard to imagine how anyone can top Fanny J. Crosby (1820-1915), author of over three thousand hymns, including the well-known "Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior," "Rescue the Perishing," and "Sweet Hour of Prayer."

Two women have been significant as translators of hymns. The foremost translator of German hymnody has been Catherine Winkworth (1829-1878), whose renderings are the most widely used of any from the German language. Her translations are contained chiefly in her *Lyra Germanica: Hymns for the Sundays and Chief Festivals of the Church Year* and *Christian Singers of Germany*. Winkworth was sympathetic with any practical efforts for the benefit of women, and from that interest wrote the *Life of Pastor Fliedner*, about the chief architect of the German deaconess movement. Second only to Winkworth as a translator of German hymns is Jane Borthwick (1813-1897). Her *Hymns from the Land of Luther* contains "Be Still, My Soul" (itself composed by a woman, Catharina von Schlegel, b. 1697).

The literary contribution of women to the faith and life of the church has continued into our own century. Of great influence was Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941). Born into an agnostic home, she converted to Roman Catholicism through a religious experience that led her to investigate spiritual experience. Underhill became an internationally recognized authority in mystical theology, and her book *Mysticism* (1911) became a standard text in that discipline. In *Worship* (1936), Underhill studied the nature and forms of Christian worship. Eventually

Underhill was led into the Anglican communion by Baron Friedrich von Hügel, with whom she shared a long and fruitful spiritual relationship. Underhill herself served as a spiritual director for many, and she conducted many retreats in spirituality. Underhill's distinction is indicated by the fact that she was the first woman invited to give a series of theological lectures at Oxford University (1921). She became a Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, and received a Doctor of Divinity degree from Aberdeen.

Dorothy L. Sayers (1893-1957) is another example of an influential woman thinker and writer. The daughter of an Anglican minister, Sayers studied medieval literature at Oxford. While her initial success was as a writer of detective novels, her renown comes from her work as an expositor of orthodox Christian faith through translations, plays, and books. Her play *The Man Born to Be King* (written for BBC) was a dignified presentation of the life of Christ. Her background in medieval literature bore fruit in her translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, which is perhaps the most-used English translation of that classic. Sayers was a lay theologian of some merit. Her treatment of God and the creative process, *The Mind of the Maker* (1942), argues that the creative process is analogous to the government of the world by the Trinity wherein both the sovereignty of God and the freedom of man are preserved. Sayers was a prolific writer, whose works, both popular and scholarly, require their own book to catalogue.[42]

Women also have written popular and devotional literature. As a representative of this writing we mention Corrie ten Boom, whose popular books—*The Hiding Place*, *Tramp for the Lord*, *In My Father's House*—detail her courageous love to Jew and Christian during and after World War II.

C. Service of Spiritual Power and Administration

Christian women have exercised spiritual power in many ways. The early church praised the steadfastness of its female martyrs and saw in them examples of Christ's victory over Satan and death. Some of these female martyrs were clearly instrumental in eliciting faithfulness also from others. Blandina (d. 177 A.D.), apparently a slave girl, was hung on a post and seemed to hang in the form of a cross. Her earnest prayer "aroused great desire in those who were suffering," for with their eyes they saw in the person of Blandina "Him who was crucified for them" (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.1.41). Similarly, Potamiaena (d.c. 210 A.D.), a pupil of Origen in Alexandria, is said to have influenced the soldier who led her to her death to become a Christian martyr himself, and "it is related that many others of those at Alexandria came over all at once to the word of Christ . . . because Potamiaena appeared to them in dreams and invited them" (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.5.7). Writing around a century later, Eusebius says that Potamiaena "is to this day still loudly sung by her fellow-countrymen" (*Hist. eccl.* 6.5.1).[43]

Female prophetic figures have on occasion exercised considerable spiritual direction and influence in the church. In the second century there were a number of female prophetesses in the churches of Asia Minor. We hear of the daughters of Philip the evangelist, who were active at Hierapolis (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.31.4; cf. Acts 21:8ff.), and of a certain Ammia who prophesied at Philadelphia (*Hist. eccl.* 5.17.2-5). The *Acts of Paul* mention Theonoe, a prophetess at Corinth.

Yet, it is especially in the Middle Ages that one finds powerful, prophetic women. We have already mentioned Hildegarde of Bingen, who wrote her visions down and whose advice and counsel were sought by popes and princes so that

her influence was perhaps not excelled in the Middle Ages. Of similar influence was Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) who was instrumental in the return of Pope Gregory XI to Rome from the Papal "Babylonian Captivity" in Avignon. Indeed, Walter Nigg can write that "no man has yet dared to speak to a wearer of the tiara as radically and openly as she spoke to Pope Gregory XI in Avignon."[44] Another prophetess contemporary to Catherine was Bridget of Sweden (1302-1373). Her visions and revelations led her also to work for the reform of ecclesiastical abuse and for the return of the papacy to Rome.[45] Finally, we may mention Caterina Fieschi Adorno, known as Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510). Following an ecstatic conversion, she committed herself to personal austerity and to the care of the poor and diseased at the Genoese hospital. She was also a mystical writer of merit.

Especially in the religious orders the spiritual power of Christian women could be ordered, officially recognized, and institutionalized. Nowhere was this more strikingly the case than with the medieval abbesses, whose powers could approach those of a bishop. The double monasteries in the seventh- and eighth-century Merovingian and Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were normally governed by abbesses. These women were ordinarily from royal or noble lineage, and the monasteries that they administered were extensions of royal power and were means for maintaining the wealth of the family.[46] "They were masterful and formidable ladies and they did not forget that they belonged to a ruling caste."[47] As such, these noble abbesses ruled their monasteries, nuns and monks alike. They were builders of churches and monasteries and demonstrated administrative wisdom.[48] They attended royal councils and ecclesiastical synods. One may mention Abbess Hilda at the Council of Whitby (664 A.D.) and Abbess Aelffled at the Synod of Nidd (706 A.D.).[49]

Yet, it is doubtful whether one can speak meaningfully of the "egalitarianism of the double monasteries," as do Tucker and Liefeld.[50] Although nuns and monks shared common functions in the scriptoria, the schools, and perhaps the divine services, the early double monasteries were, as noted, extensions of a ruling family's power and as such governed by a member of the ruling family, the abbess, who "ruled the whole organization in the spirit of one accustomed to command."[51] Moreover, nuns and monks lived separately, and their work was divided, the nuns doing the less strenuous work and the monks the rougher work. Finally, the abbesses had no episcopal power and no power to excommunicate or to administer the sacraments (note the case of the abbess of Quedlinburg, below, p. 272).

The institution of the double monastery and female monasticism in general declined during the ninth and tenth centuries. However, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries there was a revival of the double monastery, nurtured by the piety of the *vita apostolica* (which emphasized poverty and personal holiness) and utopian enthusiasm. This renewal culminated in the founding of the Premonstratensian Order by Norbert of Xanten and of the Order of Fontevrault by Robert of Arbrissel. In these foundations, nuns lived with monks, with an abbess usually at the head. In the case of Fontevrault, this rule of the abbess may have reflected the view that men should be obedient to women as St. John was to the Virgin Mary.[52] Similar were the Gilbertines founded by Gilbert of Sempringham. The Gilbertines were founded on a millennial vision of the kingdom of God encompassing all, men and women.[53]

Although there were variations, the abbesses of such foundations could have considerable authority. They administered community property, awarded benefices and spiritual offices, held their own chapter meetings, gave the benediction to their own nuns, and received ofttimes an oath of obedience from all those in the community, both men and women. And this power was not only tolerated but defended by the church, even against offending clergy. For example, in 1222 Pope Honorius III upheld the authority of the abbess of Quedlinburg, who had suspended from office and benefice a number of canonesses and clergy because of disobedience and certain other offenses. The Pope wrote to the abbot of Michelstein that he was to force the offenders, by ecclesiastical censure if necessary, to obey and defer to proper authority.[54]

However, in these institutions where the equal status of women in the communal life of the monastery was unquestioned and even held high, ultimate spiritual jurisdiction was not accorded to the abbess. Even the Gilbertines had a male master general who was "the judge to whom all controversial or difficult decisions were referred" and who heard "any confessions that the prioresses had reserved for his special attention, especially first confessions and those considered grave."[55] Also, in the case involving Pope Honorius III it is clear that the abbess had no power to excommunicate. It is for that reason that the abbot of Michelstein was called in. He could censure with excommunication.[56] The abbess was not merely the equivalent of the abbot or bishop.

The tradition of spiritual influence by women in religious orders continued after the Reformation. We have mentioned already Teresa of Avila, who gained the support of Pope Paul IV and King Philip II for her reform of the Carmelite Order. Closer to our own time is Elizabeth Bayley Seton (d. 1821). Born into a distinguished colonial, Episcopalian family, Seton early evinced great concern for the sick and poor, earning the name of the Protestant Sister of Charity. When she converted to Roman Catholicism, she went to Baltimore and eventually to Emmitsburg, Maryland, where she founded the American Sisters of Charity. Under her leadership, orphanages were opened in Philadelphia and New York, and in 1818 Seton started the first free parochial school in America. For such schools she trained teachers and prepared textbooks. After her death, the Sisters of Charity opened the first Catholic hospital in the United States (St. Louis, 1828).

In the same tradition was Frances Xavier Cabrini (d. 1917), the first American citizen to be canonized (1946). Born and raised in Italy, she was sent to America to work among the thousands of Italian immigrants. In that work she founded orphanages, schools, and hospitals, not only in the United States but also in South America and Europe.

Nor was it always the activist and organizer who exerted spiritual influence. Not until after her death did Therese of Lisieux (d. 1897) become known through her autobiography. But then her simplicity and humility elicited such worldwide reaction that Rome hastened the process of canonization. Therese was sainted in 1925.

Within Protestantism too the influence of women of faith has been significant. Wibrandis Rosenblatt (d. 1564) was married successively to three major reformers (John Oecolampadius, Wolfgang Capito, Martin Bucer) and gave gracious, intelligent hospitality to their guests. Calvin was supported by two prominent noblewomen: Marguerite of Navarre (d. 1549), the sister of King Francis I, and Renee of Ferrara (d. 1575). Especially supportive of the Protestant cause in France

was Jeanne d'Albret (d. 1572), the daughter of Marguerite and the mother of King Henry IV.[57]

However, given the Reformation emphasis on proclamation, not surprisingly Protestant women too were interested in preaching and outreach. A central figure in the evangelical revival of eighteenth-century England was Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon (d. 1791). Through her status and wealth she was the benefactress of John Wesley, George Whitefield, and other itinerant Methodist preachers. She founded colleges for the training of evangelical, even dissident, preachers and built chapels for them to preach in. Selina was interested in Whitefield's mission to Georgia and organized the sending of preachers to the Indians there. In that she was "a forerunner of those Wesleyan women in the nineteenth century who would find their first public identity in the development of missionary societies and social reform organizations."[58]

Indeed, the influence and participation of women in mission work has been considerable. Tucker and Liefeld document some of the primary figures and contributions in this area.[59] Here we may refer to those numerous women who have supported missions through various mission societies such as the Baptist Missionary Union, the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, and the Lutheran Women's Missionary League.

As individual examples of women in missions we may mention Clara Swain (d. 1910), who was the first female medical missionary to a non-Christian land (India), and Mary Slessor (d. 1915), who served for thirty-eight years as missionary in Calabar (modern Nigeria). There she built churches and schools, preached, taught, and even served as a magistrate on behalf of the government.

II. "It is Not Given to Women to Teach": The Central Tradition

By selected example we have illustrated the broad and respected contributions that Christian women have made to the church throughout its history. These contributions have been intellectual, diaconal, and evangelical, and have carried with them spiritual power and recognized authority. Many women have achieved sainthood, and some have received titles of highest honor. Within Eastern Orthodoxy a number of women—Mary Magdalene, Thekla, Helena, and Nina, missionary to the Georgians—are regarded as "equal to the apostles," and Catherine of Siena and Teresa of Avila were named "doctors of the church" by Pope Paul VI.

In fact, women have done almost everything men have, and have done it just as well. The significant exception to that generalization is that, until the very recent past, the "office" of teaching and of the sacramental ministry, with the jurisdictional powers this implies, has been reserved for men. Of course, there have been historical anomalies, and there have been sects and peripheral groups that accepted women preachers who may also have offered the eucharist.[60] Yet, in its broad central tradition and practice, the church—East and West and in a multiplicity of cultural and social settings—has consistently maintained that to men alone is it given to be pastors and sacramental ministers.

Tertullian (second century) may be taken as a representative voice of this viewpoint: "It is not permitted to a woman to speak in church. Neither may she teach, baptize, offer, nor claim for herself any function proper to a man, least of all the sacerdotal office" (*On the Veiling of Virgins* 9.1). Photius, ninth-century

Patriarch of Constantinople, echoes the same sentiment for Eastern Christendom: "A woman does not become a priestess" (*Nomocanon* 1.37). This general prohibition did not rest on some idea of a natural inferiority of women to men in intellect or spiritual stature. John Chrysostom writes that "in virtue women are often enough the instructors of men; while the latter wander about like jackdaws in dust and smoke, the former soar like eagles into higher spheres" (*Epistle to Ephesians*, Hom. 13.4). Commenting on Priscilla's teaching of Apollos in view of 1 Timothy 2:12, Chrysostom says that "Paul does not exclude a woman's superiority, even when it involves teaching," when the man is an unbeliever and in error (*Greet Priscilla and Aquila* 3).[61] We have already noted Christian women whose counsel, advice, and intellectual gifts were valued by men. To those may be added the three "ammas" or "mothers" (Theodora, Sarah, Synkletika) whose sayings are included in the Eastern church's *Geronikon* ("Sayings of the Desert Fathers").[62]

Nor does the evidence suggest that the church's exclusion of women from the preaching and teaching "office" was an unevangelical accommodation to social and cultural pressures. In fact, the social and cultural context of Christianity at times favored the church's admitting women to the teaching "office." In first- and second-century Asia Minor, for example, the social position of women was well developed. There were female physicians, and Ephesus had its female philosophers among the Stoics, Epicureans, and Pythagoreans, who were known to teach, perhaps publicly. Likewise, female leadership and priesthood were well known in the local religious cults (Cybele, Isis, Demeter, Artemis).[63]

The first clear patristic opposition to female teachers and ministers is in reaction to Gnostic groups that often regarded women as the special bearers of revelation.[64] In their denial of the creation, the Gnostics refused to take seriously any fleshly, creaturely differences, so that Tertullian complains that among them no distinctions are made between catechumens and believers, women and men, neophyte and experienced faithful, layman and priest. In his rejection of such Gnostic egalitarianism, Tertullian writes of their women: "how wanton they are! For they are bold enough to teach, to dispute, to enact exorcisms, to undertake cures, it may be even to baptize" (*Prescription Against Heretics* 41.5). It is evident that Tertullian believes the Gnostics are engaging in a practice contrary to the standing practice of the church. Otherwise his point that in creed and practice the Gnostics are contrary to the church would lose all force. It is equally evident that a distinction of functions between man and woman in the church relates in some way to actual distinctions in creation. Against the Gnostic, to maintain a distinction of male and female function was to confess a creation theology that respected the concrete, fleshly differences between man and woman.[65]

Montanism was also important in early patristic prohibitions of women teaching and baptizing in the church. Montanism was an outburst of Christian apocalypticism that taught that a new outpouring of the prophetic Spirit had begun the last days. With Montanus and two prophetesses, Prisca and Maximilla, as its leaders, Montanism held to a spiritual egalitarianism based on the common outpouring of the end-time, prophetic Spirit. Montanism appears then to have granted women a more extensive participation in the worship services. Yet, even Montanism seems generally to have respected functional distinctions in the church. The general prohibition by Tertullian, "it is not permitted to a woman to speak in Church" (*Veiling of Virgins* 9.1), was written within his Montanist

period. The account of a Montanist woman who had visions "amidst the sacred rites of the Lord's day in the church" and who "after the people are dismissed at the conclusion of the sacred services" reports her visions to the church's leaders illustrates how Montanist prophecy and Tertullian's prohibition coexisted (Tertullian, *On the Soul* 9).

The basic question raised by Montanism was whether the church understood itself to be essentially apostolic or essentially prophetic. The apostle, witness to the resurrection and confined to the first generation of the church, represented the finality of the revelation of the Word that happened once in history. The prophet, who rises again and again, does not and cannot represent Christ as final truth. When the prophet asserts his independence and autonomy, the finality of the revelation in Christ is threatened. The prophetic must be subordinated to the apostolic. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Fathers appeal to Pauline (apostolic) statements against women speaking in church as well as to the practice of Christ and the completed canonical histories of the Old and New Testaments.

Commenting on 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, Origen (third century) criticizes the Montanist prophetesses. Apparently the Montanists justified their prophetesses by an appeal to the four prophet daughters of Philip and to Old Testament prophetesses. To this Origen replies: "If the daughters of Philip prophesied, at least they did not speak in the assemblies; for we do not find this fact in the Acts of the Apostles." Deborah, Miriam, and Huldah were prophetesses. Yet, "there is no evidence that Deborah delivered speeches to the people, as did Jeremias and Isaias." Miriam and Huldah also did not speak to the people. Similarly, in the Gospel the prophetess Anna "did not speak publicly." The apostolic statements in 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:12 correspond to the Biblical history.[66]

Epiphanius provides similar argumentation against two fourth-century "feminine" movements. The "Quintillians," an aberrant Montanist group, appealed to Eve, who had eaten of the tree of knowledge, as prototype for a female clergy. Epiphanius explicitly says that they had women bishops and women presbyters and that they justified this on the basis of Galatians 3:28. To counter the appeal to Eve, Epiphanius quotes Genesis 3:16 and 1 Timothy 2:14 ("Adam was not deceived, but Eve was first to be deceived") along with 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 11:8 (*Against the Heresies* 49.1-3). The Collyridians venerated Mary as a virtual goddess, and women in the group served as priests in offering up a sacrifice of bread rolls in her name. Epiphanius attacks the women's claim to exercise the sacerdotal ministry: "Never from the beginning of the world has a woman served God as priest." In litany fashion Epiphanius runs through the Old and New Testaments pointing out that God's priests were always men but never a woman. Mary herself, the mother of the all-ruling Son of God, was not entrusted to baptize, that being given to John (*Against the Heresies* 78-79). Similar appeals to the Biblical history and to the example of Christ are made by the *Didaskalia* (Connolly, 133, 142), the *Apostolic Constitutions* (3.6, 9), and the *Apostolic Church Order* (24-28).

Fourth-century Latin opposition to women teaching in the church was probably occasioned by a Montanist-like revival named "Priscillianism." The sect was popular with women, and to give them an official function it seems to have imported from the East the title of "deaconess," which until then was not known in the West. In their commentaries on Paul, "Ambrosiaster" and Pelagius both express the view that it is contrary to the order of nature and against apostolic

injunction for women to speak in an assembly of men. Ambrosiaster is especially harsh in his attitude.[67] In view of Priscillianism church councils also condemned the public teaching by women and reiterated the apostolic prohibition against women speaking in the church. The Council of Saragossa (380 A.D.) warned Catholic women not to attend Priscillian meetings where women might give readings and teach. The Council of Nimes (396 A.D.), reacting to reports that certain ones were admitting women to the "Levitical ministry," rejects such a practice as an innovation "contrary to apostolic discipline" and not permitted by the ecclesiastical rule.[68]

There were occasional instances into the early Middle Ages when women did serve at the altar. Invariably this practice received stiff ecclesiastical censure. To bishops in southern Italy and Sicily, Pope Gelasius I "with vexation" speaks of reports of women who "serve at holy altars": "everything that is entrusted exclusively to the service of men is performed by the sex that has no right to do so" (*Letter* 11.26). In the early sixth century, two priests in Brittany allowed women to assist them in the celebration and distribution of the Lord's Supper. This elicited a letter from three Gallic bishops. The distribution of the blood of Christ to the people by women was "a novelty, and unheard-of superstition."[69] In the early ninth century, several bishops wrote to Louis the Pious that "contrary to divine law and canonical directive, women enter the sanctuary, handle the consecrated vessels without fear, pass clerical vestments to the priests, and . . . distribute the Body and Blood of the Lord to the people." They had tried to take measures to prevent such liberties. "It is most astonishing that this practice, which is forbidden in the Christian religion, could have crept in from somewhere; . . . undoubtedly it took hold through the carelessness and negligence of some bishops."[70] While the details of what was prohibited and allowed to women might vary, "there was complete constancy regarding the bans on ministering and especially . . . on 'female ministers of Communion.'"[71]

It is perhaps necessary to mention the fifth- and sixth-century Gallic councils, for they have been cited recently as proof that there was a gradual suppression of ordained female ministry in the early Middle Ages. The Council of Orange (441 A.D.) ruled: "Deaconesses are absolutely not to be ordained; and if there are still any of them, let them bow their head under the benediction which is given to the congregation." The subsequent councils of Epaon (517 A.D.) and Orleans (533 A.D.) finally prohibited the consecration of women to the diaconate. Suzanne Wemple claims these councils were "a battle against female ministers." Of the Council of Orange she writes: "We do know that, by 441, the Gallican church had ordained deaconesses who regarded themselves as equals to the male clergy. . . . The bishops assembled at Orange were apparently determined to abolish the feminine diaconate, to humiliate the women who had already been ordained, and to assert the exclusivity of male authority in the church."[72] Tucker and Liefeld give a similar judgment. Quoting the "commonly used" ordination prayer for the deaconess in the *Apostolic Constitutions* (8.20), they comment: "By the sixth century, such consecrations were becoming less and less common in the Western church. . . . church councils during the sixth century gradually lowered the status of these women until the position of deaconess was virtually nonexistent."[73]

The fact is that "such consecrations" were never common, indeed never existed in the West. Also, to my knowledge the "commonly used" prayer of the *Apostolic Constitutions* was used nowhere else than in the provenance of the

Constitutions themselves, that is, in eastern Syria. The mixing of eastern and western evidence by Tucker and Liefeld produces quite a false historical reconstruction. Detailed study of the deaconess has amply shown that "there is no evidence that such deaconesses like those in the *Apostolic Constitutions* with social and limited liturgical duties ever existed in the West.[74] Ambrosiaster and Pelagius reveal no knowledge of deaconesses in the West. The language of the councils itself indicates that the practices they opposed were unfamiliar and uncommon. The Council of Nimes acts on a report and does not even know the location where the abuse is taking place ("one knows not where"). The Council of Orange wonders "if there are still any" of the ordained deaconesses. They also speak of innovation and novelty. The claim of Wemple that between 395 and 441 the ordination of deaconesses had become "common practice in the churches of Gaul" is wholly overdone.[75] The title *deaconess* appears to have been an import from the East. The reality behind the title in the West was the widow who wished to be consecrated to the ascetic life.[76]

In sum, there never was recognized ordained female ministry in the West (or East) that involved teaching in the assembly and ministering at the altar.

The canonical regulations that govern church life and circumscribe what is permissible are consistent throughout the Middle Ages in prohibiting women from teaching in the assembly and performing priestly and episcopal functions. The *Statuta Ecclesiae antiqua* of Gennadius of Marseilles (c. 480 A.D.), which adapts eastern practice for western life, allows the nuns and widows to teach women who are to be baptized ("to teach clearly and with exactitude unlearned women from the country"), but it also repeats the general prohibitions: "a woman, however learned and holy, may not presume to teach men in the assembly" (*in conventu*); and, "a woman may not presume to baptize." Again and again this text is cited in bans on teaching. Likewise, the ban of Pope Innocent III (thirteenth century) on the preaching and hearing of confession by powerful abbesses is a commonplace in canon law: "No matter whether the most blessed Virgin Mary stands higher, and is also more illustrious, than all the apostles together, it was still not to her, but to them, that the Lord entrusted the keys to the Kingdom of heaven."[77] The *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, the present-day book of canon law in the Roman Catholic Church, is the final recipient of the long tradition that has its origin in Paul: "Only a baptized man validly receives sacred ordination" (canon 1024).

Sometimes it is asserted that the canonical prohibitions were motivated by misogyny and false evaluations of women's intellectual and moral capacities. Misogynous remarks and opinions of inferiority do exist. Yet, Manfred Hauke correctly notes that the language of Gennadius' *Statuta*—"however learned and holy"—and of Innocent III—whether Mary "stands higher than all the apostles"—indicates that ultimately and officially considerations of intellect and sanctity were not determinative. Determinative were the Biblical history, the example of Jesus, and the apostolic injunctions.[78]

Within Protestantism, the major Reformation and post-Reformation leaders assumed without question the practice of reserving the office of pastor and sacramental minister to men. Their strong "Scripture alone" principle led them, however, to rely almost exclusively on actual apostolic prohibition. Appeal to the Biblical history and to the example of Jesus is correspondingly less frequent.

Against Rome's use of 1 Corinthians 14:34 to argue the existence of a spe-

cial priesthood not common to all Christians, Martin Luther (d. 1547) consistently maintained a priesthood of all believers (especially on the basis of 1 Peter 2:9). This common priesthood possesses the right and power to exercise all "priestly offices" (teach, preach, baptize, administer the Eucharist, bind and loose sin, pray for others, sacrifice, judge doctrine and spirits).[79] Yet, Luther habitually combines 1 Corinthians 14:34 with Genesis 3:16 to assert that women are excluded from the public exercise of the common priesthood. In view of the "ordinance and creation of God" that women are subject to their husbands, Paul forbade women "to preach in the congregation where men are present who are skilled in speaking, so that respect and discipline may be maintained."[80] However, if no man is present to preach, then "it would be necessary for the women to preach."[81] For Luther, the apostolic prohibition of 1 Corinthians 14:34 was determinative.

John Calvin (d. 1564) also understood Paul's prohibitions as excluding women from speaking in an "ordinary service or where there is a Church in a regularly constituted state." The office of teaching is "a superiority in the Church," and therefore it is inconsistent that a woman, who is under subjection, should preside over the entire body.[82] Commenting on 1 Corinthians 14:34, Calvin writes: "It is therefore an argument from things inconsistent—If the woman is under subjection, she is, consequently, prohibited from authority to teach in public."[83] In his commentary on 1 Timothy, Calvin writes similarly: Paul "excludes [women] from the office of teaching, which God has committed to men only."[84] Although Calvin recognizes that some women in the Old Testament were supernaturally called by the Spirit to govern the people, "extraordinary acts done by God do not overturn the ordinary rules of government, by which he intended that we should be bound."[85]

The only significant group that denied the continuing applicability of Paul's prohibitions was the Society of Friends (Quakers). Their strong emphasis on the interiority of the Spirit militated against any distinctions in church life. George Fox (d. 1671), founder of the Quakers, and especially Margaret Fell (d. 1702) argued that the authority of the indwelling Spirit gave women equal right and obligation to speak, even in public assemblies.

John Wesley (d. 1791) repeatedly attempted to distinguish Quaker views and practices from those of Methodism, in which women also at times spoke in public. Wesley's own view was conservative. The ordinary rule of discipline, based on 1 Corinthians 14:34, was that women should be in subjection "to the man whose proper office it is to lead and to instruct the congregation."[86] Nonetheless, Wesley claimed that "an extraordinary impulse of the Spirit" suspends the apostolic regulation and allows a woman to speak in public.[87] Yet, the Methodists are not like the Quakers, who "flatly deny the rule, although it stands clearly in the Bible." The Methodists, however, "allow the rule; only we believe it admits of some exceptions." Indeed, Wesley regarded Methodism itself to be "an extraordinary dispensation" of divine providence, so that he did not wonder "if several things occur therein which do not fall under the ordinary rules of discipline."[88]

Other Reformation and post-Reformation groups largely concurred with the views of Luther, Calvin, and Wesley. The Anabaptists, the Anglicans, the Puritans, and the Separatists all prohibited women from the public ministry of preaching and teaching. While groups that emphasized religious experience and interior calling did allow women to assume (more or less restricted) public

preaching, not until the nineteenth century did women begin to make significant strides toward a ready acceptance of any public ministry. It has been only in the last half of the twentieth century that the major Protestant church bodies have begun to accept women as regular preachers and pastors.

III. Conclusion

We have emphasized the practice and argument of the patristic and medieval periods of the church's history. It was during these centuries that patterns of conduct and ecclesial behavior were developed and solidified. The evidence shows that the Pauline statements against women speaking in the church were consistently upheld. Contrary practices were regarded as innovative and opposed to the truth and were, by ecclesiastical discipline and censure, excluded from the church. The practice of the early and medieval church was followed without question by the churches of the Reformation, both Reformed and Lutheran, and by virtually all other communions until the most recent past. Although they are favorable to the full participation of women in all functions of the church, Tucker and Liefeld note that even women who did seek a position of prominence rarely evinced "feminist impulse" but rather were "very hesitant to challenge the 'rightful' leadership of men."[89] That observation as much as anything testifies to the pervasive and universal faithfulness of the church to the Biblical and apostolic word throughout its history. The utter paucity of instances adduced where women were given or took the function of public preaching and teaching confirms it.