



Few such intricate and complex historical tapestries of words have ever been woven, and this unique piece is marked by the beauty and grace godly women bring to every setting of which they are a part! Though I would not agree theologically with every woman documented in this volume, I would affirm the accuracy of this extraordinary historian, Diana Severance. Not only does she reject any popular revisionism, but she also approaches the stage of history with amazing perception and sensitivity, pulling from the shadows some dedicated and gifted women who have often been overlooked. This volume will be the centerpiece for our Women in Church History course and is a book I recommend every woman read and study and keep within reach for reference and inspiration! No woman should graduate from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary without a copy in her personal library!

Dorothy Kelley Patterson

Professor of Theology in Women's Studies
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Fort Worth, Texas

'What women these Christians have!' exclaimed Libanius, the fourth century teacher of rhetoric. His words are amply underscored and vividly illustrated in this deeply researched and highly readable survey of the last 2,000 years – an appraisal that Diana Severance invariably places against the enduring touchstone of Scripture.

Richard Bewes

OBE, Author and retired rector of All Souls Church
Langham Place, London

Feminine Threads is a must-read for men and women alike, but especially so for young women who need to have a clear view of the contributions that women before them have made to the Christian faith. Dr Severance has written a volume that is both comprehensive and engaging. She wipes away the dust of history to clear many false claims and popular misconceptions, leaving a clear view of the inspiring efforts of women in the life of the church for the past 2,000 years. A much needed resource for the church at large!

Carolyn McCulley

Author of *Radical Womanhood: Feminine Faith in a Feminist World*
Arlington, Virginia

In *Feminine Threads* Diana Severance has given us an extraordinary and valuable blend of biography, church history and biblical teaching on Christian womanhood. Whilst running counter to the feminism of our own day, together with its revisionist agenda, Dr Severance traces the remarkable story of the role and influence of women in the life of the church from the time of Christ to our present generation. Unafraid to include and evaluate the mixed and





occasionally confused contribution of some, she has provided us with a record packed with spiritual insights and one that is both timely and significant.

Faith Cook

Author
Derbyshire, England

Christian historians in the past have not always been as faithful in their calling as they could have been, for frequently they forgot one half of the story of God's Church, namely, the role of women in it. Diana Severance's study is therefore a welcome one, for with lively prose and scholarly care she has given us an excellent overview of the various ways in which Christian women have sought to live for Christ. A must read for all who are interested in the riches of Christian history.

Michael A. G. Haykin

Professor of Church History and Biblical Spirituality
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Louisville, Kentucky

I sat down to dip into this for half an hour and ended up reading it for three! It is a 'magnum opus' of heart-warming and inspirational testimonies. All the usual women of faith are here: Mary the mother of Jesus, Monica, Katie Luther, Susanna Wesley, Selina Hastings and Sarah Edwards, but so too are the less well known ones. I cried at the courage of Blandina, was rebuked by the single-mindedness of Leoba and challenged by the godliness of Margaret of Scotland. No-one reading this book can fail to be encouraged by the faith of these ordinary women who, in their own generation, humbly trusted the Word of God and lived to serve the Lord of whom it speaks. It left me wondering if there are any women in my own generation who trust and serve like this, and moved me to pray that there would be - and that, by the grace of God, I might be one of them.

Carrie Sandom

Author and Coordinator of Women's Ministry at *The Bible Talks*
Mayfair, London

This is a wonderful book about how God has used so many women in the history of the church to fulfill his purposes of grace and bring honor to the cause of Christ. Well researched and well written, this study of 'feminine threads' in Christian history makes for a tapestry of inspiration and instruction for all who love the Lord and his church - men and women alike.

Timothy George

Founding Dean of Beeson Divinity School
Samford University
Birmingham, Alabama





Feminine Threads

Women in the

Tapestry of Christian History



DIANA LYNN SEVERANCE

CHRISTIAN
FOCUS





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Nineteenth-century author Elizabeth R. Charles
wrote a fitting tribute to Christian women
throughout the ages

‘No cold gravestones are these memorials, but sun-pictures of our beloved ones who are withdrawn from our sight for a time, but whom we hope one day to see ... They are but leaves from the tree of life which is for the healing of the nations, always life and always healing, whether found in the chilliest zones of Christendom or in the most tangled wildernesses ... these, we must always remember, are no[t] ... portraits of an ... aristocratic caste of ... saints. They are specimens of the universal Christian life demanded of us all, lived by not a few; not perfect, ... but being perfected; not ... complete in any one; complete only in Him who is the Head and Life of all, and in His whole Body, which is the Church. Nor, thank God, are they records of a race and a life passed away. At this moment I could lead you into home after home around us now, blessed and hallowed by lives as Christ-like and humble and sweet.’

Elizabeth Rundle Charles. *Sketches of the Women of Christendom*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1880, pp. 333-4.





Tares Among the Wheat...

(A note to the reader)

This book does not follow the methodology of the feminists. Rather, it is a traditional, narrative history based upon reasonable consideration of the evidence. The Bible has been recognized throughout as the authoritative Word of God and the standard, or *canon*, of the Church. In its pages are the earliest accounts of Christian women as well as guidelines for the role of women in the Christian community. The Church through the ages must always be evaluated by the principles contained in the Scriptures. Through the centuries of history, as Christ has continued to build His Church, the visible Church has often included tares among the wheat, nominal Christians among the true, and false teaching alongside the truth of God. This mixture of wheat and tares is true of both women in the Church as well as attitudes towards women by the Church. The wheat (true Christians) might also have elements of spiritual blindness or sin which marred their lives. Just as the historical portions of the Bible includes people of dubious motives and actions as well as heroes of the faith, so Christian history includes admirable and questionable individuals. The reader is encouraged to discerningly use the truths of Scripture to evaluate the lives of the numerous women in *Feminine Threads*. The standards for Christian women and the Church should always be the Scriptures, not the practices of any individual or group, regardless of their influence or charisma.





2

Christian Women in the Early Church: *A Good Testimony through Faith*

Hebrews 11:39

By the time the last of Jesus' apostles had died, the Good News of salvation through Christ had spread throughout the Roman Empire and beyond. There were Christian house churches in all the major cities, including the capital city of Rome itself, and wealthy Christian women opened their homes for meeting places of the early Christians. Christianity was an unapproved, illegal religion in the Roman Empire; and persecution became a sporadic but persistent reality for Christians, with many women witnessing for their faith through martyrdom. Watching pagans also noticed the Christians honored marriage and children in a way distinct from others in society. A women's ministry developed from the first-century Church, with Christian widows helping others in the Church in a variety of ways.

Persecution and Martyrdom

For a time Christianity was seen as a Jewish sect, though the Jewish leaders persecuted Christians from the earliest days. Women were included in these earliest persecutions of the Church. When Paul, before his conversion, was persecuting and imprisoning the Christians, he was dragging off women as well as men.¹ Unlike Judaism, which had an established history and was a legal religion within the Roman Empire, Christianity had no separate legal status. Rome and its rulers were very tolerant and easily accepted new religions, especially those from the ancient East; but this new religion claiming to be the truth and teaching that the followers of other religions worshipped false gods was seen as a threat to the Empire. To say that Jesus was Lord rather than Caesar was treason against the Emperor, and Christians were sentenced to death for their faith.

Jesus had warned His followers that they would be brought before governors and rulers, both Jewish and Gentile, to testify of their faith. The disciple was not above his master. As Jesus had been persecuted, even to the point of death on the cross, so His followers could expect persecution

¹ Acts 8:3; 9:2



– ‘For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.’²

In the Scriptures, the word *marturion*, meaning ‘witness,’ was used not only to refer to those who were eye-witnesses of the life and resurrection of Christ but also to those who sealed their testimony with their execution.³ From the earliest days of the Church, honor was given to those who gave their lives rather than betray their Lord. The death of Stephen, the first martyr, was covered at length in the book of Acts. History records that all of Jesus’ apostles, except John, were martyred for their faith. Jesus’ letter to the church at Smyrna in the book of Revelation spoke especially of the martyred Church. Many saw martyrdom as an imitation of Jesus’ suffering and death. Martyrdom came to be seen as a struggle with the devil and demons and a pathway to enter heaven.

For the first three centuries of the Church, many Christians accepted death rather than renounce Jesus as their Lord. Christians were not encouraged to seek martyrdom, but in the second century Tertullian recognized that the ‘blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.’ In his Church history, the fourth-century historian Eusebius mentioned 120 men and 15 women as martyrs. From all other writings, we know about 950 names of Christian martyrs before A.D. 313, the date Christianity became a legal religion within the Empire. Of these 950 known martyrs, 170 were women. By their deaths, Christian martyrs caused the Greeks and Romans to notice Christianity. Christian women were among those whose martyrdoms ‘contributed to the victory over paganism.’⁴

As in any court proceeding, official records were taken at the trials of the martyrs by the court stenographer.⁵ Many writers in the early Church refer to these judicial court records. The records included the exact words of both the judge and the accused Christians at the trials. Christians obtained copies of these court records and added descriptions of the martyrs’ deaths to make a complete record of the Christian’s witness or martyrdom. Some judges later took measures to prevent the court records from being sold, duplicated or spread abroad. In A.D. 92, Clement of Rome ordered a compilation of the first Acts of the Martyrs. In 237, Bishop Anterus continued the work. He had copies of the Acts deposited in the fourteen churches in Rome, but

2 Matthew 16:25.

3 Acts 22:20; Revelation 2:13; 17:6

4 Everett Ferguson, ‘Women in the Post-Apostolic Church,’ *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity* (ed. Carroll D. Osbourn). Joplin, Missouri: College Press Publication Co., 1993, p. 501.

5 There was a syllabic shorthand used in the ancient world which died out during the Middle Ages. The shorthand was used for keeping records of court proceedings, and was also the way many of the sermons of the Church Fathers were preserved. Origen had seven stenographers working at one time and girls assisting as copyists. Debates of church councils also were taken down by the stenographers.

was prosecuted and executed by the pagan Pontifex Maximus for his zeal. Other Roman bishops continued the practice of collecting martyrdom accounts. The 56 folios of Acts of the Saints ultimately were compiled in the eighteenth century in France. Accretions were added over time, but a root of history can be found in these accounts.⁶

Among the early martyrs whose history has come down to us was Blandina, a slave girl from Gaul, in what is modern France. Christians from Asia Minor had first brought the gospel to the region, and contact between the Christians of Asia Minor and of Gaul continued. A letter from the Christians of Lyons to Christians in Asia Minor provides the details of the martyrdom of Blandina and her companions.

In 177, in the cities of Lyons and Vienne, the townspeople became increasingly hostile to the Christians there. Christians were attacked, stoned, and robbed by mobs, and prevented from appearing in the markets, baths, or anywhere in public. Some of the Christians' servants were seized. Under torture, the servants falsely accused the Christians of cannibalism and incest. The authorities brought some of the Christians into the forum for questioning, and some recanted under pressure. Others were imprisoned and tortured. Among the latter was the Bishop Pothius, Deacon Sanctus, Attalus, a recent convert Maturus, and the slave Blandina. Bishop Pothius, who was over 90 years old, was severely beaten and then released; he died shortly after. The others were tortured in various ways and finally sent to the arena to be tormented before the people.

Blandina was the last of the group to suffer in the arena. Though she was a slave, her witness was the most bold, showing, as the account of her martyrdom stated, that Christ uses the weak and obscure to bring great glory to Himself. Her tormentors had to admit they could not break her. They were

astonished at her endurance, as her entire body was mangled and broken; and they testified that one of these forms of torture was sufficient to destroy life, not to speak of so many and so great sufferings. But the blessed woman, like a noble athlete, renewed her strength in her confession; and her comfort and recreation and relief from the pain of her sufferings was in exclaiming, 'I am a Christian, and there is nothing vile done by us....'⁷

After being tormented herself and watching others suffer cruel deaths, Blandina was suspended on a stake in the arena and left to be devoured by wild beasts. However, when the beasts did not come near her, she was taken down and cast into prison. An observer described her as 'small and

6 A full text database of the Acta Sanctorum can be found at <http://acta.chadwyck.co.uk/>.

7 The letter describing the martyrdom of Blandina and the other martyrs from Lyons can be found in Eusebius. *Church History*, V, 1-3. This can be read online at the Christian Classics Ethereal Library: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.x.ii.html>.



weak and despised yet clothed with Christ the mighty and conquering Athlete.' Her courage in overcoming the adversary many times was a source of inspiration to the other prisoners.

On the last day of the contest, Blandina was brought out with Ponticus, a fifteen-year-old boy. Every day the two had watched the sufferings of the others and had refused to swear by the idols, infuriating the crowd even more. Finally, Blandina, 'having, as a noble mother, encouraged her children and sent them before her, victorious to the King, endured herself all their conflicts and hastened after them, glad and rejoicing in her departure as if called to a marriage supper, rather than cast to wild beasts.' Blandina was scourged, thrown to wild animals, and placed on a red-hot iron seat so that her flesh was burned. Finally, she was placed in a net and thrown before a bull. The animal tossed her about, 'but feeling none of the things which were happening to her, on account of her hope ... her communion with Christ,' she also died. And the heathen themselves observed 'that never among them had a woman endured so many and such terrible tortures.' The bodies of the martyrs were exposed for six days, then burned to ashes and thrown into the Rhone River so that no trace of them would remain on the earth. By such efforts the persecutors thought the hoped-for resurrection of the Christians would be impossible.

A quarter of a century after the martyrdom of the slave Blandina, a young woman of some social standing suffered for her faith in North Africa. The first writing we have by a Christian woman is Vibia Perpetua's account of her imprisonment before being martyred in Carthage in 203.⁸ In 202, Emperor Septimius Severus issued a decree forbidding conversion to Judaism and Christianity. In Carthage, five young catechumens still being instructed in the Christian faith were arrested – Saturninus and Secundulus, the servants Revocatus and Felicity, and Vibia Perpetua, in her early twenties. Satorus, a fellow-Christian who was not originally arrested with the five, surrendered to the authorities so that he could share the captivity of his brothers and sisters in the faith. For a time the catechumens were under a kind of house arrest; but when they were baptized, completing their conversion to Christianity, they were moved to prison.

Where was Perpetua's Husband?

Why Perpetua's husband is not mentioned in the account of her imprisonment and martyrdom has been a subject of debate. Some speculate he was a pagan and it was he who reported Perpetua and the other converts to the authorities. Others think he had died. Still others postulate that Satorus, the most mature of the imprisoned Christians, had turned himself in to join his wife Perpetua in prison.

⁸ Links to a variety of translations of Perpetua's work as well as further information on her can be found online at <http://home.infionline.net/~ddisse/perpetua.html>.



Perpetua was a respectable, well-educated, twenty-one-year-old woman who was married and had an infant son. She was loved by her parents and two brothers. She wrote an account of her imprisonment and the struggles she had with her family to maintain her Christian convictions. Perpetua's mother and brothers were Christians, but her father

pled with her to renounce her Christianity and spare herself and her infant son. He begged her to consider how the rest of the family would suffer if she were condemned. The Proconsul sympathized with the father and also urged Perpetua to reconsider her commitment to her Christian faith. Perpetua firmly replied that 'I am a Christian' and that she could not

be called by anything other than that name. She observed that just as a pot cannot be anything other than a pot, so a Christian cannot be anything but a Christian. When Perpetua was placed in the dungeon, she became quite despondent and depressed by the absolute darkness. As her faith strengthened, however, she wrote that the dungeon became like a palace to her. She gave her baby into the care of her relatives. Other Christians (not imprisoned because they were not recent converts) came and ministered to those in prison, paying the guards so that Perpetua and her companions could have more time in the lighted courtyards.

Was Perpetua a Montanist?

Montanus was the leader of a movement that arose in Asia Minor in the second century. Montanus fell into ecstatic states and claimed to be the voice of the Holy Spirit. He was joined by Prisca and Maximilla, two women who left their husbands and also began prophesying. The Montanists developed a rigorous morality and ascetic lifestyle. Distrusting the clergy, they put forward alternative leaders for the Church, including women. The North African apologist Tertullian became a Montanist for a time, and the Montanist teaching became strong in Carthage and the surrounding area.

There is substantial evidence that Perpetua was influenced by the Montanists, if not actually a member of that group. Her reliance on personal revelation and visions as the leading of the Holy Spirit was an important aspect of Montanism. The superior honor given to the martyrs over the clergy in her visions was also a Montanist belief.

The Montanists' chief error was their reliance on ecstatic prophecies more than the authority of Scripture. Some used the fact that women were important leaders in this unorthodox sect as evidence that women were easily deceived and an argument against women assuming leadership positions in the Church.



(as paterfamilias, the father was responsible for all the affairs in his own household, including his daughter's sacrifice to the emperor). Perpetua was deeply saddened to see her father so treated, but she steadfastly maintained her faith in Christ. Hilarianus had no choice but to condemn her to the wild beasts. Besides, he needed a certain number of criminals for the games celebrating the birthday of Geta, Emperor Septimius Severus' son and heir.

Perpetua showed spunk in the way she responded to her treatment. When the Christians were not given enough food, she asked her keepers, 'If we are to be sacrificed, shouldn't we be fattened up?' She refused to wear the clothes of the pagan gods going into the arena; she wanted liberty to serve Christ.

Perpetua wrote graphic descriptions of three visions she had while in prison. Her emphasis on visions and personal revelation have led some scholars to conclude that Perpetua was part of the Montanists, a sect that was gaining strength in North Africa. The visions themselves provide insight into Perpetua's understanding of Scripture and her theological perspective.⁹

In the first vision, Perpetua climbed to heaven on a narrow golden ladder with swords and hooks on the side and a large dragon at the bottom. The image itself recalled the ladder Jacob saw ascending to heaven with angels going and coming on it (Gen. 28:12). The narrowness of the ladder reflected Jesus' words that 'the gate is narrow, and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few' (Matt. 7:14). The Roman government used fear of the sword and death to deter Christians from the narrow way. The dragon at the foot of the ladder was certainly 'the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan' (Rev. 12:9, NKJV). As she ascended the ladder, Perpetua stepped on the head of the dragon, reminiscent of God's promise to Eve in the garden that her seed would bruise the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15).¹⁰ Jesus Himself had told His disciples, 'Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy' (Luke 10:19). In martyrdom, Perpetua would be ascending the ladder to heaven and reaching the garden at the top, mirroring the Garden of Eden of Genesis 2 and the tree of life of Revelation 22. In her vision, Perpetua met in the garden a tall grey-haired man, resembling the Ancient of Days of Daniel 7:9. There also was a Shepherd, symbol of the Lord throughout both the Old and New Testaments, and thousands of white-robed attendants, the martyrs who had come out of the great tribulation (Rev. 7:9-14).

A second vision concerned Perpetua praying for her dead brother Dinocrates, who had died of face cancer when seven years old. Dinocrates

9 Rex D. Butler. *The New Prophecy & 'New Visions': Evidence of Montanism in the Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*. Catholic University of America Press, 2006.

10 Also see Romans 16:20.



was thirsty and in a gloomy place, but through Perpetua's prayers was healed and brought into a bright light and was drinking from a refreshing pool. This vision implied a belief in praying for souls in a kind of purgatory.

The day before her battle with the wild beasts in the arena, Perpetua had a third vision, in which she was ushered into the arena by deacon Pompanius dressed in white. She was amazed when she was confronted with a horrible Egyptian rather than the expected wild beasts. She suddenly became a man and struck the Egyptian's face with her heels and trod on his face so that he rolled in the dust (as a serpent would – Gen. 3:14). She realized then that she would be fighting the devil, not beasts, and that her victory was assured.

Perpetua's writings gave a woman's perspective on her suffering and of the suffering of the slave Felicity imprisoned and martyred with her. Her account was full of emotion and contained many references to childbearing, nursing and family relations. Her visions and her comments upon them conveyed several theological beliefs. Perpetua's God was a sovereign God who ultimately was in control of human events. Death was not an accident, but a call from God. The martyr's adversary was a very personal devil, seen in the images of the dragon, the Egyptian, and wild animals. The early Christians viewed their salvation as a cosmic salvation, a deliverance from the demonic forces that controlled the whole world. Christ won the victory over death and Satan at the cross. The inner presence of Christ was very real to Perpetua. It was only Christ's strength and power through her that enabled her to endure. Since eternal life was the destiny of the martyr, the day of martyrdom was a time of joy and entrance into life eternal.

Perpetua and Felicity

Though there were several Carthaginian Christians martyred together, the martyrdom is always remembered by the names of the two women in the group – Perpetua and Felicity. By the fourth century, a basilica in Carthage was dedicated to the memory of Perpetua and Felicity, and in the reign of Constantine, the date of their martyrdom was added to the calendar of the church of Rome. Perpetua's own story was read yearly in the North African church, and in at least one sermon Augustine sternly warned the people not to think the account itself was canonical Scripture.

Augustine preached several sermons on Perpetua and Felicity's memory as he celebrated the feast day of the Carthaginian martyrs. Three of the sermons have survived the years. Augustine often played upon the names of the martyred women as he preached. He told that these women were able to achieve such victories because of an inner strength, 'a male virtue struggled on behalf of perpetual felicity.' He asked, 'How did Perpetua become perpetually blessed...? ...What made Felicity fit for such infinite felicity, but her not being terrified by momentary infelicity?' He encouraged women: 'let them fix their minds on Perpetua, fix them on Felicity, and so take hold of perpetual felicity.'



God's vengeance and judgment was certain upon His enemies, but the martyrs did not take the judgment of their opponents into their own hands. Though persecuted by Rome, they never attacked or criticized Rome. Perpetua's martyrdom, her witness (for, as we saw above, the Greek word 'martyr' meant 'witness'), was a renunciation of her entire world – her motherhood, her family, and her social position – for a primary identification with Christ Himself, whatever the cost. Maintaining truth was more important than torture and physical pain – it was the Truth to which Perpetua was a witness. The paradox was that Christians were sacrificed to maintain the authority and social order of Rome. Yet, their humility under torture actually subverted that order and caused the Church to grow.

Others, of course, added the descriptions of Perpetua's and her companions' deaths and their last moments in the arena. As Perpetua walked into the arena and passed Hilarianus, her last words to him were as if the judge himself were on trial, 'Thou judgest us, but God will judge thee.' Perpetua and Felicity were tossed about by a mad heifer and finally killed by having their throats cut.

Perpetua's story was a story of transformation. A 21-year-old woman from a wealthy family, with a new husband and a one-year-old child, gave up her life. She had power to defeat sin, death, and the devil as God worked through her. How can this be? Perpetua would answer now as then, 'I am a Christian.'

The account of Blandina's and Perpetua's suffering and death, as well as those of their companions, revealed the attitude of the early Church to martyrdom itself. Though persecuted, beaten and tortured, God gave the martyrs strength. The view developed that Christ suffered in them and overcame the adversary, the devil, through their deaths. The martyrs were in the arena as athletes for Christ in a spiritual conflict. They also were the Bride of Christ and looked forward to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb at the end of their conflict. Such themes were found in the many other martyrdom stories of women during the period. Since women were viewed as weaker, the acts of strength of female martyrs were more remarkable, giving them a stature equal to and often higher than that of male martyrs. Although excessive devotion to martyrs eventually led to the cult of the saints, many Christians both now and in earlier centuries have been encouraged by the stories of the earliest martyrs.

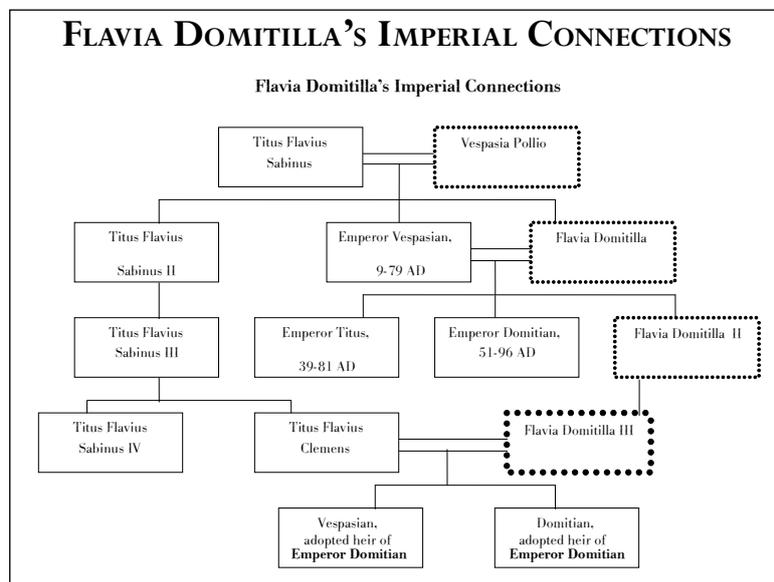
Influence of Christianity on Roman Society

Though the early Christians are often depicted as from the poor and lower classes, there were Christians from the higher social strata as well. From his prison in Rome, Paul wrote the Philippians that 'all the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household.' (Phil. 4:22 KJV). Those Christians 'of Caesar's household' might have been slaves, but there were also



some Christians, or people with Christian sympathies, among the Roman aristocracy from the earliest days of the Christian Church.

There is some evidence that there were Christian women among the ruling class, even before Paul's arrival in Rome. According to the Roman historian Tacitus, Pomponia Graecina, wife of Aulus Plautius, the first Roman conqueror of Britain, was accused of a 'foreign superstition' and handed over to her husband for trial.¹¹ Plautius heard his wife's case in front of her relatives and found her innocent. Many historians believe the 'foreign superstition' Tacitus referred to was the Christian faith. Was Plautius protecting his wife from punishment by his declaration of her innocence? Tacitus further stated that Pomponia 'lived a life of unbroken melancholy' and wore only mourning clothes after the murder of her dear friend Julia, Drusus' daughter. Though moving in the aristocratic (and often murderous and maniacal) circles of Claudius' and Nero's Rome, Pomponia remained somewhat apart from that life. Several Christians from the Pomponius family are buried in the Roman catacombs of St. Callistus. Were these the descendants of this early Christian Roman lady from the reign of Claudius? The Pomponius family members are found in the crypt of Lucina. Some have speculated that Lucina was the baptismal name of Pomponia and that she herself donated the land for the cemetery. All of this is tantalizing, though not conclusive, evidence of Pomponia's Christian faith. It was enough, however, for Pomponia to become an important Christian character in Henryk Sienkiewicz's well-researched historical novel *Quo Vadis*.



11 Tacitus, *Annals*, XIII, xxxii.



The ancient historians Suetonius and Dio Cassius provide some evidence for the Christian faith of another Roman matron, Flavia Domitilla.¹² Flavia, who lived at the end of the first century, was the granddaughter of the Emperor Vespasian and the third Flavia Domitilla in her family. She had married Titus Flavius Clemens, a nephew of Emperor Vespasian and a colleague of Emperor Domitian in the consulship. Flavia and Clemens' two sons were adopted by Domitian as his successors to the throne. Flavia Domitilla was thus centered at the pinnacle of Roman power with important connections to the Emperors themselves. However, Clemens was executed within a year of his assuming the consulship, and Flavia was banished to the island of Pandataria in the Tyrrhenian Sea. Her crime? She was accused of 'atheism' and practicing Jewish rites and customs. Christianity was at that time still closely associated with the Jewish faith, and the fact that Christians worshiped an invisible God rather than idols often led them to be accused of atheism. Other accounts indicate Flavia's niece (daughter?), also named Flavia Domitilla, was banished to the island of Pontia. What happened to the sons is not known, since Domitian was soon assassinated and his successor was appointed by the Roman Senate.

Substantiation for the Christian faith of Flavia Domitilla and possibly her husband Titus Flavius Clemens can be found in a church and a cemetery in Rome. The Church of St. Clement (San Clemente), on the Coelian Hill, was among the earliest churches in Rome. A church was built on the site in the fourth century, as soon as Christianity was no longer an illegal religion. Located in the heart of Imperial Rome only a few steps from the Colosseum, the fourth-century church was constructed on top of a large house that had been built after the Neronian fires destroyed much of Rome. An ancient inscription beneath the church's altar states that 'Flavius Clemens, martyr, is in joyfulness buried here.'¹³ The evidence suggests that the house of Flavius Clemens and his wife Flavia Domitilla was one of the early house churches in Rome. One can only imagine the prayers and sermons which might have been heard in this home – and how Flavia's young boys, adopted heirs to the imperial throne, might have been brought up in the Christian faith. The Catacombs of Domitilla, near the Appian Way in Rome, contain the monuments and tombs of many

12 Suetonius, *Vita Domitiani*; Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, Ixvii.4; See also Eusebius, *History of the Church*, III : 18.

13 Though lacking an inscription, the remains of St. Ignatius are also in this church. Ignatius was one of the disciples of the apostle John, Bishop of Antioch, and by legend the little child Jesus chose to teach about the children coming unto him. Ignatius was brought to Rome and martyred in the Colosseum about A.D. 107.



early Christian martyrs. Inscriptions in the catacombs indicate they are on land donated by Flavia Domitilla.

Flavia and her husband suffered under Emperor Domitian, under whom John the apostle was sent to the Island of Patmos. By the time of the death of the apostle John, the last of the apostles, the gospel of Jesus Christ had been preached throughout the Roman world and even as far as India, if ancient stories of the ministry of the apostle Thomas are to be believed. Where the gospel was preached, lives were transformed, and Christians gained a new citizenship. The second-century *Epistle to Diognetus* best described these new Christians:

For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring [lit. 'cast away fetuses']. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death, and restored to life. They are poor, yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things, and yet abound in all; they are dishonoured, and yet in their very dishonour are glorified. They are evil spoken of, and yet are justified; they are reviled, and bless; they are insulted, and repay the insult with honour; they do good, yet are punished as evil doers. When punished they rejoice as if quickened into life; they are assailed by Jews as foreigners, and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred. To sum up all in one word – what the soul is in the body, that are Christians in the world...¹⁴

14 *Epistle from Mathetes to Diognetus*, v-vi. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, online at <http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-01/anf01-08.html>.

SOME WOMEN MARTYRS FROM THE EARLY CHURCH

Felicitas	c. 162	Roman lady who brought up her seven sons in the Christian faith. She was seized and called on to give up Christ to spare her family; but she remained faithful to Christ. Her sons too refused to sacrifice to the Emperor. They all were executed – Felicitas and her sons Januarius, Felix, Philippus, Sylvanus, Alexander, Vitalis, and Martialis.
Blandina	177	Female slave martyred at Lyons. Though the weakest of the martyrs that day, she showed the most courage. She was thrown to the wild beasts and finally gored to death by a bull.
Donata	c. 180	One of 12 Christians from the African town of Scilita who were martyred at Carthage. When called upon to sacrifice, she replied, 'We render to Caesar as Caesar, but worship and prayers to God alone.'
Caecilia	c. 180	Referred to in many martyrs' lists, but information on her is sketchy. She was a Roman Christian whose martyrdom is surrounded by many legends and has been used by many artists and writers (including Chaucer). Considered the patron saint of music. There is a Church of St. Caecilia in Rome on grounds which might have been her family's property.
Potamiaena	Late 2 nd cent.	Martyr in Alexandria during the Severan persecution. Tortured and had burning pitch poured over her from head to feet.
Felicity and Perpetua	202-203	Famous martyrs from Carthage. Perpetua's account of their imprisonment is the first writing extant by a Christian woman.
Caritas, Faith, Hope, and Wisdom	?	The date of their martyrdom is unclear, but the virgin sisters of Faith, Hope, and Charity and their mother Wisdom seem to have been real martyrs. The four are buried in St. Caecilia's Church
Apollonia	248	Martyr in Alexandria in her old age. She was beaten, her teeth were knocked out, and then she was brought to be burned outside the city. She threw herself into the fire to hasten her death.

Dionysia	251	Mother martyred at Alexandria
Agatha	251	Quintius, governor of Sicily, fell in love with Agatha. When she refused him, he became resentful, especially when he learned she was a Christian. He ordered her scourged, burnt with a red-hot iron, and torn with sharp hooks. She also was laid naked on live coals mingled with glass. She died in prison.
Prisca	275	Roman convert to Christianity who was tortured and beheaded for refusing to abjure Christianity and sacrifice to idols.
Statonice	c. 300	Martyr at Cyzicum in Mysia with Seleucus her husband at the quinquennalia of Galerius during Diocletian's persecution. Converted when she saw a large number of Christians tortured, and she converted her husband. Her father became her accuser when he could not win her back to paganism. She and her husband were beheaded and buried together, and Emperor Constantine built a church over their tomb.
Agnes	303	12-13-year-old virgin who died under the Diocletian persecution. She rejected her suitors, saying she had consecrated herself to a heavenly spouse. Suitors accused her of being a Christian, thinking this would change her mind. She was beheaded, and Emperor Constantine built a church in Rome in her honor.
Anastasia	c. 303	Christian martyr in Rome under Diocletian. Father was a pagan but mother was a Christian who instructed Anastasia in the faith. After her mother died, she married a Roman knight, Publius Patricius, who obtained a rich patrimony. When he discovered his wife was a Christian, he treated her harshly and spent her wealth. When he died, Anastasia spent her fortune on the poor and imprisoned. She and three female servants were arrested and told to sacrifice to idols. When they refused, the three servants were put to death, and Anastasia was burnt alive.
Lucy	305	Born at Syracuse. She devoted herself to religion and refused to marry. She gave her fortune to the poor to try to prevent a suitor's advances. The young man was enraged and reported her Christianity to judge Paschasius. She was then executed.

Catherine	310	Well-educated, noble virgin of Alexandria who converted to Christianity. Emperor Maximinus ordered her to dispute with 50 heathen philosophers. When they were reduced to silence and converted to Christianity, she was then martyred. The Emperor ordered her crushed between wheels of iron, with sharp blades. The wheels broke, so she was beheaded – at the age of 18. Catholic legend holds her corpse was transported to Mt. Sinai by angels – hence St. Catherine’s monastery there.
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Distinctive Christian Attitudes to Marriage and the Family

The *Epistle to Diognetus* summarized the Christians’ noticeably different attitudes and practices from other citizens of the Roman world, including their treatment of women and attitude to marriage. Marriage was honored, and both men and women were expected to be faithful to their spouse. Children from the marriage were also respected and honored. Though abortion and infanticide were accepted practices in the pagan world, Christians valued life, even if the life was that of a baby girl.¹⁵

Men outnumbered women in the Greco-Roman world, but women seem to have outnumbered men in the early Church. Women, especially in the upper classes, were attracted to Christianity. This was so much the case that the pagan Celsus criticized Christianity as a religion only for slaves, women and children. Celsus said Christianity had a corrupting influence on women, but this might be because they began to think and act differently from the accepted standards of paganism.¹⁶

The disapproval of infanticide was one area of Christian disagreement with the prevalent social standards. It was rare for a Roman family to have more than one girl in the family; unwanted girls were just left to die. An example of this can be seen from a letter of a man named Hilarion to his pregnant wife, Alis:

Know that I am still in Alexandria. And do not worry if they all come back and I remain in Alexandria. I ask and beg you to take good care of our baby son, and as soon as I receive payment I shall send it up to you. If you are delivered of a child [before I come home], if it is a boy keep it, if a girl discard it. You have sent me word, ‘don’t forget me’. How can I forget you? I beg you not to worry.¹⁷

15 Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1997, pp. 95-128.

16 *Contra Celsum*, 3.44, online at http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-04/anf04-57.html#P8471_213330.

17 *Rise of Christianity*, pp. 97-8.

Second-century apologist Minucius Felix criticized the pagan world's embrace of abortion and infanticide:

And I see that you at one time expose your begotten children to wild beasts and to birds; at another, that you crush them when strangled with a miserable kind of death. There are some women [among you] who, by drinking medical preparations, extinguish the source of the future man in their very bowels, and thus commit a parricide before they bring forth. And these things assuredly come down from your gods. For Saturn did not expose his children, but devoured them. With reason were infants sacrificed to him in some parts of Africa.¹⁸

Minucius Felix himself was from North Africa and was familiar with the child sacrifices which had been a part of the religious rituals there since the Phoenicians had imported the practice centuries before. That Christians did not condone infanticide, even female infanticide, would have demonstrated to the watching world that women had value, dignity, and respect within the Christian community. Abortion was a high cause of death among women, and the Christian disapproval of the practice would have saved many women from a painful end.

The Christians' more favorable view of women was also evident in their condemnation of divorce, marital infidelity, and polygamy. Pagans were part of a male-dominated culture which held marriage in low esteem. Christians, however, sanctified marriage and condemned promiscuity in both men and women. This gave Christian women a greater marital security than their pagan counterparts enjoyed. Christians stressed the obligations of husbands toward their wives as well as those of wives toward their husbands.

In the pagan society, women were frequently forced into marriage at a very young age, whereas Christian women often married at an older age and had more choice about their marriage. In the Christian community, virginity was recognized as a viable choice, and a woman or man could choose not to marry. Widowhood was also highly respected among Christians, in contrast to pagan and even Jewish society. Many Christian leaders, however, established standards beyond those of Scripture and discouraged second marriages so that the remainder of the widow's life could be devoted to prayer and service to God.¹⁹

Christianity thus offered women freedoms unavailable elsewhere, and women were often the first to convert to Christianity in a region. Though women might not have positions of leadership within the Church, their influence was strong. Since there were fewer men than women in

18 Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, xxx, online at http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-04/anf04-34.htm#P5530_808394.

19 Compare with 1 Timothy 5:11, 14.

EARLY CHURCH FATHERS ON CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Polycarp (*To the Philippians 4:2-3*)

Teach your wives to walk in the faith given to them, in love, and in purity, to be altogether truly affectionate to their own husbands, to love all others equally in all chastity, and to bring up their children in the discipline of the fear of God.

Clement of Alexandria (*Miscellanies 4:19, 20*)

It is possible for man and woman equally to share in perfection... The wise woman then would first choose to persuade her husband to be a partner with her in the things that lead to true happiness. If that should be impossible, alone she should be diligent in virtue, being obedient to her husband so as to do nothing against his will except in regard to those things that are considered to make a difference to virtue and salvation ... Marriage then that is fulfilled according to reason is sanctified, if the union is subjected to God... The truly happy marriage must be judged by neither wealth nor beauty but by virtue.

Tertullian (*To His Wife 2.8*)

How can I paint the happiness of a marriage which the church ratifies, the oblation celebration of communion confirms, the benediction seals, angels announce, the Father declares valid? Even upon earth, indeed, sons do not marry without the consent of their fathers. What a marriage is that between two believers! They have one hope, one desire, one way of life, the same religion. They are brother and sister, both fellow servants, not divided in flesh or in spirit – truly ‘two in one flesh,’ for where is one flesh there is also one spirit. They pray together; they prostrate themselves together; they carry out fasts together. They instruct one another and exhort one another. Side by side they are present in the church of God and at the banquet of God; they are side by side in difficulties and in consolations. Neither ever hides things from the other; neither avoids the other; neither is a grief to the other. Freely the sick are visited and the poor are sustained. Without anxiety, misgiving, or hindrance from the other, they give alms, attend the sacrifices [of the church], perform their daily duties [of piety]. They are not secretive about making the sign of the cross; they are not fearful in greetings; they are not silent in giving benedictions. They sing psalms and hymns one to the other; they challenge each other as to who better sings to God. When Christ sees and hears such things, he rejoices. He gives them his peace. Where two are together in his name, there is he, and where he is, there the evil one cannot come.

the Church, and more men than women in the surrounding culture, Christian women frequently married unbelieving husbands and became the instruments of their conversion to Christianity. Historian Peter Brown called women the ‘gateway’ into pagan families. As wives, servants, and

nurses of unbelievers, they were able to share the gospel and convert others to the Christian faith. By the fourth century, many upper-class families in Rome were Christian, with the husband often coming to faith through the witness of his Christian wife.

Tertullian and some others, however, attacked the mixed marriages that had become popular among the upper-class Christians. He noted that the activities of Christian fasts, vigils, visiting the poor, going to evening love feasts, exchanging the kiss of peace, and showing hospitality could all seem suspicious to an unbelieving spouse. Then too, the pagan husband would want his wife to participate in the pagan rituals and practices.

Pope Callistus in the third century upset many when he ruled that Christian women could live in 'just concubinage,' being in a permanent relationship with a man without entering into marriage legally. Possibly Callistus was trying to deal with the problem of there not being enough eligible Christian men in the upper classes, yet upper-class Christian women could lose their property and privileges of wealth if they legally married below their ranks. Earlier, Hippolytus had accepted into the full fellowship of the Church a slave woman who was in faithful concubinage to one man and reared her own children. Slaves were not allowed to marry under Roman civil law, but the Church created an ecclesiastical law of marriage which in effect elevated the position of the slave woman, recognizing her faithful concubinage as marriage.²⁰

Early church leaders continued to look to the apostolic writings of the New Testament for their understanding of the position of women in the family, society, and the church. Ignatius and Polycarp, both disciples of the apostle John, echoed the New Testament writings. Ignatius encouraged the Philadelphian wives to 'be subject to your husbands in the fear of God' and husbands to 'love your wives as fellow-servants of God, as your body, as partner of your life, and your co-adjutors in the procreation of children.' Marriage was honorable, as was virginity, if Christ was always before you. Ignatius, like Paul and John, had to contend with early Gnostics who held that the flesh was evil, marriage was polluting, and certain foods were abominable. Ignatius plainly said that the one who teaches such things 'has the apostate dragon dwelling within him.'²¹ Everett Ferguson concluded that 'Women as wives and mothers gave the Christian home the strength that made it such a powerful influence in the spread of Christianity in the Roman world.'²²

20 Hippolytus. *Apostolic Tradition*, xvi.24. Charles Ryrrie. *The Role of Women in the Church*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1970, p. 129.

21 Ignatius, *Letter to Philadelphia*, available online at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.v.vi.vi.html>.

22 'Women in the Post-Apostolic Church,' p. 486.

Women's Ministry - Widows and Deaconesses

Both Ignatius and Polycarp reiterated Paul's advice concerning widows. Widows should not be 'wanderers about, nor fond of dainties, nor gadders from house to house,' but they should be praying continually and avoiding slandering tongues full of falsehood and every kind of evil. Polycarp even called the widows the 'altar of God,' for through their sacrifice of prayer God was worshipped, honored, and served.²³

Christianity was unique in valuing widows. Nothing in Judaism or paganism paralleled Christianity's exaltation of widowhood. Under Emperor Augustus, a law was passed which penalized widows if they did not remarry after two years. The Church, however, took care of widows, and remarriage was not encouraged. Christians considered it a duty to support widows and orphans, and historians recognize that the Church helped alleviate poverty in antiquity by this support. In 253, the Roman Bishop Cornelius noted that the Roman church supported 1500 widows and poor persons. Later, in the fourth century, the church at Antioch supported 3000 widows and virgins. Christianity took away the shame of widowhood. By elevating the widows to a life of prayer and contemplation, widowhood became noble. Widows were seen as intercessors who prayed specifically for those whose names were given to them by the bishops. The third-century *Didascalia Apostolorum* described these Christian widows:

... a widow who wishes to please God sits at home and meditates upon the Lord day and night, and without ceasing at all times offers intercession and prays with purity before the Lord. And she receives whatever she asks, because her whole mind is set upon this. Her prayer suffers no hindrance from any thing, and thus her quietness and tranquility and modesty are acceptable before God, and whatever she asks of God, she receives ...²⁴

However, widows were not simply cared for by the Church; they were also important to the functioning of the Church. They were given the responsibility of nursing the sick, caring for the poor, dispensing the alms of the Church, and evangelizing pagan women. The age and character requirements the apostle Paul had given for widows supported by and working within the Church, including that they remain unmarried, became the foundation for an order of widows within the early Church.²⁵

Though the Church's general treatment of widows was commendable and virtuous, some in the Church apparently were taking advantage of the

23 *Epistle of Polycarp*, 4, available online at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.iv.ii.iv.html>.

24 *Didascalia Apostolorum*, chs. 14-15, quoted in Jean La Porte, *The Role of Women in Early Christianity*, p. 63.

25 1 Timothy 5:5-10. Some later church rules lowered the age requirement for the rank of widows to age 50 rather than Paul's requirement of age 60.

widows. In 370 Emperor Valentinian I addressed a ruling to the Bishop of Rome that male clerics and unmarried ascetics should not loiter around the houses of women and widows trying to get bequests for the Church, to the detriment of the widows' families and relatives. The temporal wealth of the Church had apparently greatly increased from such bequests.

The organizational structure of the Church developed and changed over time and over different geographical areas. These developments and changes can be gleaned from the varied writings and inscriptions from the early Church and are not always as clear as one might like. However, by the second century, widows were listed as having a position in the Church along with bishops, presbyters, and deacons. 'Deaconess' as a position in the Church seems to have developed from the order of widows and performed the same services as the widows. In time, however, the person(s) who held this position were unmarried, took vows of chastity, and came to be over the widows. The third-century *Didascalia* gave a specific ritual for the consecration of widows and deaconesses. A principal work of the deaconesses was to help prepare women for baptism. This included instruction as well as helping in the baptism of women, which in the early Church was by immersion. They also instructed women at marriages. In the early Church, men and women separated during the worship meetings of the Church. In this setting, deaconesses helped the presbyter distribute communion to the women, both in church and to those who were sick at home. In all their work, whether teaching, conducting rituals of the Church or distributing charity, the deaconesses worked primarily with other women and under the authority of the presbyter.

As the Church became more structured, the widows were placed under the authority of the deaconesses; and by the end of the fourth century, widows as a special position in the Church seems to have been abandoned. The order of deaconesses remained for several more centuries, especially in the Eastern Church. In the sixth century, the church staff of St. Sophia in Constantinople included 60 priests, one hundred deacons, forty deaconesses and ninety sub-deacons. By the eleventh century, however, the position of deaconess had virtually disappeared.

The evidence for deaconesses as a special part of the Church's organization is indisputable, and in various areas there were ordination services for the deaconesses as well as for the deacons and clergy. The deaconesses' responsibilities, however, were always seen as primarily teaching and working among the women, not as being preparatory to the priesthood or as sharing in any of the priestly functions. Especially in the area of baptisms, deaconesses were important in helping the women in their preparations when it was inappropriate for a man to be alone with a woman. If there were women priests, as some feminists maintain, a special office of women to teach and work with women catechumens would not have been necessary.

The third-century *Didascalia Apostolorum* gave detailed regulations and instructions on the widows and deaconesses. The women were specifically told that their realm of ministry was distinct from that of the deacons and priests, who were to be male. When Jesus sent out the twelve to instruct the people, there were no women among them. If women were to be the main teachers in the Church, Jesus would have appointed some women as his apostles and ministers. If women were to administer baptism, Jesus would have been baptized by Mary, not John. The *Didascalia* advised women not to imperil themselves by acting outside of the law of the gospel. Historian Everett Ferguson concluded that in the mainstream circles of the early Church, 'the same situation prevailed as that reflected in the New Testament documents; a very full involvement of women in every aspect of the Church's life except speaking in the public liturgical assemblies and serving as elders/bishops.'²⁶

Some feminist scholars maintain that the patriarchal forces of the Church restricted the role of women, but there is little evidence to support this argument. The decline in the position of deaconesses in the Church was not dictated by a male-dominated priestly hierarchy; other historical forces were at work. Once the Church became institutionalized after Constantine and babies were born into 'Christendom,' adult baptisms at conversion declined and infant baptism became the norm. The need for women to teach women and help women during the rite of baptism, one of the prime functions of the deaconesses, was diminished. The growth of cloistered, monastic societies at the same time diverted those women with a Christian calling to no longer serve in an open society but within the cloistered walls. The development of monasticism as a competing authority was an important change which was not in any way under the influence of patriarchy.

Virgins and a Growing Asceticism

The deaconesses in the early Church were most often either widows or unmarried women. Christianity's value of unmarried women was as unique as was its value of widows. Christians were the first to recognize that unmarried women could be worthy of honor, dignity, and respect. In view of Christ's expected soon return, Paul had counseled those who were single in the Corinthian Church to remain unmarried so they would have more freedom to serve the Lord.²⁷ The four prophesying daughters of Philip the evangelist possibly remained virgins for such greater Christian service.²⁸

By the end of the first century, a popular order of virgins had arisen in the Church. These virgins dedicated themselves to a single life of service to

26 Everett Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak*, Abilene Christian University Press, 1999, p. 235.

27 1 Corinthians 7:26, 40.

28 Acts 21:9.

Christ and His Church. They lived at home but put themselves under the bishops to help the Church in whatever ways were needful. Like the widows, virgins sought a life of prayer and contemplation as well as service. Though most of the women in the early Church were married, more was written about the single, contemplative life of the virgins than about married life. Perhaps some chose the single life because of the fewer number of Christian men than women. Others chose a life of virginity in revulsion to the extreme lustfulness of the surrounding sex-crazed pagan society. Most of the dedicated virgins were from upper-class families who had independent wealth.

Though the apostle Paul had taught that both marriage and celibacy were honorable and one could live an honorable Christian life in either condition, some began to elevate virginity and an ascetic life as more noble than married life. Paul had warned against such tendencies in his last letters to Timothy. The apostle specifically warned that false teachers, inspired by deceiving spirits and demonic doctrines, would forbid marriage and require abstinence from certain foods which God had made to be received with thanksgiving.²⁹ Rather than teach the sound doctrines of the Scripture, false teachers turned ears away from the truth and taught according to their own desires.³⁰ Despite these apostolic warnings, an asceticism and dualism came into the Church, which adopted some of the beliefs of pagan philosophy and Gnosticism. Leaders arose who, borrowing from Greek philosophy, taught that matter and the body were evil and that denying the body was a virtue leading to a purer life of the spirit. That Jesus Himself was celibate was taken by many as an example and encouragement to celibacy. Virgins and ascetics claimed to live a higher level of Christian life than those caught up in the mundane affairs of marriage, family, and business. An emphasis on celibacy became a distinguishing feature of a higher Christian life. The more perfect Christian was thought to be the one who lived removed from the world and its passions.

Of course, the virgins and celibates had to deal with pride and personal conceit, which easily accompanied such an assumed lofty spiritual position. Many of the early Church fathers who wrote on virginity (and they nearly all did) wrote that virginity was more a matter of the soul than the body. Hoping for a higher reward in heaven, all earthly desires were renounced as the virgins struggled with the flesh to achieve the sexless, angelic state of eternity.

Vows of virginity were first mentioned by Tertullian early in the third century, but Cyprian (c. 200-258) said that a marriage contract taken after a vow was legal. Penalties for breaking a vow of virginity were soon implemented, however. The Council of Elvira in Spain (306) imposed

29 1 Timothy 4:3.

30 2 Timothy 3:12-17; 4:3-5.

a lifelong excommunication for breaking a vow of virginity. Since the virgin had taken a vow as the Bride of Christ, the Council of Ancyra (314) considered those who married after taking such a vow guilty of bigamy. By the end of the fourth century, taking a vow of virginity had become a special ceremony before a priest, who bestowed a veil and a special robe upon the female virgin. Male ascetics of that time, however, made no public vow and did not wear any special clothing.

A popular piece of fiction elevating the female virgin was the second-century *Acts of Paul and Thecla*.³¹ Manuscripts of the story have been found in several languages, including Greek, Coptic, Ethiopic, and Armenian. The Syrian and Armenian Churches included the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* in their early Biblical canons. Though there apparently was a real person named Thecla who had a great impact on southeastern Asia Minor, the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* was early recognized as fiction. Tertullian stated the work was a forgery and that he knew the pastor-author who wrote it. According to the story, Thecla was a virgin of Iconium who converted to Christianity after listening to the apostle Paul. She was engaged but broke off her impending marriage so she could follow the apostle. Paul, however, was banished from the town for the disturbance he caused, and Thecla was sentenced to be burned at the stake. Divine intervention miraculously prevented her martyrdom, and Thecla was able to follow Paul. She cut her hair, baptized herself, dressed like a man, and took up life as a wandering evangelist. At one point along her journey she was thrown to wild beasts and again miraculously delivered, through the kindness of a lioness. After following Paul for a time, the Apostle commissioned Thecla to teach and return to Iconium.

A cult developed around Thecla, and women especially went on pilgrimages to Seleucia, the place of Thecla's birth, and several places in Egypt where St. Thecla was venerated. Archaeologists have found items at these various pilgrimage sites, such as flasks with Thecla's name and image on them, from the fifth and sixth centuries. Because of her fictional story, however, Thecla was removed from the Roman Catholic calendar of saints at Vatican II (1962-65).

Though fiction, Thecla's story held up virginity as superior to marriage. The persecution Thecla endured at various points in the story paralleled the martyrdom that real Christian women endured as they stood firm in their faith. Tertullian, for one, was most displeased with the Thecla story for the way it supported the right of women to teach and baptize. Many modern feminists rely heavily on Thecla's fictional story as 'evidence' of the leadership roles they contend women had in the early Church. They assert this is one remnant of evidence, most of which was destroyed by patriarchal Church leaders, of women's position of leadership in the early

31 Online at http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-08/anf08-89.htm#P7548_2309231.

Church. The story is also valued for the earliest physical description of the apostle Paul, 'of a low stature, bald (or shaved) on the head, crooked thighs, handsome legs, hollow-eyed; had a crooked nose; full of grace; for sometimes he appeared as a man, sometimes he had the countenance of an angel.' Whatever grain of truth might be in this description of the apostle is not known any more than what kernel of history might be contained in the story of Thecla herself.

Gnosticism and Feminist History

The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* is one of several post-apostolic writings that have become favored by recent historians as alternative accounts of conditions in the early Church. Some assert that these alternative writings were actually contenders for becoming the Scripture of the Church but were disallowed by later patriarchal Church rulers. Works such as the *Gospel of Thomas*, *Gospel of Phillip*, *Pistis Sophia*, *The Thunder Perfect Mind*, and *Gospel of Mary*, despite being named after various apostles or their contemporaries, were all written in the second century or later, well beyond the apostolic period when the Scriptures were written.

Feminist activists either totally deny the Bible's authority or seek to re-interpret the Bible in accordance with their feminist presuppositions. One argument they have chosen is to say the Bible is not the authority for the Christian because the Gnostic writings preceded the Bible and thus speak of the earliest days of the Church. One problem with this is that the Gnostic documents all date to a century or more *after* the apostolic period. Gnostic ideas, however, are very congenial to the postmodern mind, and some scholars continue to contend that the Gnostics represent the original, true Christian teaching.³²

Gnosticism comes from the Greek word *gnosis*, meaning 'knowledge.' The Gnostics purported to have a hidden, secret knowledge available only to those initiated into Gnosticism. The Gnostics were syncretists who blended ideas from philosophy, ancient mystery religions, and Christianity. They claimed to have a hidden wisdom unavailable to most. There was much variety in Gnostic writing and thought, making it difficult to describe Gnostic beliefs coherently. Generally, however, Gnostics were dualists, believing that matter, which included everything in the world, was evil and

32 Philip Jenkins. *Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Lost Its Way* (Oxford University Press, 2001) is an excellent analysis of the use of the Gnostic gospels by those who wish to denigrate Christian origins. Other recent works which ably refute the claims of the new history of the early church based on these alternative Scriptures include Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006); Darrel Bock, *The Missing Gospels* (Nelson Books, 2006); Craig Evans, *Fabricating Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006); N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Gospel of Judas: Have We Missed the Truth About Christianity?* (Baker Books, 2006).



that spirit was good. It followed that the God who created the heavens and earth according to Genesis 1 created an evil, material world (even though He pronounced it very good).³³ The Gnostics believed in reincarnation of the soul to different successive levels of being as it progressed on its spiritual journey. The real human being was androgynous, both male and female, and devoid of sexuality. Believing that matter was evil, Gnostics believed that Jesus' incarnation, His taking on human flesh, was evil and that Christ's sacrifice for sin was a monstrous invention. The Gnostics claimed they were the Christians who first accepted Christ in the fullest, spiritual sense.

To many Gnostics, Sophia or Wisdom was the female manifestation of God, 'a breath of the power of God and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty.'³⁴ Some Gnostic writings spoke of women prophets and leaders, and Mary Magdalene was often denominated a leading disciple, with the suggestion that she even shared a sexual intimacy with Jesus. Leading feminists, including Karen Torjesen and Karen King, have used the Gnostic *Gospel of Mary* as evidence that women were leaders and priests in the early Church but were suppressed by the male apostles, led by Peter. Mary Magdalene has become the chief of the apostles for modern feminists, who contend that the *Gospel of Mary* was one of the books excluded from the Bible because of the suppression of the male hierarchy of the Church. Such a reconstruction ignores the facts of history. The *Gospel of Mary* was written at least 100 years after the writing of the Biblical Gospel of John, too late even to be considered for inclusion in the Christian Bible. The Mary depicted in the Gospel is a character of fiction, with no historical roots. She has as much historical validity as a character in a novel, which is exactly what occurred in the novel, *The Da Vinci Code*. Unfortunately, many will ignore the facts of history and accept a novel as truth because it comfortably fits with their own predilections.

Gnostic writings are not new as historical sources, but have been emphasized today in current social and ecclesiastical debates. They are being used to radically reconstruct religious belief and practice by postmodern academics, feminists, and media, so that their agenda has become accepted as truth throughout much of the popular culture today. Philip Jenkins well summarized the interpretive issues by saying that the willingness to claim the Gnostic writings as a lost 'women's canon' of Scripture 'is troubling testimony to the ideological character of some modern interpretations of the hidden gospels.'

While the Gnostic writings have become favorite sources for contemporary feminist historians, interestingly, feminists of earlier centuries favored them as well. The idea that the Gnostics were the real Christians of

33 Genesis 1:31.

34 *Wisdom of Solomon* 7:25-26, as quoted in *Hidden Gospels*, p. 130.



the early Church was commonplace among earlier women occult writers such as Madame Blavatsky, Annie Besant, and Anna Kingsford. In 1909, theosophist and occultist Frances Swiney wrote in *The Esoteric Teachings of the Gnostics* that the Gnostics were chiefly supported by emancipated women of the Roman Empire, 'early pioneers of the liberation movement of their sex, dialectical daughters questioning the truth and authority of received opinions, earnest intellectual women.'³⁵ She saw Gnostics as predecessors of the suffragettes of her day and maintained that the Gnostics accepted the life of Christ, not his death, as key to their doctrine. Swiney wrote that the Gnostics were subjected to the bloodiest of persecutions by the orthodox priests in order to suppress women: 'The Gnostics kept true to the original pristine faith in the Femininity of the Holy Spirit. A truth universally suppressed in the fourth century AD by the male priesthood of the Christian church.' She contended that this exclusion of women from the faith and its Scriptures was the cause of 'the persecution, degradation and maltreatment of womanhood' through following centuries.³⁶

Scholar Elaine Pagels studied the ancient texts found at Nag Hammadi, Egypt, forty years after Swiney wrote, yet the thesis in Pagels' award-winning *The Gnostic Gospels* (1979) was similar to that of the earlier feminist. Pagels wrote that the patriarchal establishment condemned Gnosticism because it gave too much authority to women and other members of society who did not normally exercise authority. Under this perspective, social position rather than truth determined orthodoxy. Pagels accepted the basic thesis of Walter Bauer's *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, first published in German in 1934 and translated into English in 1971. Bauer's thesis was that in earliest Christianity, orthodoxy and heresy did not stand in relation to one another as primary to secondary, but that in many regions heresy was the original manifestation of Christianity. This thesis, however, does not stand up to an examination of the evidence. Examining the *earliest* Christian documents clearly indicates a set of core beliefs, which were orthodox teaching. Diversion from such teachings has always clearly been seen as heresy.³⁷

Pagels found two different attitudes towards the female in orthodox Christian and Gnostic groups. The Gnostics described the deity using both masculine and feminine terms, while the orthodox used only masculine terms. She contended that Gnostic exegesis of Creation focused on Genesis 1, male and female, whereas orthodox analysis emphasized Genesis 2, placing the woman secondary. This claim ignored the extensive commentaries on Genesis 1 by the Church Fathers. Yet, from this mistaken evaluation, Pagels

35 Frances Swiney, *The Esoteric Teachings of the Gnostics*, (London: Yellon, Williams and Co., Ltd., 1909) as quoted in *Hidden Gospels*, p. 128. However, there is no evidence that the Gnostics ever endured the bloodiest of persecutions, either before or after the fourth century.

36 *Esoteric Teachings of the Gnostics*, 5, p. 40.

37 *Missing Gospels*, pp. 49-55.

held that the orthodox 'subordinated' women while the Gnostics elevated women and gave them positions of equality. From these premises, she reached a flawed conclusion: In Gnostic societies women were equal with men; in orthodox societies they were subordinated. As with many of the feminist reconstructions of history, the evidence linking women's authorities with heretical communities failed to be substantial enough to make the case. However, Pagels and many today continue to find the Gnostics very relevant because they sought truth within the individual rather than in a rigid historical truth, such as orthodox Christians found in Scripture.

Were Women Priests ?

An extensive amount has been written in recent decades about the position of women within the organization of the early Church. This is usually put by the question 'Were women priests?' The question itself is an anachronistic question for the early Church. The Jewish priesthood, with its extensive rules, ceremonies, and sacrifices, was not continued in the early Church. When the veil in the temple was torn at Christ's crucifixion, the way was open for all to approach God freely, without the intermediary of a priest. As the writer of the book of Hebrews emphasized, the old priesthood was done away with the old covenant. Jesus Christ Himself was the High Priest who opened the way to God's throne. Because of Christ's atoning death on the cross, there was no longer needed a sacrifice for sin. Every Christian, male and female, was now a priest who could freely offer sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving and who could through prayer boldly approach God's throne of grace. Early Church writers such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, and even later writers such as Origen and Augustine, speak of the priesthood of all believers as a distinct mark of Christianity's superiority to other religions. In time, however, the Lord's Supper came to be seen as the Christian offering and a Christian priest (presbuteros) became the mediator between the congregation and God. Old Testament as well as pagan concepts of priesthood were absorbed into the Church, so that the priesthood of the later medieval Church differs from that of the earliest Church.

Too often the hierarchical Roman priesthood is anachronistically read into the early Church. The clergy/laity distinction was not nearly as distinct as it later became in the Church hierarchy, especially under the later sacramental system. For a woman to be ordained a deaconess did not mean she had started up the ladder to become a priest, as such ordination might mean in later centuries. Ordination simply was a way to set apart a person for service or ministry; it did not carry a sacramental meaning until later Church history and did not mean that women were the leaders of the church or were the main spokespersons or preachers for the congregation.

Feminist historians endeavor to reconstruct the historical evidence to show that women held leadership positions in the earliest Church but in time were suppressed by patriarchal authorities. However, the circumstantial evidence put forth to support the claim that women priests served in the early Church is not persuasive, and the conclusions of the feminist historians are undermined by logical and factual flaws.

The evidence put forward for women priests may be grouped into four categories, listed below along with reasons to question the legitimacy of the feminist conclusions:

1. **Examples of women priests in Montanist and Gnostic groups.** However, no woman serving as priest in such groups can be documented until the second century. There is no logical reason why such later heretical groups, who clearly rejected the authority of the Scriptures, can be assumed to have been the models and patterns for the early Christian women.
2. **Inscriptions, especially sarcophagus and tomb inscriptions, call some women 'priestesses' or 'bishopesses.'** Celibacy is not a requirement in the Eastern Church and was not a mandatory requirement for even the Roman Catholic priesthood until 1123 in the Western Church. When a priest married, it was common to give his wife the honorary title of priestess, or presbuterae. This remains true in the Greek Orthodox Church today. The use of the title in itself is insufficient evidence to indicate a 'priestess' who functions as the counterpart of the male priest. While there are a few inscriptional and documentary references to presbuterae or female priests, there is not enough context for these references to build a case for any significant number of women clergy in the early Church. Some of the presbutera clearly refer to the wives of priests; others refer to Montanists or sects of Gnostic groups, who tottered between the outer periphery of Christianity and false doctrine.*
3. **Documents instructing women not to serve as priests or deaconesses.** This is an argument based on inference. The assumption here is that such documents would never have been written if women were not already serving as priests. One letter frequently cited is that by Pope Gelasius (492-96) discouraging women participating at the altar in matters that belong to men. Yet, this letter says nothing about ordination or the women actually being priests. That women might have been ordained as priestesses in some regions, however, is not evidence that this ever was the norm. More likely, it indicates the Church in a region compromising with the practice of competing heretical groups rather than following the Scriptures' guidelines for Church organization.
4. **Ancient art has pictures of women serving as priests.** All the artwork put forward as showing women priests or bishops can just as easily be interpreted in other ways. A woman pictured in the catacombs as raising her hands in prayer is no positive indication that she was a priest, but simply a woman in prayer. Most frequently cited is a mosaic of the basilica in Rome for Sts. Prudentiana and Praxedis, which includes a woman labeled as 'Theodora Episcopa,' interpreted by feminist revisionist historians as 'Bishopess Theodora.' Of all the Church offices for which there is ample documentation, certainly the Bishop of Rome tops the list, yet there is no documentation of a Bishopess Theodora. Revisionists might argue that the patriarchal rulers destroyed all the documents. If so, would they have left



intact a large mosaic in a Roman Church in plain view for all to see? Much more plausible is the explanation given in the Church itself – Theodora was given the honorary title of ‘Episcopa’ because she was the mother of Pope Paschal I, the Bishop of Rome who built the Church of Sts. Prudentiana and Praxedis.

There is no evidence to show that women were priests or leaders in the earliest Church and were denied such leadership at a later time as the patriarchal forces asserted their power. Those who assert such must, as they themselves say, ‘re-imagine’ and ‘reconstruct’ history, reading their own predilections into the early Church rather than letting the historical evidence speak for itself.

* Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History*, Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005, 8-9, 163.





8

Heiresses of the Reformation: *Joint Heirs with Christ*

Romans 8:17

Elizabeth I's ascension to the English throne in 1558 followed years of religious upheaval and political turmoil. Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII, had separated the Church of England from papal authority and placed the English monarch at the head of the English Church. Henry, however, did not embrace the evangelical beliefs of the Reformation, and the English Church's doctrines and practices largely continued to be those of the Roman Church. Henry's son and heir, the young King Edward VI, was a Protestant, and his regents encouraged the evangelical faith within England. During Edward VI's reign, Thomas Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer* became the standard of Anglican worship. English Bibles were permitted among the people, transubstantiation (the worship of bread and wine as the body and blood of Christ) was rejected, clerical marriage became legal, and ritual images were removed from the churches. Edward's brief reign of six years was followed by the five-year reign of his sister Mary. Queen Mary zealously sought to return England to the Catholic fold, repealing the Act of Uniformity passed under Edward. Many English Protestants fled to the Continent for safety. Protestants remaining in England were persecuted; nearly 300 were executed under Mary.

When Elizabeth came to the throne, the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity once again placed the Church under the monarchy's governance and established the *Book of Common Prayer* as the Anglican liturgy. The English Bible was once again freely allowed in the country and recognized as the determining authority in matters of faith. The Thirty-Nine Articles defining the beliefs of the Church of England were essentially Protestant; however, many elements of Catholic liturgy remained. By following a *via media*, Queen Elizabeth sought to avoid the extremes of the competing religious groups in her realm. Many who had been exiles in Geneva under Queen Mary wanted to purify the Church of England along the lines of Calvin's Geneva. These Puritans wanted to go beyond the *via media* of Elizabeth and bring a complete reformation to England. They were to be a key force in shaping the face of England and America for the next century.

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Women of Puritan Times

As heirs of the Reformation, Puritans abjured the medieval idea of celibacy and placed a high value on marriage and the family. Their ideas of sex and marriage were truly revolutionary. Professor Leland Ryken summarized their stance: 'The Puritans devalued celibacy, glorified companionate marriage, affirmed married sex as both necessary and pure, established the ideal of wedded romantic love, and exalted the role of the wife.'¹

The prominent medieval notion that women were in some way more evil, lustful and irrational than men had no place in Puritan thought. Puritan Richard Cleaver wrote:

Most true it is that women are as men...reasonable creatures, and have flexible wits, both to good and evil...And although there be some evil and lewd women, yet that doth no more prove the malice of their nature than of men, and therefore the more ridiculous and foolish are they that have inveighed against the whole sex for a few evil.

John Cotton wrote as follows:

Women are creatures without which there is no comfortable living for man: it is true of them what is wont to be said of governments, *That bad ones are better than none*: They are a sort of Blasphemers then who despair and decry them, and call them a *necessary Evil*, for they are a necessary Good: such as it was not good that man should be without.

Based on Genesis 2:18, 'it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him,' the Puritans saw the main purpose of marriage as companionship. Famed Puritan Richard Baxter wrote:

It is a mercy to have a faithful friend that loveth you entirely...to whom you may open your mind and communicate your affairs...And it is a mercy to have so near a friend to be a helper to your soul and...to stir up in you the grace of God.

Daniel Rogers further expounded:

Husbands and wives should be as two sweet friends, bred under one constellation, tempered by an influence from heaven whereof neither can give any reason, save mercy and providence first made them... and then made their match; saying, see, God hath determined us out of this vast world each for [the] other.²

The Puritans saw the family as the foundational institution of society, both spiritual and secular. The family was called the 'seminary of all other societies,' a foundation of both the Church and the state. The husband and wife were the king and queen of this little commonwealth, and as such both

1 Leland Ryken. *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic Books, 1986, p. 53.

2 Quotes of Puritan authors on marriage found in *Worldly Saints*, pp. 50-2.

were responsible for the governance of the family. There was a hierarchy in the family, with the husband as the head and the wife in submission to him. The husband's headship was not a tyranny, but he was, like Christ, to rule in love and wisdom. Samuel Willard wrote that a good husband will rule 'as that his wife may take delight in [his headship] and not account it a slavery but a liberty and a privilege.' One Puritan preacher said that the wife's responsibility is to 'guide the house and not guide the husband.' The Scriptures called upon the wife to submit to the husband, but this was to be of the wife's own will, not through any force from the husband. John Winthrop said that the Christian wife's submission was 'her honour and freedom... Such is the liberty of the church under the authority of Christ.' The husband and wife shared a spiritual equality, but they had differing stations in the governance of the home and family. The wife was as the husband's assistant in authority, office, advice and counsel in the home.

An important aspect of the Puritan home was the responsibility of caring for the spiritual welfare of those in the family, both children and servants. Daily Bible reading and prayers, with the father serving as the 'priest' of the family congregation, were routine. Puritan domestic manuals of the day especially developed the importance of parents instructing the children in spiritual truths. One indicator of the importance placed on home instruction was that in the last half of the sixteenth century in England, over 100 editions of catechisms for household use were published. The Geneva Bible, most used by the Puritans, included a marginal note to Deuteronomy 21:18 stating, 'it is the mothers [sic] dutie also to instruct her children,' and, in practice, the instruction of children was often overseen by the mother in the family. If women were to educate their children, it followed that the education of women was considered a necessity. Puritans recognized that in their domestic sphere as wife and mother, women had an important role in shaping the spiritual education of the nation. The woman's spiritual calling in the home was as significant as any public function in the Church or government.

Evidence of women's concern for the spiritual education of their children is abundant in the many advice books written by women for their children at this period. Dorothy Leigh's *The Mother's Blessing* set the pattern. First published in 1616, the work went through twenty-three editions between 1616 and 1674, including seven editions in its first year, easily making it the best-selling book written by a woman in the seventeenth century. Leigh's husband had died, and in his will he had urged her to see their three sons 'well instructed and brought up in knowledge.' Sensing that her own life would soon come to an end, Dorothy Leigh wrote down her advice to her sons as a way of carrying out her husband's wish. Her work was published shortly after her death. The book's typically lengthy subtitle explained more fully Dorothy's purpose: *The godly counsaile of a Gentle-woman not long since deceased, left behind her for her Children: containing many good exhortations, and godly admonitions, profitable for all Parents to leave as a Legacy to their Children, but especially for those, who by reason of their young yeeres stand most in need of*



Instruction. The title page also had Proverbs 1:8 written under Dorothy Leigh's name, 'My sonne, heare the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the lawe of thy mother.'

Dorothy Leigh told her sons she wrote out of motherly affection for them:

neither care I what you or any shall think of me, if among many words I may write but one sentence, which may make you labour for the spiritual food of the soul, which must be gathered every day out of the word, as the children of Israel gathered Manna in the wilderness ... For as the children of Israel must needs starve, except they gath'ed every day in the wilderness and fed of it, so must your souls, except you gather the spiritual Manna out of the word every day, and feed of it continually: for as they by this Manna comforted their hearts, and strengthened their bodies, and preserved their lives; so by this heavenly Word of God, you shall comfort your souls, make them strong in Faith, and grow in true godliness, and finally preserve them with great joy, to everlasting life, through Faith in Christ; whereas, if you desire any food for your souls, that is not in the written Word of God, your soul die with it even in your hearts and mouths; even as they, that desired other food, died with it in their mouths [Num. 11:33] were it never so dainty: so shall you, and there is no recovery for you.³

Yet, Dorothy also wrote for publication, encouraging other mothers to teach and care for their children and write their instructions to them. She discussed a multitude of topics: how to further a reformation of manners, morals and religion; the importance and method of prayer; the proper and improper use of worldly wealth; the need to restrict business dealings and marriage to the godly; and the faults of worldly ministers. Her writing was permeated with Scripture as well as simple analogies. When describing the advantages of casting all cares upon God, Dorothy warned of the devil as a 'cunning fisher':

When the devil makes all his poisonous baits, wherewith he draws an innumerable company of souls to hell, he covers them all with some worldly thing or other, that they may not see the hook; some he covers with gold, some with silver, some with earth, some with clay, some with honor, some with beauty, some with one thing, and some another.⁴

She further developed the fisher/bait analogy for some pages. In a chapter on 'the way to rule our corruptions,' she began to develop the importance of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life, which she enlarged upon in the ensuing chapter:

... without [the Holy Spirit] we are like a house which is built fair on the outside: but there are no windows to show any light at all into it, and then

3 *The Mother's Blessing*, ch. 2, All quotes from *The Mother's Blessing* are as found in Sylvia Brown, ed. *Women's Writing in Stuart England*. Sutton Publishing, 1999. (Was the 20th-century Christian humanist Dorothy Leigh Sayers named after the popular woman writer of the 17th century?)

4 *Ibid.*, ch. 38.

the house is good for nothing, because there remains nothing but darkness in it: even so dark is the earth of *Adam*, which we are made of . . .⁵

One of Dorothy's sons, William, did become a minister as she wished. He became rector at Groton, Suffolk, under the patronage of Puritan John Winthrop, who later led the Puritan migration to America and became governor of Massachusetts. By putting her motherly advice in writing, Dorothy Leigh not only passed on important Biblical truths to her sons, but taught other women how to teach spiritual truths to their children, thus encouraging them to do the same. *The Mother's Blessing* became a pattern for other motherly advice books.

Lady Grace Mildmay (1552-1620) not only wrote an important motherly advice work, she also wrote the first autobiography in English written by a woman. Grace Mildmay had been educated at home with her three sisters by her mother and a governess, a niece of her father's. Her education was a general one, focusing on basic academics, deportment, domestic skills, and religion. Among the domestic accomplishments in which Grace came to excel was medicine. She became quite skilled in herbal treatments, and later kept extensive notes on various cures and their effectiveness.

Grace called her mother an 'Angell of God' and throughout her life honored and treasured her teachings and example. Shortly before her death at the age of eighty-four, Grace's mother encouraged her daughters to daily read chapters in the Bible, as she had done all her life and as her own godly mother had done. Grace followed this advice and throughout her life daily opened her Geneva Bible and read one chapter each in Moses, the Prophets, the Gospels, and the Epistles, in addition to the Psalms for the day. She also regularly read three other books her mother had given her – John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, Wolfgang Musculus' *Common Places*, and Thomas à Kempis' *Imitatio Christi*. Daily she went into her room, cast all earthly things from her mind, and submitted herself to God and His Word. In humility she looked to God's leadership and learned to rely on God, whatever troubles came her way, as they inevitably did.

When she was fifteen, Grace was married to Anthony Mildmay, then eighteen or nineteen. The match was negotiated between the parents, and Anthony was not particularly interested in the marriage. He was often away from home on diplomatic missions for the Queen. When he was home, Anthony could sometimes be quite harsh, though he would later apologize for his rudeness. Grace could have lived at the royal court, but she thought the temptations for her there would be too great, so she remained at her home, Apethorpe Manor, in Northamptonshire. There she used her medical abilities, as well as her financial means, to help the poor

⁵ *The Mother's Blessing*, ch. 30.

and suffering. The first ten years of her marriage she was childless, which undoubtedly was a sorrow and difficulty for her. Yet, whatever difficulties she faced, she found strength in her faith in God. This was the lesson Grace wished to convey in her autobiography and meditations.

While in her sixties, after her husband had died, Grace wrote her autobiography for her only daughter and her grandchildren. Her work was not simply an accounting of her life, but was the story of her spiritual growth since childhood. The autobiography was an introduction to her spiritual meditations, which she called the 'consolation of my soul, the joy of my heart, and the stability of my mind.'⁶ She had kept a journal of her spiritual meditations and edited some of these specifically for her descendants' edification. Because of her deep, personal relationship with Christ, her life had a strength and peace which became a testimony of her faith to her daughter and grandchildren. Her life was an example of the results of daily reading and meditation on the Scripture. As she wrote her granddaughter:

Whosoever in the beginning of his life sets the word of God always before his eyes and makes the same his delight and counselor, and examines all that he sees, all that he hears, all that he thinks, and all that he loves, wishes or desires by the said word of God, he shall be sure to be preserved in safety.⁷

Elizabeth Knevet Clinton, the Countess of Lincoln (1574-1630?), gave her advice on child-rearing to her daughter-in-law. She held that the obligation to 'marry and bear children' included not just pregnancy and giving birth but nurturing the child through breastfeeding. A mother who did not nurse her own child showed 'unmotherly affection, idleness, desire to have liberty to gad from home... and the like evils.' According to Clinton, the child at the breast 'is the Lord's own instruction... instructing you to show that you are his new born babe by your earnest desire after his word.'⁸

Elizabeth Joscelyn (1596-1622) died after six years of marriage to Towrell Joscelyn and only a few days after her child was born. She had a premonition that she would die in childbirth and left her 'Mother's legacies to her unborn child' with her husband before she died. He printed the tract after her death, and it became among the most popular of the 'mother's advice' books. Not knowing whether she would bear a son or a daughter, Elizabeth wrote instructions and advice for each. If a son, she wrote, 'I humbly beseech Almighty God ... that

6 Retha M. Warnicke, 'Lady Mildmay's Journal: A Study in Autobiography and Meditation in Reformation England,' *Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 20, No. 1 (Spring 1989), p. 57.

7 Quoted in Norman Leslie Jones, *English Reformation*, (Blackwell Publishers, 2002), p. 25.

8 Betty Trivitsky, 'New Mother of the English Renaissance,' Cathy N. Davidson and E.M. Broner, eds. *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1980, p. 36.

thou may serve him as his Minister, if he make thee a man.' If the child were a daughter, she wrote her husband:

I desire her bringing up may be learning the Bible, as my sisters doe, good housekeeping, writing, and good workes: other learning a woman needs not: though I admire it in those whom God hath blessed with discretion, yet I desired not much on my owne, having seen that sometimes women have greater portions of learning than wisdom. . . . But where learning and wisdom meet in a virtuous disposed woman she is the fittest closet for all goodness. . . . Yet I leave it to thy will. . . . If thou desire a learned daughter, I pray God give her a wise and religious heart, that she may use it to his glory, thy comfort, and her own salvation.

Elizabeth's concerns for her child were primarily spiritual: 'I never aimed at so poor an inheritance for thee as the whole world: . . . the true reason I have so often kneeled to God for thee, is, that thou might be an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven.'⁹

This new emphasis on motherhood has come to be known by scholars as the 'new mother' idea and is well documented not only in Puritan writings, but in the writings of the Renaissance humanists. Though the Puritans developed and held on to the ideal longest, the concept and practice of the family as a spiritual household and place of spiritual instruction was something espoused by Erasmus and other humanists, including the Catholic Thomas More. That the practice of the spiritual household died out in Catholic and Anglican circles but continued in Puritan circles was due in large part to the Council of Trent. The Council of Trent (1545-1563), which established the norms for Catholic orthodoxy and practice after the Reformation, not only proclaimed the married state inferior to celibacy, but also made the catechism and instruction of children the responsibility of the bishops, not the family. The Council seemed to have thought that religious instruction within the household would subvert the purity of doctrine and the authority of the Church hierarchy. Teaching the priesthood of all believers, and even speaking of the father as a kind of priest in his family, was regarded as a form of insubordination to the clerical order of the Church.¹⁰

Besides the home being a place of religious instruction, Puritan women also used their homes as places of hospitality for the saints. Separatist or Independent churches often met in private homes, and lodgings were provided for nonconformist ministers. Women were an important part of the spiritual networking of the Puritan household meetings. Women of position used their influence to plead at court for the protection of Puritan ministers. As in the days of the earliest Church, wealthier Christian women provided patronage and

9 'New Mother of the English Renaissance,' pp. 39-40.

10 Margo Todd in 'Humanists, Puritans and the Spiritualized Household,' *Church History*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (March 1980), pp. 18-34.

support for the clergy, including financing the publication of tracts and religious works. Educated women also published works of their own, though many of the works published by women before the mid-seventeenth century were translations. As seen in chapter six, Anne Locke translated Calvin's sermons. Mary Sidney Herbert, the Countess of Pembroke, joined her brother Sir Philip Sidney in translating the psalms into English poetry.

Mary Sidney (1561-1621) was born into an aristocratic Tudor family which held positions of prominence during the reigns of Henry VIII and his daughter Elizabeth. Mary's father, Sir Henry Sidney, was lord president of Wales and lord deputy of Ireland; her mother, Mary Dudley, was daughter of the Duke of Northumberland. Together the Dudley and Sidney families controlled two-thirds of the lands ruled by Queen Elizabeth. Mary Sidney was given an excellent education, comparable to that of Queen Elizabeth herself. In addition to traditional training in household medicine and administration and the feminine skills of music and needlework, Mary Sidney was taught the Scriptures and the classics. She was fluent in French, Italian and Latin, and probably knew some Greek and Hebrew. In 1577, at the age of fifteen, she married Henry Herbert, the wealthy Earl of Pembroke. Four children were born to the couple before Mary was twenty-three. In 1586, both of Mary's parents died. The same year, her older brother Philip died fighting against the Spanish in the Netherlands. Mary was overcome by illness and grief, as well as with fear at the prospect of the invasion of the Spanish Armada.

Mary recovered after the defeat of the Armada, returned to London, and became an important patroness of literature. She supervised the publication of her brother Philip's unpublished works. Most notable was her completion of a metrical paraphrase of the psalms which Philip had begun. Philip had translated Psalms 1-49 into English verse; Mary completed the 150 Psalms. Others had turned various psalms into English verse, but the Sidneys together were the first to provide English verses for the entire psalter. Mary used an amazing variety of verse forms and rhetorical figures. Her psalms reflected her scholarship and her careful reading of commentaries in English, French, and Latin. An artistic achievement in its own right, the Sidney verse translation of the psalms influenced the devotional poets of the next century, especially George Herbert and John Donne. Donne called Philip and Mary Sidney 'this Moses and this Miriam' and said, 'They show us Islanders our joy, our King, / They tell us *why*, and teach us *how* to sing.'¹¹ Through the fame of her contribution to the 'Sidnean Psalms,' Mary Sidney became the first Englishwoman to receive recognition as a poet.

Under both Elizabeth and the Stuart monarchs, Puritans endured imprisonment and persecution, most often for not conforming to the Church of England's liturgy and ceremonial requirements. Puritan women were imprisoned as well as men, and the women could be the most vocal in protesting Anglican practices. From 1565 to 1567, when Queen Elizabeth

11 Margaret P. Hannay, 'Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke (1561-1621),' www.english.cam.ac.uk/sidney/pembroke_biography.htm, accessed 10-28-2007.

and Archbishop Matthew Parker sought uniformity in vestments and liturgy, the women of London led in defending their preachers. When John Bartlett was suspended as a lecturer at St. Giles Cripplegate, sixty women defended him and surrounded the house of Bishop Grindal in protest. When pastors John Gough and John Philpot were removed from their London pulpits, over two hundred women accompanied them over London Bridge into exile in the country. During this period, more women than men were imprisoned in London's Bridewell prison for their Puritan convictions.

Lucy Hutchinson, Puritan Writer

Lucy Hutchinson (1620-1680) was a Puritan whose writings help illumine Puritan ideals. Her *Order and Disorder* was the first epic poem written by an Englishwoman and has been favorably compared to *Paradise Lost* both in the quality of its composition and in its subject matter.

Lucy's husband was Colonel John Hutchinson, a trusted officer of Oliver Cromwell. Colonel Hutchinson was one of the commissioners of the trial of Charles I and a signer of his death warrant. Under the Commonwealth he continued to be an active member of Parliament. At the Restoration, he was imprisoned and died during his imprisonment. After her husband's death, Lucy wrote *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel John Hutchinson* especially to record the character of their father for her eight children, but also as a record from the Puritan perspective of the momentous events surrounding her husband's life. Her descriptions belie the picture of the Puritans as narrow and dour. Lucy's description of her husband's love for her follows the Puritan conceptions of marriage:

Man never had a greater passion or a more honorable esteem for woman; yet he was not uxorious, and never remitted that just rule which it was her honor to obey; but he managed the reins of government with such prudence and affection, that she who would not delight in such honorable and advantageous subjection must have wanted a reasonable soul. He governed by persuasion which he never employed but in things profitable to herself. He loved her soul better than her countenance; yet even for her person he had a constant affection, exceeding the common temporary passion of fond fools. If he esteemed her at a higher rate than she deserved, he was himself the author of the virtue he doted on; for she was but a faithful mirror, reflecting truly, but dimly, his own glories upon him. When she ceased to be young and lovely, [Lucy became disfigured by smallpox shortly before her marriage] he showed her the most tenderness. He loved her at such a kind and generous rate as words cannot express, yet even this, which was the highest love any man could have, was bonded by a superior feeling; he regarded her, not as his idol, but as his fellow-creature in the Lord, and proved that such a feeling exceeds all the irregularities in the world.*

*As quoted in Sarah J. Hale, *Lessons from Women's Lives*, (London: William P. Nimmo, 1877), p. 52.

In the following century, when Civil War between Parliamentary and Royalist forces broke out, women offered their support in a number of ways. A large body of middle-class women, led by Ann Stagg, a brewer's wife, presented a petition supporting Parliament at the door of the House of Commons. Ann Stagg prefaced the presentation by saying

It may be thought strange and unbecoming our sex to show ourselves here, bearing a petition to this honourable assembly; but Christ purchased us at as dear a rate as he did men, and therefore requireth the same obedience for the same mercy as of men; we are sharers in the public calamities.¹²

The women were received courteously; John Pym encouraged them, telling them, 'Repair to your houses, we entreat, and turn your petitions into prayers at home for us.' The women not only prayed, but contributed materially to the Parliamentary forces. The wealthier contributed their jewels, while the poorer women brought their silver thimbles, spoons, and bodkins. The Royalists scoffingly called the Parliamentary army the 'thimble and bodkin army.' Women also helped defend ports and castles besieged by Royalists

The political upheaval of the time brought many into personal peril and difficulty. Christian women affected by the political fortunes of their husbands showed a level of courage and fortitude unknown to the secular world. Perhaps Mary Love, wife of pastor Christopher Love, best illustrated this Christian courage and consecration. Christopher Love, a London pastor and writer of many Christian works, opposed the execution of Charles I and the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell. In 1651, he and five other prominent ministers were accused of high treason, charged with plotting to reinstate the monarchy under Charles II. Love was sentenced to be executed, and while in the Tower of London, he sent letters to his wife, as she did to him. Their letters reveal a love and Christian bond with roots in and eyes on eternity. On August 21, 1651, the day before Christopher's execution, Mary wrote her husband:

My Heavenly Dear, I call thee so because God hath put heaven into thee before He hath taken thee to heaven. Thou now beholdest God, Christ, and glory as in a glass; but tomorrow, heaven's gates will be opened and thou shalt be in the full enjoyment of all those glories which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither can the heart of man understand...O lift up thy heart with joy when thou layest thy dear head on the block in the thought of this: that thou are laying thy head to rest in thy Father's bosom which, when thou dost awake, shall be crowned not with an earthly

12 James Anderson. *Memorable Women of the Puritan Times*, vol. 1. Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2001 (reprint of 1862 London edition by Blackie and Son), p. 15.

fading crown but with a heavenly eternal crown of glory...O let not one troubled thought for thy wife and babes arise within thee. Thy God will be our God and our portion. He will be a husband to thy widow and a father to thy children; the grace of thy God will be sufficient for us...Now my dear, I desire willingly and cheerfully to resign my right in thee to thy Father and my Father, who hath the greatest interest in thee. And confident I am, though men have separated us for a time yet our God will ere long bring us together again where we shall eternally enjoy one another, never to part more...Farewell, farewell, my dear, till we meet there where we shall never bid farewell more; till which time I leave thee in the bosom of a loving, tender-hearted Father. And so I rest till I shall forever rest in heaven.¹³

Mary certainly exhibited the 'peace of God which surpasses all understanding.'¹⁴

Puritan Women in America

During the political and religious turmoil in England under Charles I, the King was intent on asserting his 'divine right' in Church and state, while the Puritans sought to follow a Biblical pattern in both. As the possibility of their successfully influencing the King to their way of thinking waned, many Puritans considered the possibility of establishing a new England in America. With the tension between the King and the Puritans mounting, it seemed little short of a miracle that the King granted the Massachusetts Bay Charter to a group of Puritans, giving them the right to establish and rule a colony in America. When the Massachusetts Bay Charter was granted in 1628, John Winthrop led the organization of the migration and establishment of the colony.

A businessman and man of affairs, John Winthrop had a heart for God. In his work, as in all of life, he sought to live in a God-honoring way. His wife Margaret (1591-1647) similarly looked for God's hand in all of life's events. First as one of three attorneys to the Court of Wards and Liveries (which oversaw estates which had reverted to the King) and then when planning the Great Puritan Migration, Winthrop often had to be away in London. Margaret remained at Groton Manor, Suffolk, overseeing the family and the estate. The loving letters each wrote to the other revealed much of the Winthrops' heart and thoughts. Written in the rough and tumble of political and domestic life, the letters were full of relations of mundane affairs – children's illnesses, deaths in the community, the making of cheeses, supervision of help, transportation problems, effects of political maneuvers, etc. Inextricably woven throughout the mundane,

13 Don Kistler. *A Spectacle unto God: The Life and Death of Christopher Love (1618-1651)*. Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1998, pp. 84-5.

14 Philippians 4:7.

however, were the expressions of the deepest affection for each other and a Christian outlook on all that transpired. The human elements and earthly affairs were seamlessly blended with spiritual reflections and prayerful thoughts. Both Margaret and John selflessly sought God's will and path for the other during the many times they were apart. Each viewed difficulties as trials which were part of God's larger plan for their lives.

When the children and servants were ill and troubles seemed to multiply, Margaret wrote John of the news and concluded, 'Thus it pleases the Lord to exercise us with one affliction after another in love; lest we should forget ourselves and love this world too much, and not set our affections on heaven where all true happiness is for ever.' In the next letter, she continued in the same vein:

I hope the Lord will hear our prayers and be pleased to stay his hand in this visitation, which if he please to do we shall have great cause of thankfulness. But I desire in this and all other things to submit unto his holy will. It is the Lord, let him do what seems good in his own eyes. He will do nothing but that shall be for our good if we had hearts to trust him, & all shall be for the best whatsoever it shall please him to exercise us withal...¹⁵

John and Margaret each encouraged the other in their Christian faith and hope throughout their lives.

When John sailed for America in 1630, leading 700 Puritans in eleven ships, Margaret remained behind in England. She was pregnant and planned to rejoin her husband in America the following year. Before John sailed on the *Arabella* with two sons Stephen and Adam, he wrote Margaret:

My dear wife be of good courage, it shall go well with you and us. The hairs of your head are numbered. He who gave his only beloved to die for you, will give his Angels charge over you. Therefore raise up your thoughts, & be merry in the Lord. Labor to live by your Faith. If you meet with troubles or difficulties, be not dismayed. God does use to bring his children into the straights of the Red Sea &c, that he may show his power and mercy in making a way for them. All his course towards us are but to make us know him & love him.¹⁶

Margaret did arrive in America in 1631, accompanied by their young son Samuel and the oldest Winthrop son, John Jr. Baby Ann died a week after Margaret set sail to rejoin John, who had never seen his infant daughter. After a ten-month voyage, Margaret's ship arrived in New England. The people welcomed her with abundant gifts of provisions and food, showing their love for Governor Winthrop and his wife. Margaret and John lived

15 Diana Severance, ed. *A Cord of Three Strands*. Xulon Press, 2004, p. 58.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 68.

together in Boston for fifteen years. It seems that their strong spiritual union had only grown stronger through their years of separation and difficulties. In 1647, an epidemic swept through the colony. Margaret Winthrop fell sick June 13 and died the next morning. John wrote in his diary, '14. In this sickness the governor's wife, daughter of Sir John Tindal, knight, left this world for a better, being about fifty-six years of age; a woman of singular virtue, prudence, modesty, and specially beloved and honored of all the country.'¹⁷

In many ways the relationship between John and Margaret Winthrop was a model of the Puritan family. The husband was the head of the family. Though the wife was submissive to the husband's leadership, she was his equal in companionship and had important responsibilities in managing the household and children. In a primarily agricultural economy, managing the household often included the farming business of the family. One historian called Puritan wives 'deputy husbands,' who were empowered to act for their husbands in legal and financial matters.¹⁸ This was especially true when John was away in London or in America establishing a new colony.

The First Native American Christian Woman

The first known Native American Christian was Pocahontas, a daughter of the Indian chief Powhatan, in what became the colony of Virginia. Pocahontas was early attracted to the English settlers and befriended these visitors to her land. Though often remembered for saving the life of John Smith, Pocahontas married English settler John Rolfe. Rolfe had prayerfully considered whether or not he should marry Pocahontas, and gathered together numerous Scriptures persuading himself his love for her could be a means of bringing her people to Christ. Pocahontas converted to the Christian faith and was instructed in the Scriptures by Rev. Whitaker.

When Pocahontas converted to Christianity, she took the Christian name of Rebecca at her baptism. After her marriage to John Rolfe, the couple traveled to England, where Rebecca became the sensation of London society and was received by the Queen (but not received by King James. The King, displeased with Rolfe for marrying a princess without his permission, refused to see the Native American).

Before returning to America, Rebecca took ill and died. She was buried at St. George's church at Gravesend. The church today contains two stained glass windows commemorating the young American woman. One is of the Old Testament matriarch Rebecca, with a smaller picture depicting Pocahontas' baptism. The other window is of Ruth, the Moabitess who left her native people to follow the God of Israel. Did Pocahontas/Rebecca know of Ruth's famous words to Naomi—'Intreat me not to leave thee, nor to depart from thee, for whither thou goest, I will go: and where thou dwelleth, I will dwell: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God'?

17 Robert C. Winthrop, ed. *Life and Letters of John Winthrop*. New York: De Capo Press, 1971 (reprint of 1864-1867 ed.), Vol. II, p. 362.

18 Laurel Thatcher Ulrich. *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982.

The spiritual companionship of husband and wife, as well as their recognition that the primary fealty of each was to their God, were important hallmarks of the Puritan marriage. In his famous address on board the *Arabella* en route to New England in 1630, Winthrop spoke at length about the importance of love among the Christians in the new settlement. He noted that 'love among Christians is a real thing, not imaginary,' and that the 'state of wedlock' was the closest thing on earth to heaven.

The first English poet in America, Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672), also held this Puritan view of marriage and of woman's position. In 1630, when she was eighteen, Anne, along with her parents Thomas and Dorothy Dudley and husband Simon, sailed to America with John Winthrop's fleet. Thomas Dudley, who had been steward to the Earl of Lincoln, left behind wealth in England to serve God in America. Anne had been tutored since she was seven in dancing, languages, music, and the skills expected of a lady of piety and some station in life. At sixteen she married Simon Bradstreet, the son of a Puritan minister and part of the Earl of Lincoln's household. Both Anne's father and her husband served as governor of Massachusetts several times, so she was among the leading families of the young colony. In the midst of her many household duties and raising eight children, Anne wrote poetry.¹⁹ Many of Anne's poems were descriptions of events in her life, which led her to spiritual meditations and Christian reflections on the event. Anne's poems were a way of focusing her attention upon God in times of hardship. The poem entitled 'Verses upon the burning of our house, July 18th, 1666' described the burning of her house with its pleasant things and memories, but reflected on the house built in heaven gloriously furnished by a mighty Architect. The poem concluded

Farewell, my pelf, farewell, my store.
The world no longer let me love;
My hope and Treasure lies above.

In the epitaph Anne wrote for her mother, Dorothy Dudley, she pictured the Puritan ideal of woman:

A worthy matron of unspotted life,
A loving mother and obedient wife,
A friendly neighbor, pitiful to poor,
Whom oft she fed and clothed with her store;
To servants wisely awful, but yet kind,
And as they did so regard did find.
A true instructor of her family,
To which she ordered with dexterity.

¹⁹ Selected poems by Anne Bradstreet may be found at *The Celebration of Women Writers*, <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/bradstreet/1678/1678.html>.

Within a span of about ten years, Anne had eight children, all of whom lived to adulthood, a very rare occurrence in a day when most families lost several children to disease. Though Anne's children did become seriously ill, they recovered, as Anne wrote in 'Upon My Daughter Hannah and Her Recovering from a Dangerous Fever:'

Bles't be Thy Name who did's't restore to
health my Daughter dear
When Death did seem ev'n to approach
And life was ended near.
Grant she remember what thou'st done
And celebrate thy praise
And let her conversation say
She loves Thee all her days.

Having eight children, Anne was wise enough to recognize that each child was different and required different parenting:

Diverse children have their different natures; some are like flesh [or meat] which nothing but salt will keep from putrefication; some again like tender fruit that are best preserved with sugar; those parents are wise that can fit their nurture according to their Nature.

Several of Anne's poems were about her husband Simon, who frequently was absent on government business. 'To My Dear and Loving Husband' reads:

If ever two were one, then surely we.
If ever man were loved by wife, then thee;
If ever wife was happy in a man,
Compare with me, ye women, if you can.
I prize thy love more than whole mines of gold
Or all the riches that the East doth hold.
My love is such that rivers cannot quench,
Nor ought but love from thee, give recompense.
Thy love is such I can no way repay,
The heavens reward thee manifold, I pray.

Unknown to her, Anne's early poems were collected by her father and brother-in-law and taken to England, where in 1650 they were published as *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America*. In the preface, Anne's brother-in-law wrote that the poems were

the Word of a Woman, honoured, and esteemed where she lives, for her gracious demeanor, her eminent parts, her pious conversation, her courteous disposition, her exact diligence in her place, and discreet, managing of her Family occasions, and more than so, these Poems are

but the fruit of some few hours, curtailed from her sleep and other refreshments.

In later years, Anne also wrote more lengthy poems, treating of learned subjects, such as the four kingdoms of Daniel, the seasons, or the ages of men. These, however, were read by friends and family and were not published until after her death. Though remembered today for her poetry, Anne did not consider poetry-writing her primary occupation. Her life before God was primarily as a wife and mother. When Anne wrote an autobiography for her children, she never mentioned her poetry. Writing in her journal near her death she concluded, 'Upon the Rock Christ Jesus will I build by faith, and if I perish, I perish. But I know all the powers of Hell shall never prevail against it. I know whom I have trusted, and whom I believe and that he is able to keep what I have committed to his charge.'

While Margaret Winthrop and Anne Bradstreet modeled the role of the Puritan woman, wife, and mother, their names are not as well recognized as that of Anne Hutchinson, a rebel to the Puritan ideals and government. Anne Hutchinson (1591-1643) and her husband were part of Rev. John Cotton's church in Boston, Lincolnshire, and they immigrated to New England in 1634-5, along with Cotton and other members of the congregation.

The Boston church in England had emphasized two different ways of measuring the reality of a person's conversion. One said that works were evidence of salvation; the other said personal union with the Holy Spirit was evidence of salvation. The tension between these two views was brought to the colony when many of the Boston church immigrated with Pastor Cotton. In New England, Anne began holding weekly meetings in her home to discuss Rev. Cotton's sermons. The meetings grew, and another meeting started with both men and women attending. Anne began going beyond simply reviewing the sermons and began teaching her own views of Scripture, attacking leaders of the Massachusetts colony who disagreed with her.

When Anne had a conversion experience early in the 1630s, she sensed God's love in a special way. When this sense later faded, she sought to recapture it by her works, especially fasting and opening herself to the random association of the words of Scripture, which she believed came from the Holy Spirit. Many Puritans taught that works or sanctification were signs of conversion, evidences of grace and justification. Anne believed this at first, but came to think that this was legalistic and that the personal presence of the Holy Spirit was a better proof of conversion. Anne's brother-in-law, Rev. John Wheelwright, taught that every Christian could receive the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Anne came to believe

Those Salem Witches

When many think of the Puritans of Massachusetts, they think of the Salem Witchcraft trials of 1692. Yet, Salem's witchcraft hysteria was an example of the Puritans' succumbing to outside cultural influences rather than being true to their Puritan beliefs.

In the seventeenth century, witchcraft was widely acknowledged as an evil in England and throughout Europe. Witchcraft trials and even the burning of witches were a part of the culture of the day. According to the Renaissance theory of witches, women were particularly susceptible to the devil's wiles, and witches were recognized as an evil which should be purged from society.

In Salem, the problem began with some teenage girls accusing citizens of the town of bewitching them. Even if witnesses could testify that the accused had not even come near the girls, the idea that the 'specter' of the individual could be persecuting the girls was accepted. The acceptance of 'spectral evidence' rather than true forensic evidence by the courts allowed a great injustice to be done in Salem. At one time, 150 people were imprisoned as being suspected witches. Many of the accused were social misfits or middle-aged women; few were young or middle-aged men. Nineteen people were eventually hanged (no witches were burned in the colonies), and one was pressed to death for refusing to testify.

Scholars have noted several causes for the witchcraft hysteria at Salem, including the following:

- A West Indian slave was practicing voodoo in the village and enticing the girls with superstitions
- Judges and ministers were nervous about the colony's spiritual decline and were eager to find ways to check it
- There was simmering community hostility against a few lonely old women and a few new families
- A wide range of occult practices were being secretly practiced in the village
- The adolescent hysteria of a few teenage girls was accompanied by the judicial hysteria of a few older men.

The witch trials at Salem came about because the villagers accepted contemporary theories of witches rather than looking to the Bible for the criteria for who was a witch and what the punishment should be. Leading Puritan ministers, such as Increase Mather, spoke out against the trials. Most of the clergy recognized the real evil was with the accusers; when the girls began accusing people of spotless character, the trials were ended. Five years after the trials, one of the judges, Samuel Sewell, confessed his guilt for the judgment at the trials. The trials showed the vulnerability of the people to mass suggestion and their failure to follow the Scriptures, which they claimed to be their guide.

that those who believed works were evidence of salvation were teaching a covenant of works and were bound by the law that Christ came to abolish. The entire controversy became known as the Antinomian (anti-law)

controversy, implying that Anne and her followers wanted to throw off the requirements of the law entirely and lead a life of absolute freedom and licentiousness. Rev. Wheelwright and Anne attacked the ministers of the colony, even calling them antichrists, and saying that only Rev. Cotton and Rev. Wheelwright were teaching the truth. When the Pequot War broke out, Anne and Rev. Wheelwright discouraged Bostonians from volunteering and serving under the leadership of such false ministers.

Anne's meetings and attacks upon the ministers were looked upon as attacks upon the leadership of the colony in a time of war and considered a threat to the safety and stability of the colony. The Court of Massachusetts disbanded Anne's twice-weekly meetings saying,

women might meet (some few together) to pray and edify one another; yet such a set assembly (as was then in practice in Boston), where sixty or more did meet every week and one woman (in a prophetic way), by resolving questions of doctrine and expounding scripture took upon her the whole exercise, was agreed to be disorderly, and without rule.²⁰

Yet Anne continued the meetings. In doing so she disrupted the peace and harmony of the colony and threatened the very religious basis of the Massachusetts government. Anne claimed her meetings were in accord with the apostle Paul's instructions – they were in her private home, not in church. Paul had told the older women to teach the younger, and there was nothing amiss in her privately teaching and counseling men. Since both male and female were one in Christ, she claimed she had done nothing wrong.

The Massachusetts Bay Colony had been established as a covenantal society with the goal of building a civil and ecclesiastical society to improve the residents' lives and allow them to serve the Lord. Anne's views were outside the agreed-upon covenant, and thus were a threat and danger to the colony itself. To protect the colony, laws were passed restricting new immigrants to those approved by the council or magistrates. In a commonwealth founded by free consent, the people must have a common interest in each other. Those whose dispositions would be hurtful to the commonwealth should be excluded. No person could be a part of the commonwealth without the consent of the magistrates and leaders. Accordingly, some who came from Lincolnshire and shared the views of Hutchinson were allowed to stay only four months before they were required to return to England. Those responsible for governance maintained that the colony should not have to receive those who made out the ministers and leaders of the colony to be the enemy of Christ.

20 Marilyn J. Westerkamp. *Woman and Religion in Early America, 1600-1850: The Puritan and Evangelical Traditions*. London and New York: Routledge, 1999, p. 39.

Governor John Winthrop and pastor John Cotton tried to moderate the differences, but Anne Hutchinson and Rev. Wheelwright refused to admit any error or modify their views.

In October 1636, at a meeting of the General Court, the clergy met with Rev. John Cotton. He said he had taught that the Holy Spirit indwelt the saints, but that this teaching was distinct from the personal union and inspiration of the Holy Spirit Rev. Wheelwright had preached; the latter had more in common with Quakerism. In November 1637, John Wheelwright was banished from the colony; a trial of Anne Hutchinson followed. Anne, a woman of intelligence and extensive knowledge of the Scripture, was able to think circles around the leaders of the General Court, answering them repeatedly with Scripture. She incriminated herself, however, when she began to speak about her personal revelation, like the prophet Daniel. She 'prophesied' that the colony and the court would come to ruin because of their treatment of her. At the trial, Hugh Peter, for the Court, told Anne, 'you have stepped out of your place, *You have rather bine a Husband than a Wife and a preacher than a Hearer; and a Magistrate than a Subject.*'²¹ The court accordingly banished her 'for traducing the ministers and their ministry in this country, [for which] she declared voluntarily her revelations for her ground, and that she should be delivered and the Court ruined, with their posterity.'²² If Anne did not support the leadership and government of Massachusetts, she must find somewhere else to live. After the civil proceedings were over, Anne Hutchinson was brought before the Boston church on charges of heresy and excommunicated.

John Winthrop had little charity for Anne Hutchinson because she never would admit her error. She was uncompromising in her negative attitude towards the clergy and seemed to have a grandiose sense of her own self-importance. Her arrogance and impulsiveness itself were a threat to the social order of this Puritan experiment on the edge of the American wilderness. Unable to respect a woman asserting such religious leadership outside of the home, Winthrop called Anne an 'American Jezebel' and an agent of the devil. Winthrop was probably also embarrassed by Anne's brilliant answers in court. When Anne moved to Rhode Island and gave birth to a deformed child prematurely, Winthrop took this as a curse of God upon her. English correspondents complimented Winthrop on dealing with the seriousness of the issues, saying such upstart opinions as Anne Hutchinson's were not held in England.

21 Lyle Koehler, 'The Case of the American Jezebels: Anne Hutchinson and Female Agitation during the Years of Antinomian Turmoil, 1636-1640,' *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., Vol. 31, No. 1 (Jan. 1974), p. 64.

22 Francis J. Bremer. *John Winthrop*. Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 298.

When she was banished, Anne and her family moved to Rhode Island, where Anne became an Anabaptist and against all civil authority among Christians. She also denied that there were not, nor could there be, any true churches since the time of the apostles and evangelists. After Anne's husband died in 1641, Anne became disgruntled with affairs in Rhode Island. She and her five children moved to New Netherlands (New York) the following year. Within months she and her children were massacred by Indians. The Massachusetts authorities saw this as God's punishment for her heresies.

In 1987, Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis pardoned Anne Hutchinson and revoked Winthrop's edict of banishment 350 years earlier, and some recent writers have elevated Hutchinson as a feminist proponent of religious liberty and freedom of conscience. In her day, however, she did not espouse broad and wide-ranging principles of liberty or women's rights. Hers was a personal struggle against an authoritarian society trying to bring religious and civil order out of a wilderness. Her individual charm, coupled with her intellect and brilliance, led to a band of supporters gathering around her and made her a powerful opponent to the civil and religious leaders of her day. Her pride and arrogance prevented her from having a more positive influence on those same leaders or being a positive instrument for change on her society. Some of her followers became members of the Quakers, a group who from the beginning espoused the right of women to preach freely, or lead in all the meetings of the Church.

Women and the Society of Friends

England of the seventeenth century underwent important transformation both religiously and politically. Queen Elizabeth had established the Anglican Church along a *via media*, but many yearned for a Church whose forms and practices, as well as its doctrines, conformed to a strictly Biblical pattern. James I and Charles I, the Stuart monarchs, who followed Elizabeth, favored a more formal liturgy, vestments, and hierarchical structure to the Church. They also believed firmly in their divine right to rule and found it easy to ignore the power of Parliament and the legal constraints which had been placed on the monarchy over the centuries. Such religious and political conflict resulted in the English Civil War (1642-1651) between the Royalist and Parliamentary forces. King Charles I was executed for high treason in ignoring English law, and a republic or Commonwealth was declared in 1649. With the Royalist forces defeated, the Parliamentary and independent forces became more fractious, causing the Protectorate under Oliver Cromwell to be established in 1653 as an attempt to preserve order in the nation.

George Fox (1624-1691) lived during this tumultuous time in England's history. He tired of the ever-changing state-controlled religion. The English Church had been successively Roman Catholic, Anglican,

Presbyterian, and Independent, yet, for Fox, none of these forms seemed to embody the truth. He rejected all forms of institutional Christianity and became convinced that Christ was not solely contained in either the Mass or the Bible, but should be personally experienced. Fox himself believed God had spoken to him, and he began to speak in the open air, outside the churches, of the Divine Light and true Christianity as he knew it. Fox's movement swiftly spread throughout England and beyond. Some of his followers seemed fanatical when 'moved by the Spirit' – gaining the group the name of 'Quakers' for their trembling and enthusiasm. Fox, however, learned to check behavior by Scripture, and emphasized that the liberation from sin found in Christ should lead to an individual's obedience to Christ.

Fox taught an equality of Christians totally unknown at the time. Servant girls and aristocrats equally came and sat side by side in the meetings of the Society of Friends, as Fox's followers called themselves. The Friends or Quakers refused to show any deference to people of position in society, declining even to take off their hats to judges or people in authority. They did not pay the obligatory tithes to the state Church or take oaths of any kind. Because of the state-sanctioned Church, Quaker religious meetings were forbidden and illegal. Fox had an audience with Oliver Cromwell as he tried to obtain religious freedom. He told Cromwell that Christians must not only have the Scriptures, they must live by the Scriptures. He encouraged Cromwell to reject the military weapons on which he relied and take up the armor of the Spirit. Though Cromwell had respect and sympathy for Fox, fearing chaos and disorder in the kingdom, he did not permit the religious freedom Fox requested. With the threats of rebellion against the government materializing towards the end of the Protectorate, thousands of Quakers were imprisoned for their failure to take oaths or show loyalty to the government. Fox himself was imprisoned on many occasions. On at least one occasion he was imprisoned with the woman who became his wife.

Margaret Askew (1614-1702) was related (possibly a great-granddaughter) to the martyr Anne Askew, burned at the stake during the days of Henry VIII. When she was eighteen, Margaret married Thomas Fell, a lawyer and Member of Parliament. The couple had eight children, seven daughters and a son, and lived in Swarthmoor Hall in Lancashire. In 1652, Margaret heard George Fox speak and became a follower and supporter of his. Later she wrote that when she listened to Fox, he opened to her 'a book that we had never read in, nor indeed had ever heard that it was our duty to read in... And he turned our minds toward the light of Christ as they had never been turned before.'²³ The 'book' Margaret

23 Quoted in Deen, *Great Women of the Christian Faith*.

referred to was simply the 'inner light of the soul.' Though George Fell never joined the Quakers himself, he supported his wife in her religious work with the Quakers. Swarthmoor Hall became a center of Quaker life, and Margaret became the unofficial secretary of the society, writing letters for Fox and others, as well as writing tracts herself. Her organizational skills in themselves were important to the fledgling group.

In 1658, George Fell died, leaving Swarthmoor and his estate to Margaret. When Charles II was brought to the throne at the Restoration in 1660, he sought to restore a high Anglican Church to power, and government forces raided Swarthmoor to stop the illegal religious meetings held there. Margaret petitioned the king for freedom of conscience, promising persuasion, not violence, to bring about change in government or religion. However, in 1664, Margaret was arrested for having Quaker meetings in her home and for not taking the oath of loyalty to the Anglican Church. She was imprisoned in the Lancaster jail and finally sentenced to life imprisonment and forfeiture of her property.

While in prison she wrote books and pamphlets, including one in 1666 entitled 'Women Justified, Proved, and Allowed of by the scriptures, all such as Speak by the Spirit and Power of the Lord Jesus.'²⁴ Margaret tried to show from Scripture that women should speak and preach freely. She contended that men and women equally bore the image of God and that limitations on a woman's freedom were not made until after the Fall of Adam and Eve. The Church was described as a woman in Scriptures; to limit the speech of women was to limit the speech of the Church. Numerous women mentioned in Scripture showed that women were to preach the gospel – including the Samaritan woman, Martha and Mary, the women with Christ during His ministry, Mary Magdalene, Priscilla, Hannah, Esther, Jesus' mother Mary and her cousin Elizabeth (both prophesied clearly). In support of women prophesying, Margaret quoted Joel 2:29, 'And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.' Neither men nor women were to speak without the Spirit of God, but it would be wrong to limit the speech of a woman when the Spirit clearly was prompting her. Christ worked through the weak to accomplish His purposes, and He could work through a preaching woman.

Margaret examined the Scriptures in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy 2 where Paul enjoined the women to keep silence and not exert authority over men. She decided these Scriptures were intended for unruly women in the early Church who were disrupting meetings and adorning themselves with worldly ways and fashions. She believed the Scriptural admonitions had nothing to do with Christian women of later centuries

24 Available at www.qhpress.org/texts/fell.html.

who, under the power of the Spirit, preached to others. George Fox, who was in prison with Margaret when she wrote this tract, later wrote and spoke similarly about the freedom of women to preach and minister. From the earliest days of the Quaker meetings, women spoke freely. The Quakers had no ordained ministers. All who spoke in the Quaker meeting were lay people and were to speak only by the direct inspiration of the Divine Light, including women. Ultimately, Quakers looked to the Inner Light more than the Scriptures for their authority and guidance. Looking to personal inspiration rather than Scripture as their ultimate authority, Quakers easily developed a diversity of beliefs distinct from the truth found in Christ.

In 1668, Margaret was released from prison by the order of the King and Council. Her property had been protected by her daughters and had not been confiscated; she was able to return to life at Swarthmoor. In 1668, Margaret Fell married George Fox, ten years her junior. This was a marriage for spiritual purposes. During their twenty-two years of marriage, they were apart more often than they were together. George was imprisoned several more times for illegal religious assembly, and also traveled to America. In later years he lived in London, staying with one of Margaret's four married daughters, while Margaret remained at Swarthmoor with her youngest daughter and son-in-law. Gulielma Penn, wife of Pennsylvania founder William Penn, kindly wrote Margaret, 'methinks if thou foundest a Clearness and Freedom in the Lord, it would be happie thou wert nearer thy dear Husband and children, but that I leave [to] the Lords ordering, and thy Freedom.'²⁵ Yet Margaret maintained her independence and remained at Swarthmoor. She used her wealth and higher social position to enhance George Fox's position and elevate the Quaker cause whenever possible.

Margaret was important in establishing women's meetings among the Quakers, which expanded the role of women in the Church. These meetings had a role in governing the Church, disciplining women, and controlling the Church's membership. George Fox wrote a pamphlet encouraging the meetings. The women's meetings collected money to distribute to the poor and helped train women in midwifery, social welfare, and how best to help and minister to others. The women's meetings were also the first to rule on a couple's intention to marry. Both man and woman would need to be Quakers, and if one was outside the community, his Quaker credentials and his suitability for marriage, both materially and spiritually, were examined by the women.

25 Bonnelyn Young Kunze, 'Religious Authority and Social Status in Seventeenth-Century England: The Friendship of Margaret Fell, George Fox, and William Penn,' *Church History*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (June 1988), p. 181.



In the seventeenth century, the majority of the traveling ministers who spread the Quaker teachings throughout Britain, America, the Continent, and Turkey, were women. One historian estimated that from 1700 to 1775, there were between 1300 and 1500 female preachers among the Quakers. Usually two women traveled together, an older and a younger one. The women were approved by first monthly and then quarterly meetings of Friends before being permitted to travel and minister in the Friends' name.

One of the pioneering Quaker missionaries was Mary Fisher (1623?-1698?), a Yorkshire servant girl. Mary was a servant in the home of Richard Tomlinson and his wife Pontefract when she first heard George Fox. The entire household converted to Quakerism, and Mary began preaching the Quaker faith to the parish minister. For sixteen months she was imprisoned in York Castle with other Quakers, from whom she learned and grew in the faith. Quakers believed that ministers of Christ became such from knowledge of Christ's life and work, not merely by knowledge of Greek, Hebrew, and Latin. When released from prison, Mary Fisher and a friend went to preach to the students at Sidney Sussex College. For this they were arrested and whipped publicly at the Market-Cross. Mary and her friend showed the utmost courage under persecution. In 1655, Mary set out for America with Anne Austin, arriving in Boston in May 1656.

The Puritan leaders in Massachusetts believed the Quaker preachers challenged the colony's order and threatened the pure doctrine and practice of the colony. If allowed to continue, they feared Quaker beliefs would bring anarchy and undermine the moral fabric of their fragile society in the American wilderness. Massachusetts accordingly had passed laws against the Quakers. Quakers were banished from the colony, and if they returned they could be physically punished. If they persisted in returning to the colony, they could be executed. When Mary and Anne arrived in Boston, they were kept prisoner aboard the ship, their trunks were searched and all their books were burned. They were shipped back to Barbados and then England without ever being able to preach in Boston.

In 1657, when she was thirty-four, Mary journeyed to Turkey with five other Quaker missionaries, three men and two women. She told people along the way she had a 'message to the king from the Most High God.' Fearlessly, Mary came to speak to the Ottoman Sultan, whose court was then at Adrianople with an army of twenty thousand men. Quaker historian William Sewel, writing in 1795, described the scene:

The Sultan bade her speak the word of the Lord to them, and not to fear, for they had good hearts and could hear it. He also charged her to speak the word she had to say from the Lord, neither more nor less, for they were willing to hear it, be it what it would. Then she spoke what was

upon her mind. The Turks hearkened to her... Then the Sultan desired her to stay in the country, saying that they could not but respect such a one, as should take so much pains to come to them so far as from England, with a message from the Lord God. He also proffered her a guard to bring her into Constantinople... But she, not accepting this offer, he told her it was dangerous traveling, especially for such a one as she; and wondered that she had passed so safe so far as she had; saying also that it was in respect to her, and kindness that he proffered it, and that he would not do anything that she should come to the least hurt in his dominions. She, having no more to say, the Turks asked her what she thought of their prophet Mahomet and she answered she knew him not, but Christ the true prophet, the Son of God, who was the Light of the World, and enlightened every man coming to the world, Him, she knew.

Though Mary's words are not known to have changed any Turkish heart, they did give courage to the Quakers back in England. Mary later wrote to another Quaker:

I bore my testimony for the Lord before the King unto whom I was sent, and he was very noble unto me ... and he and all that were about him received the words of truth without contradiction ... There is a royal seed amongst them which in time God will raise. They are more near truth than many nations. There is a love begotten in me towards them which is endless.²⁶

A continent away, another Quaker preacher was boldly speaking her faith with a more direful end. Mary Dyer was a Puritan who settled in Boston, Massachusetts, with her husband in 1635. She became a strong supporter of Anne Hutchinson and followed her to Rhode Island when she was banished from Massachusetts. The Puritans thought Mary was infected with the same erroneous doctrines as Anne. In 1652, Mary accompanied her husband when he returned to England with Roger Williams to procure a charter for the colony of Rhode Island. While in England, Mary converted to Quakerism. When her husband returned to America, Mary remained in England four more years growing in her Quaker beliefs.

When Mary Dyer and fellow-Quaker Ann Burden returned to New England in 1656, they were arrested in Boston and placed in jail. Mary Fisher and Anne Austin had been deported only days before. When he heard she was in prison in Boston, Mary Dyer's husband came from Rhode Island to procure Mary's release on the promise that she would not remain in Massachusetts Bay Colony. The next year, however, Mary went to the colony of New Haven to preach and was expelled. A month later she returned to Boston to visit some Quakers in prison. She was arrested again by the authorities. Mary and two other Quakers were brought

26 Quotes from William Sewel's *History of the Rise, Increase, and Progress of the Christian People Called Quakers*, 1795, in Deen's *Great Women of the Christian Faith*, pp. 128-9.



before the Massachusetts governor, who asked why they had returned to the colony after they had been banished from it. They contended they were obeying the Lord in coming and preaching. For the repeated offense of returning to Boston and not respecting her banishment, Mary Dyer and the others were sentenced to hang on October 27, 1659. Mary's husband's petition for clemency for his wife brought a reprieve, and Mary once again was banished from Massachusetts. Less than six months later, however, she returned to preach in Boston. She felt this was her duty before God, even though she knew it meant death. Mary Dyer was hanged June 1, 1660. Her former pastor in Boston urged her to repent, but Mary said, 'Nay, I cannot, for in obedience to the will of the Lord God I came, and in His will I abide faithful to the death.'²⁷ Women continued to be an important part of Quakerism in ensuing centuries. In the nineteenth century, Quaker women became important leaders of the women suffrage movement. Many of the principles and practices of this later movement can be seen in the early Quaker women.

Daughters of Zion

Cotton Mather, the American Puritan pastor and prolific writer, wrote a work on Christian women published in 1692 as *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*, subtitled 'The character and happiness of a virtuous woman: in a discourse which directs the female sex how to express the fear of God at every age and state of their life and obtain both temporal and external blessedness.'²⁸ The book was written specifically for 'promoting the Fear of God in the Female Sex.' The basic organization of Mather's work followed Jean Vives' 1529 work written at the request of Catherine of Aragon for her daughter Mary, but Mather provides a distinctively Puritan reflection on womanhood.

Mather began by discussing the character of a virtuous woman. The foundation of all in a virtuous woman's life was the conviction that there is a God. In creation she saw the wisdom, power, and goodness of God throughout the universe, and this produced in her a reverence. She saw God's providence preserving all things to His purposes and recognized that God was a wise General over all the quarrelsome and contentious things in the world. She had the most respect and reverence for all connected with the Name of God, especially the Word of God. She had a fear of God and sought to avoid anything which might bring displeasure to Him. Not only did she not want to offend, but she sought to please and serve the great God and considered being a servant of God the highest of all callings. The worship of God was her greatest delight. She perfumed every room of

27 Quoted in Deen, *Great Women of the Christian Faith*, p. 346.

28 Cotton Mather. *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*. Cambridge: S.G. & B.G., 1692.

her house with prayer. Scriptures and sermons were very dear to her, 'and it is not every trifle (as the want of a Garment or a dread of the weather) that she will make her excuse for her absence from the *Means of Grace*' and Sabbath worship.

Mather secondly dealt with the happiness of the virtuous woman. While volumes had been written on the evils of the female sex, Mather wrote that the virtuous woman would be praised for her fear of God and the wisdom and benefits which came from the fear of the Lord:

The fear of God will soon make it evident, that you are among the excellent in the Earth. If any Men are so wicked (and some sects of Men have been so) as to deny your being rational Creatures, the best Means to confute them, will be by proving yourselves religious ones. I do assure you, and I have more than Luther to consent and concur with me, in this Assertion, That the Actions of even the meanest Milk-maid or Cook-maid, when done in the fear of God, are in the Account of God more noble Things than the Victories of a Caesar! Thus do I set before you, the Way for you to be ennobled; thus ennobled, many of you already are.

Mather noted that there were more women in Church than men. Possibly this was because there were more women in the world than men, though Mather didn't think so. More likely it seemed to him that

The Curse in the Difficulties both of Subjection and of Childbearing, has been turn'd into a Blessing, by the free Grace of our most gracious God. God sanctifies the chains, the Pains, the Deaths which they meet withal; and furthermore, make the Tenderness of their Disposition, a further Occasion of serious Devotion in them . . . most of you have more Time to employ in the more immediate Service of your souls, than the other Sex is owner of. You are ordinarily more within the House, and so may more mind the Work within the Heart than we . . .

The longest portion of Mather's work dealt with counsel and advice. Some of the advice was suited for either sex: pray constantly that the fear of God may be implanted in your soul; let every action in the day be done in fear of God; begin and end the day in communion with God:

Throughout all the Day, interweave a conscience of Duty into all your Motions, all your affairs. Let every meal, every sleep, every visit, and all your domestick business, though it be but the rocking of a cradle, be done with an eye to this, *This is the thing wherein I may perform a Service to God, and expect a Blessing from God; This is what my God would have me to be about.*

Other areas of advice Mather deemed especially suitable to the female sex. Women should be cautious about those who would seduce them from the fear of God. The devil designed to use the weaker sex to reach



their husbands. A poison is most effective when placed in woman's milk! Though women were often accused of misusing the tongue, Mather thought it unfair that all women should be accused of such weakness. He also devoted some space to the importance of proper speech, citing many appropriate Scriptures:

Proverbs 10:20, 'The Tongue of the Just, is as choice Silver.' So your speech ought likewise to be rare, like silver, which is not so common as copper or iron is. Be careful that you don't speak too soon, because you cannot fetch back and eat up, what is uttered; but study to answer. And be careful that you don't speak too much ...

A consecrated Christian woman should exercise discernment in the clothing she wore.

A woman's fashion should not prejudice her health. Her dress should be consistent with modesty and sobriety and should be according to her rank in society. She should not over-expose parts of her body. An old woman should not dress as a young woman. If a woman spent more time on her clothes than she did in praying or working out her own salvation, then the clothes became a snare to her soul.

Mather recognized that the most important thing for a virtuous woman was her faith in Christ: 'Whoever pretends to write the calling of a Virtuous Woman, and forgets to urge Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Root and Source of all true Virtue, has finely left out the one Thing needful.' Such a woman maintained the fear of God in every condition and stage of life. Mather described in detail how the maid, the virtuous wife, the virtuous mother, and the virtuous widow each in her own way and station lived out and manifested the fear of the Lord. Mather concluded his work with the prayer:

I praise thee, O my God, for thy assisting my Endeavors to describe the Praises of the virtuous Woman; and rely upon thy Grace in the Son, that these my poor Labours may be accepted and succeeded among the Daughters of the People. Amen.

