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A Garden Locked, A Fountain Sealed: Female Virginity as a Model for Holiness in the Fourth Century

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The University of Southern Mississippi

A GARDEN LOCKED, A FOUNTAIN SEALED: FEMALE VIRGINITY AS A
MODEL FOR HOLINESS IN THE FOURTH CENTURY

by

Lindsay Anne Williams

A Thesis
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ABSTRACT

A GARDEN LOCKED, A FOUNTAIN SEALED: FEMALE VIRGINITY AS A MODEL FOR HOLINESS IN THE FOURTH CENTURY

by Lindsay Anne Williams

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Despite centuries of Christian theologians and lay Christians alike assigning and/or accepting an entrenched misogyny in the writings of Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine, close examination of their work on its own terms and in its own time reveals that, in fact, they did not hold women in lesser esteem than men. Rather, time and again, in the writings of these Latin Doctors of the Church, women were promoted as exemplars of holiness and sanctity often in excess of their male counterparts and commonly as didactic tools used to lead their fellow Christians down a more righteous path. The following thesis serves as both examination and exculpation of these deeply influential figures in the history of Christianity, in an attempt to understand better the place of women in Christian society, teaching, and theology.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>CCSL</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum Series Latina</i> . Turnhout: Brepols, 1953-
<i>CSEL</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> . Vienna, 1866-
<i>CT</i>	Theodosian Code
<i>Ep(p)</i> .	<i>Epistula(e)</i>
<i>MGH</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i> . Berlin: Weidmann, 1819-
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> . Paris: J.P. Migne, 1841-1865.

For the convenience of general readers, Latin works are referred to by English titles throughout this text unless better known by their Latin names (e.g. *On Virginity*, or *Epitoma Chronicon*).

Unless otherwise noted, all dates referred to herein are from the Common Era.

LIST OF EDITIONS

Augustine. *Ep. CXLII: The Works of St. Augustine: A New Translation for the 21st Century*, Part 2, Volume 3, *Letters 156-210*. Translated by Roland J. Teske. Edited by Boniface Ramsey. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2004.

———. *Ep. CCLII-CCLV: Saint Augustine: Letters, Volume V (204-270), The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation, Volume 32*. Translated by Sister Wilfrid Parsons. Baltimore, MD: Catholic University of America Press, 1956.

Jerome. *Ep. XXXIX: Jerome Letters and Select Works*. Translated by W.H. Fremantle. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956.

———. *Ep. XLIX (XLVIII); Ep. LIV; Ep. CVII; Ep. CXXVIII: Select Letters of Saint Jerome*. Translated by F.A. Wright. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1933.

C. Pharr. *The Theodosian Code and Novels and Simondian Constitutions. A Translation with Commentary, Glossary, and Bibliography*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952.

All Latin text is from the *CSEL*, unless otherwise noted.

Aside from the specific works and translations mentioned above or in the text, most translations are from the Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers Series I and II. Edited by Philip Schaff. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.M. Eerdmans, 1886-1895). The translations found in these editions are often the only translations available in English of certain compositions of Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine. This series is so well regarded that it was reprinted beginning in the 1950s through the end of the 1990s.

All biblical passages in English are from the New Revised Standard Edition.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet...”

-Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII.vii.17

“But I was unhappy, incapable of following a woman’s example...”

-Augustine, *Confessions*, VI.xvi.25

“I only wish that men would follow the example that women have publicly given them...”

-Jerome, *Epistula* LIV.ii

Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine have left an indelible mark on the history of western Christendom. Their works became the foundations of orthodox Roman Catholicism. The subjugation of women perpetuated by the Church from the time of the early Middle Ages was often traced to a supposed biblical and patristic precedent in the compositions of Paul of Tarsus, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine. But upon more thorough examination, the compositions of Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine presented women as capable of greater religious purity than men; the epitome of Christian righteousness. Their position as Fathers of the Church, and the extensive translating and transmission of their compositions led to bad interpretations and the misappropriation of their ideas, just as the works of Paul were also victims of interpolation and misunderstanding. It is common to write Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine off as merely being mouthpieces for their misogynist times, parroting back the *mores* of the overly patriarchal society in which they lived. This simply is not good enough. Within the letters, sermons, and books of Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine, one finds their

Christianity to be largely inclusive, emphasizing the equality in terms of religious potential and purity of human beings, not just elite men. More than that, however, they were addressing issues of heresy and paganism in a time when orthodox Christianity was still evolving. In their works to perpetuate orthodoxy, Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine portrayed the important role women played in life and in theory as role models and paradigms of proper Christian religious expression. Although without question Greco-Roman polytheism played a large role in the Mediterranean late antique world, these church fathers do not address the role of Christian women in comparison with their pagan counterparts, but instead seem to be forging a model of feminine holiness within a uniquely Christian context. It is important to look closely at the works of Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine and how they perceived women, to better understand women's positions as exempla for humanity, literally and rhetorically, in Christian society in the late fourth century.

The issue of women's role in history is a field that has recently arisen in late antique studies. While the research undertaken has spanned many subjects, no one has investigated the specific role the Latin Church Fathers of the fourth century played in determining, or at least enunciating, the relatively important role of women as exempla in Christian society. While studies have been undertaken that note the progressive views of one or another of the Latin Fathers, or that discuss the power of aristocratic women in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, the two have yet to be put together in a comprehensive study. My thesis will address the important role of women in the late antique Western Roman Empire and the Church.

In the late fourth century, Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine, to borrow and slightly modify a phrase of Peter Brown's, used women to teach with, presenting them as ideal exempla of Christian behavior and asceticism.¹ The writings of Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine exhibited considerable admiration for the women in their lives. The authors presented women, both living and biblical, as models for all Christians. Women served as the guides and paradigms for Christians from the youngest child, to the most adept male ascetic. There also persisted a notion that women were capable of a higher asceticism and, therefore, had the potential for a greater holiness than men, an idea that represented a reversal of contemporary normative Roman concepts of women. This was borne out clearly in Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine's letters to women, some of whom seem to have achieved this higher holiness in the eyes of their male correspondent. Similarly, the letters that they wrote regarding the education of children consistently recommended women as the teachers and models for young Christian children to take after. There was similar assessment of women's suitability as exempla in the treatises concerning asceticism and virginity that were intended to be preached or read among a community of both genders. In works that were intended for an audience of which men were a part, the authors presented this concept of female superiority in much more subtle ways. This nuanced portrayal of women was evident in sermons in which the authors included not just biblical exemplars of supreme feminine holiness, but also, such as in Ambrose's sermons on the death of his brother, contemporary exemplars as well.² Even when they had to readjust their message regarding asceticism to better suit their audience, women remained the exempla used to model ideal Christian behavior. This notion of

¹ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 153.

² His sister, Marcellina.

women as capable of the highest righteousness among humans and their rightness to serve as models for Christian behavior culminated in Augustine's portrayal of his mother, Monnica in the *Confessions*. Monnica served, for Augustine, as voice of God, arbiter of orthodoxy, and guide for himself, and by his example, for all people, on the path to righteousness. Whether directed at an audience of men or women, Ambrose, Augustine, and Jerome certainly viewed females as closer, by nature, to the path of true righteousness via asceticism. The presentation of such ideas, however, varied from overt to veiled even, depending upon the audience to whom a particular sermon, letter or treatise was being addressed.

In the mid-late fourth century when Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine lived and were active, Roman society was in the most profound transitional period it had ever experienced. Roman society in the late fourth and early fifth centuries was turning from a fully ingrained Greco-Roman polytheistic religion and philosophical tradition to the philosophies and worldview of Christianity, just as the Roman Empire, at least in the west, was beginning to fragment as Germanic peoples inserted themselves into the military and political affairs of Rome with increasingly devastating results. Even before Stilicho and Alaric, there was the devastating Roman defeat at Adrianople in 378 and the Roman emperor, Valens (r.364-378), lying dead on a battlefield at the hands of the Gothic chieftain, Fritigern.

In the later fourth century, there was still a living memory of Christianity's advent to the status of *religio licita* (legal religion as opposed to *superstitio*, literally superstition, not acknowledged as a valid religious practice) in the greater Roman world (311-313) and the line between orthodoxy, only first determined at Nicaea in 325, and heresy was

very fine indeed. Arianism had arisen out of the debate and run-up to the Council of Nicaea, Christianity's first ecumenical council, during which the Alexandrian presbyter, Arius, drew the ire of his bishop, Alexander, for claiming (as Paul of Tarsus seems to have done, e.g. Romans 1) that Jesus was not co-eternal with the Father. Although Arius' Christology was significantly higher than Paul's—Arius was happy to claim that Jesus was fully divine and pre-existent before creation—Alexander and his lieutenant, Athanasius, would have none of it. The debate climaxed at Nicaea with the wily presbyter, Athanasius, stage-managing an impressive coup by stacking the ranks with like-minded bishops and arriving at the doctrine of *homoousios*, which is commonly translated as “one in being with” or “of the same substance as” when describing Jesus' relationship to the Father. Arianism, however, did not go away after Nicaea. By 335, Athanasius, now bishop of Alexandria, found himself exiled by the very emperor, Constantine, who had rubber stamped the canons of Nicaea. That same emperor was baptized by the Arian bishop, Eusebius of Nicomedia, on his deathbed in 337. In the West, where Ambrose was bishop and Jerome had traveled and studied, Arianism was rampant. Especially among Germanic peoples, the doctrine of *homoisias*, or “of a similar substance,” and an adoptionist philosophy of Jesus' divinity were dominant.

Augustine's position in North Africa placed him against slightly different heresies than those Ambrose and Jerome faced. Less concerned with Arianism, Augustine's main concerns were Manichaeism and Donatism before the rise in popularity of Pelagianism fixated him. Manichaeism was a syncretic religion that had been founded by the prophet Mani (216-274) in Mesopotamia with aspects of Zoroastrianism and Gnostic Christianity. Manichaeism combined philosophy, reason, and revelation to answer the questions about

the sources of good and evil.³ As Gnosticism had flourished in North Africa in the second and third centuries, Manichaeism thrived there in the fourth, absorbing much of what remained of the Gnostic community. A largely spiritual religion with no need for established ecclesiastical buildings and institutions, Manichaeism was touted as the key not only to salvation but to the search for knowledge on this earth.⁴ As the Manichees saw no need for institutionalization, they also denied the need for Christian sacraments such as baptism. To cleanse one of sins, rather than a ritual bath, one must perpetually seek knowledge and maintain intellectual inquiry and spiritual enlightenment. Manichees embraced a strict dualism between Good and Evil with Jesus as the bringer of wisdom from the far-distant realm of Good.⁵ In Manichaeism, the physical realm and the flesh were largely evil and thus could not have been created by a good god. But the soul was created by the good god. Thus, humans had to choose between their evil, physical wants and needs, and their good, spiritual needs. This argument negated the supposed omnipotence of the Judeo-Christian god, Yahweh, and introduced an evil demagogue as his opponent. A strong ascetic movement which lauded sexual renunciation among the elite Manichees developed because of this dichotomy between good and evil within the body. The carnal, corrupt, evil flesh imprisoned the good, enlightenment-seeking soul.

A controversy concurrent with the heresy of Manichaeism racking the North African Christian communities was the Donatist controversy. When Augustine turned his sights to the Donatist schismatics, he defended not only his church, the orthodox

³ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, new edition with an Epilogue (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 32.

⁴ W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 661.

⁵ Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, 662. The influences of Zoroastrianism on Manichaeism, Judaism and Christianity can be seen in the development of Satan as a powerful adversary of Yahweh, first seen in Job, which was written in the wake of the Babylonian captivity around 500 BCE.

Christian church, but the office of bishop in that church. The Donatists took issue with the *traditores*, those bishops who had handed over sacred documents to Imperial authorities during the Great Persecutions of 303-311. Donatists argued that those bishops no longer held their sacred office, and therefore the sacraments they performed, including the consecration of new bishops, were invalid. This presented a huge potential problem for the Church because the Donatists called into question the universality of the church and spiritual authority of a host of bishops. Those bishops, if the Donatists were correct, were no longer effective conduits to the grace of god, and all the sacraments they had performed in the meantime were null and void. For Augustine, whose episcopacy the Donatists considered impure and invalid, this schism was a dangerous and direct threat to the unity of the orthodox *catholic* (universal) Christian community.⁶ The schism also called into direct question Augustine's own authority as bishop. In response, Augustine embarked on a fierce polemical campaign against the Donatists, eventually declaring that what had begun as a schism had turned into heresy.

Particularly regarding the issue of rebaptism, Augustine was unrelenting in his opposition to the Donatists. In the third book of *Against the Letters of Petilianus (Contra litteras Petiliani)* (405), Augustine disparaged the hubris of the Donatists to presume that a cleric could be free of sin. Augustine argued that it was not the relative righteousness of the man, but the righteousness of his office and the sanctity of the sacraments he performs, thereby promoting his position as bishop while not entirely alienating the Donatist community.⁷ Finally, Augustine and his orthodox church won the battle with

⁶ Augustine, *Against the Letters of Petilianus*, II.xxxviii.91.

⁷ Augustine, *Against the Letters of Petilianus*, III.lv.67, III.xlix.59; Augustine, *On Baptism Against the Donatists* III.x.15.

the 411 Council of Carthage which demanded unity and that unrelenting Donatists would be subject to laws governing heretics. With this ostensible triumph, Augustine had shored up the authority of the office of Bishop, and established himself even more firmly as a force to be reckoned with on all matters of the church.

Around the time of the 411 Council of Carthage, Augustine became aware of a British monk, Pelagius, who had been speaking out against the seeming helplessness Augustine expressed in his conversion story.⁸ With this, Augustine embarked upon a battle that would consume him for the rest of his life. Pelagius had been concerned when hearing the *Confessions*, and Augustine's own expressions of passivity in his own conversion story.⁹ Pelagius and his followers argued that humans did in fact wield free will and were capable not only of choosing to live Christian lives, but were capable of living perfect and sinless lives. This theory, while not initially developed to combat Augustine, found in Augustine's writings and doctrine a stark opposition. Augustine's fight against the Pelagians, most notably Julian of Eclanum, saw the full development of the seeds of those doctrines Augustine had sown in his earliest Christian writings *On Genesis against the Manichees* and the *Confessions*.

Life Stories: Profiles of the Latin Church Fathers

Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine are three of the most prominent Latin Church Fathers, and they were contemporaries. Their works are important to consider and understand because they became the "Doctors" of orthodoxy at a time when orthodoxy had yet to be determined. They were the crafters and tailors of the orthodoxy that was inherited by the later Christians. These three authors are often considered in common

⁸ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 345.

⁹ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 343 citing Augustine, *On Nature and Grace* XX.23.

with Gregory the Great (r. 590-604), the last great Latin Church Father. Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine were largely contemporaries though, and they faced a unique set of heresies and problems in their ministries and episcopates. Because these three men lived in and around each other, they addressed the same issues, they shared a common *Romanitas* (Roman-ness), and they greatly influenced the works and ideas of one another. This moment in ecclesiastical history and the development of orthodoxy is remarkably well-documented through the works of Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine, and served to cement in history their positions as authorities of orthodoxy and pathbreakers with regard to the place of women in Christian communities.

Ambrose of Milan (339-397)

As bishop, Ambrose was widely known and well-regarded throughout the Roman world. Before his acclamation as bishop of Milan he had been intricately involved in government, and upon his accession to the see of Milan, he continued to exercise his influence in the political realm. Despite this heavy involvement in the secular world, little is known of the man himself and his life prior to becoming Bishop of Milan. Even to those like Augustine who loved him well, Ambrose remained remote, a somewhat mysterious character, shrouded by his “properly episcopal” behavior.¹⁰ This reservation Ambrose displayed on many occasions left little behind for historians to glom onto. What Ambrose has left, however, is his carefully edited corpus of texts, sermons, treatises and letters.

¹⁰ Neil McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), xiv.

Around 339, Ambrose was born in Trier, in Gaul, near the Rhine border.¹¹ Trier was the secondary capital city for the Western Roman Empire established under the tetrarchy of Emperor Diocletian in 293. Ambrose's father, Ambrosius, was a praetorian prefect at Trier in the administration of Constantine II (r. 337-340) when Ambrose was born.¹² The office of prefect conferred upon Ambrose's family prestige and honor. It is unknown whether the family were of a landed class or servants of the dynasty who had been promoted after generations of loyalty. The only evidence for Ambrose's parentage comes from his biographer, Paulinus, who was informed by Marcellina, the sister of Ambrose.¹³ Ambrose himself never refers to his background. It is clear that Ambrose was raised in a borderline aristocratic state. His position in society was by no means cemented by his ancestry, but rather relied on his own maneuvering and achievement.

Ambrose's father had died in 340, and Ambrose lived with his mother, elder sister, and brother, Satyrus, on their estate. Sometime in the 350's the family moved to Rome, likely to have access to a better education for Ambrose and Satyrus. Soon thereafter, between 353-356, Marcellina took on the veil and became a consecrated virgin.¹⁴ In his explanation of Marcellina's consecration by Pope Liberius (r. 352-366), Ambrose did mention one member of his ancestry, the virgin martyr, Soteris.¹⁵ Ambrose credited Soteris, whose relation to Ambrose and Marcellina was never explicitly stated, and as she was a virgin could not have been direct, with inspiring Marcellina to make her

¹¹ McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 32.

¹² W.H.C. Frend, *The Early Church*, reprint with a new Preface and updated bibliography (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 178.

¹³ McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 33.

¹⁴ Frend, *Early Church*, 178.

¹⁵ Ambrose, *On Virgins*, III.I.

formal oath of virginity, and later even called her an exemplar for his own life.¹⁶ Upon Marcellina's consecration, other like-minded women began to join the household to pursue their piety in a community, and Ambrose's family in turn joined Pope Liberius's retinue.

For a career, Ambrose joined the secular administration, serving as an advocate, something akin to an attorney, for the praetorian prefect.¹⁷ In 372, Ambrose was appointed consular prefect (governor) of Aemilia and Liguria in north western Italy, with his base at Milan.¹⁸ The bishop of Milan at the time, was the Arian, Auxentius who had been acclaimed bishop in 355. When Auxentius died, in the last days of November 373, Ambrose, as-yet unbaptized, was unanimously acclaimed bishop by both Nicene and Arian factions.¹⁹ Though he was an orthodox, Nicene Christian, he was an incredibly popular figure, and as consular prefect had been accepting of the Arians. Despite the resounding call for his consecration, Ambrose fled from Milan, having no desire to become bishop. Emperor Valentinian I (r.364-375), however, ordered Ambrose to be consecrated and take up the yoke of the See of Milan. His baptism, succession through the clerical orders and consecration were carried out within eight days, and Ambrose became the uncontested bishop of Milan.²⁰ Though as consular prefect he had been tolerant of the Arians, as bishop, Ambrose immediately sought to be rid of them. Many of his early theological tractates and sermons were clearly pro-Nicene. *On Faith* and *On the Holy Spirit* were two of his earliest Anti-Arian, polemical compositions. Ambrose

¹⁶ Ambrose, *On Virgins*, III.xxxviii. *Exhortation to Virginity*, I.lxxxii. “*domesticae piae parentis proferamus exemplum.*”

¹⁷ Paulinus, *Life of Ambrose*, V.i.

¹⁸ McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 42.

¹⁹ Frend, *Early Church*, 179

²⁰ McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 51.

addressed them directly to the Emperor Gratian (r. 375-383), continuing his close relationship with the administration of the Roman Empire.

Ambrose's dealings with the imperial family continued throughout his episcopacy. In 385 and 386, Ambrose butted heads over the rights and property of heterodox sects with the dowager empress, Justina (d. 388), second wife of Valentinian I, and mother of Valentinian II (375-392).²¹ Though Valentinian I had been a Nicene, thus orthodox, Christian, Justina and Valentinian II were Arians.²² Justina demanded a basilica in Milan be handed over for her Arian army for the paschal celebrations of Easter in 385. Ambrose refused. In the face of the empress, orders from the Emperor, and Justina's imperial army, Ambrose barricaded himself along with his congregation inside the church and began a mass. The standoff between Justina and Valentinian II and Ambrose lasted for several weeks before a peace was settled upon.

Ambrose continued to oppose the emperors on ecclesiastical issues, at times even arguing that moral and political matters fell under the purview of the bishop. He often threatened the emperors with excommunication if they would not bend to his will.²³ When the bishops of Callinicum, a city on the Euphrates, destroyed a local synagogue in 388, Theodosius I (r.379-395) ordered it rebuilt. Ambrose took exception to Theodosius' support of the Jews of Callinicum and demanded that he reverse the order. Ambrose again excommunicated Theodosius after the 390 massacre of Thessalonians who had rioted against the Roman governor.²⁴ When Ambrose used these religious punishments to "encourage" Theodosius to change his political policies, in the face of certain

²¹ Paulinus, *Life of Ambrose*, XV.i.

²² Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History*, V.xv.

²³ Ambrose, *Epp.* XX, XXI, and XL.

²⁴ Ambrose, *Ep.* LI.

excommunication, Theodosius invariably did as Ambrose wished, and what is more, the emperor knelt before the bishop at his episcopal headquarters in a profound gesture of penitence for failing to obey Ambrose's demand in the first place.

With his continual dealings with the Roman administration and his influence over imperial Christianity, Ambrose's spectre over orthodoxy grew. Ambrose had sought to establish himself in a position of doctrinal authority, and by his treatises and increasing political profile because of his relationships with the emperors he had done so. He wrote many treatises regarding orthodoxy to combat the influence of Arianism and other heresies. He remained a vocal proponent of Nicene Christianity and influenced the likes of Augustine away from heterodoxy. He also maintained his important relationships with the imperial family until his death in 397.

Ambrose's ecclesiastical and orthodox authority, established through his episcopate, positions him as an important lens through which to view the fourth century. His inclusion of women and the importance of female asceticism in his promotion and defense of Christian orthodoxy against heresy and paganism illustrates his obvious admiration for female holiness. In Ambrose's ministry and from his pulpit at Milan, woman served as role models in a rhetorical program advocating ideal Christian behaviors large and small.

Jerome (347-420)

If little is known about the early years of Ambrose's life, even less is known about Jerome. The primary sources are spare and even modern, English treatments of Jerome's life are limited, the best and most complete of which is that of J.N.D. Kelly.²⁵ Jerome was

²⁵ J.N.D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies*, reprint (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000).

born in Pannonia, in the Balkans on the Adriatic coast. According to Prosper of Aquitaine, he was born in 331.²⁶ Among the scholarly community, Jerome's birth year is a matter of debate. Some accept Prosper's date while others prefer 347 as a more likely date for his birth.²⁷ In the 360s, Jerome went to Rome to pursue an education in rhetoric and philosophy. There, he lived hedonistically with the decadent behavior common to students at the time.²⁸ By 366, he had been baptized and moved to Trier and then Aquileia to study theology with Bonosus (fl. 391-414), who may be the same Bonosus who would become Bishop of Sardica (modern Sofia, Bulgaria) and preach against the perpetual virginity of Mary, thereby being branded a heretic, and Rufinus (340-410).²⁹ In 373, Jerome undertook a journey to Antioch where he was struck ill and had a vision that led him to renounce his secular ties and become an ascetic.³⁰ While in Syria, he began his study of Hebrew and was ordained in 378/9. From there he travelled to Constantinople to continue his studies under the tutelage of Gregory Nazianzus (329-390), Archbishop of Constantinople and one of the three Cappadocian Fathers.³¹

Jerome returned to Rome in 382 and joined the service of Pope Damasus (r.366-384) as his secretary.³² Pope Damasus assigned Jerome the task of creating a new Latin translation of the Bible to replace the faulty *Vetus Latina* (Old Latin Bible) that had been

²⁶ Prosper of Aquitaine, *Epitoma Chronicon*, I.ix.451.

²⁷ Kelly, *Jerome*, 337-339. Kelly provides a brief outline of this debate, before settling on the side of Prosper and the early date of 331. He does, however, admit that this date leaves a significant portion of Jerome's life unknown, and would have made Jerome 89 at the time of his death, an incredible, though not unheard-of, age for the fourth century.

²⁸ Kelly, *Jerome*, 20-21.

²⁹ Kelly, *Jerome*, 13-14.

³⁰ Kelly, *Jerome*, 44.

³¹ Jerome, *Famous Men*, CXVII.

³² Kelly, *Jerome*, 83, cites Jerome, *Ep.* CXXIII.xi.

written from the also flawed *Septuagint* (Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible).³³

Jerome translated his *Vulgate* directly from the Hebrew for a truer Latin rendition of the Old Testament.

While at Rome, Jerome became the central theological tutor to a community of aristocratic, female ascetics. This community was comprised of well-educated widows and virgins who had dedicated their lives to the study on contemplation of scripture.³⁴ As spiritual guide and teacher, Jerome was very vocal in his endorsement of asceticism. One of the women among his devotees, Blaesilla, had taken his direction to such an extreme that she continued to fast even while ill. Her body was so weakened that she died. In the wake of her death, he was accused of carrying on an affair with Blaesilla's mother, Paula (347-404). Because of those events and backlash against his strict promotion of asceticism, Jerome was exiled from Rome in 385.

Paula and her second daughter, Eustochium, followed Jerome from Rome, and in the winter of 385 they all traveled around the Near East before settling in Bethlehem. From there Jerome produced most of his extant compositions. Jerome continued his work on the *Vulgate*, which he had begun under the direction of Pope Damasus in 382, until 405. Aside from his work translating and writing commentaries on the books of the Bible, Jerome was a passionate polemicist. Jerome was constantly writing to defend his own orthodoxy and to zealously promote orthodoxy in others. He would fervently attack heretics and at times even orthodox bishops with whom he happened to disagree. In some of his exchanges with Augustine, Jerome repeatedly displayed a short temper, not

³³ Kelly, *Jerome*, 85, notes that Jerome's claim of Damasus' assignment in the *Preface to the Gospels*, is our only source for the impetus of Jerome's translation of the *Vulgate*.

³⁴ Kelly, *Jerome*, 94.

even waiting for Augustine's reply before firing off another letter filled with invectives.³⁵ The restraint and tact of Augustine contrasts Jerome's sharp words in these letters, and Augustine's cool head has often been credited with maintaining the friendship between the two men.³⁶

Not all of Jerome's friends-turned-opponents had such diplomatic responses as Augustine. In 393/4, Jerome was embroiled in a polemical battle against his old friend Rufinus. The doctrines of Origen, which both men had formerly admired and written about, came under fire by Epiphanius (310/20-403), Bishop of Salamis.³⁷ While Jerome came to agree with Epiphanius' criticism of Origenism, Rufinus had not changed his mind in his admiration for Origen. The Origenist Controversy was started by two bishops, Epiphanius and John II (356-417), Bishop of Jerusalem. The heart of the debate was carried out in the vitriolic compositions of Jerome and Rufinus. These epistolary exchanges with friends and opponents represent an enormous source base for scholars to scrutinize Jerome's perception, understanding, and promotion of feminine holiness within the larger Christian community.

Jerome continued his zealous support for asceticism and orthodoxy into his last years. Nearly all of his compositions staunchly defended orthodoxy. He addressed issues of Jovinianism and Helvidism (both heresies were centered on anti-ascetic messages and denial of the perpetual virginity of Mary), Pelagianism, and any other threat to orthodoxy of which he was made aware. Jerome died in Bethlehem in 420.³⁸

³⁵ Kelly, *Jerome*, 264.

³⁶ Kelly, *Jerome*, 276.

³⁷ Kelly, *Jerome*, 198.

³⁸ Prosper of Aquitaine, *Epitoma Chronicon*, I.ix.469

Jerome had made it his life's work to perpetuate the written legacy of orthodox Christianity. His personal relationships with powerful and religiously astute women colored his works. This is made evident by the infusion of women as teachers to young children, and role models for ascetics. His use of living exemplars like Paula the elder and Eustochium served to provide Christians with living examples of attainable religious expression.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

The youngest and arguably most influential of the three Latin Church fathers, Augustine, left in his extant works a wealth of biographical information. Even taking into account the rhetorical nature of many of his compositions, especially the *Confessions*, the reader can learn much about Augustine. Augustine was born in 354 in Thagaste, a small town outside of Hippo Regius (in modern Algeria), to Patricius and Monnica. Patricius was a minor official in Thagaste, perhaps among the upper echelons of society within the small town, but no more than a middle class administrator.³⁹ Though her husband was a pagan, Monnica was a devout Christian and sought to raise her children as such.⁴⁰ Patricius and Monnica were intent on Augustine receiving a first-class education and sent him about thirty miles away to Madaura, a university town, in 369, to learn the Classics. Such an education was not common among in Thagaste, and even most of Augustine's cousins never received the education Patricius and Monnica insisted he have.⁴¹ The cost of Augustine's schooling was too great for Patricius' income and Augustine came back to Thagaste the next year. Augustine languished in Thagaste while he waited for his father to earn enough money for him to return to school.

³⁹ Henry Chadwick, *Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 4.

⁴⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, I.x.17.

⁴¹ Augustine, *On the Happy Life*, I.i.6.

Patricius died in 371, after having cobbled together enough money to send Augustine to Carthage to resume his studies.⁴² Monnica took up Patricius' efforts to keep Augustine in school, and Augustine was sponsored by an elite man from Thagaste, Romanianus for the rest of his education.⁴³ While in Carthage, Augustine became a Manichaean. He had never been baptized and once he began his education, he thought the scriptures of Christianity unsophisticated. The philosophies of Manichaeism seemed to promise him the sophistication and metaphysical answers that he sought.⁴⁴ During this time, Augustine began a long-term relationship. Augustine and this woman, whom Augustine never named in the *Confessions*, maintained their relationship for thirteen years and had a son, Adeodatus.⁴⁵

When Augustine had finished his studies at Carthage in 373, he initially moved back to Thagaste to become a *rhetor*, teacher of rhetoric. After two years, Augustine moved back to Carthage and began a school in the city.⁴⁶ Augustine grew weary of the unruly and disrespectful students and sought a new position in Rome, in 384. In the meantime, Monnica had followed Augustine to Carthage, and was intent on coming to Rome with him. Augustine snuck away with his concubine and his son in the middle of the night rather than bring his mother with him to Italy. After a short time at Rome, Augustine was disgusted with the lazy students and used his connections to the pagan politician Symmachus to secure a position as state *rhetor* in Milan. Augustine was in Milan by the end of 384.⁴⁷ There he met Ambrose and came to respect him a great deal.

⁴² Brown, *Augustine*, 26.

⁴³ Gary Willis, *Augustine's Confessions: A Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 33.

⁴⁴ Chadwick, *Augustine: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 11.

⁴⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, IV.ii.3.

⁴⁶ James Joseph O'Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 40.

⁴⁷ Brown, *Augustine*, 56.

When Monnica joined Augustine in Milan in 385, she fostered his relationship with the bishop even further. Monnica also maneuvered to engage Augustine to an aristocratic young woman.⁴⁸ By marrying into an elite family, Augustine's career, social, and political standing would all be improved. Augustine's intended wife was also a Christian, and Monnica hoped that marriage would entice Augustine to finally convert to Christianity. Augustine's young fiancée was not of age, and Augustine had to wait two years before they could be married. In order for the engagement to take place, however, Augustine had to send away his beloved concubine of thirteen years. Losing her deeply affected him, and Augustine spoke of the wound her absence left in his heart quite passionately.⁴⁹

In 386, Augustine suffered from an illness which permanently affected his voice.⁵⁰ His career as *rhetor* was ended. Augustine retired to a villa outside of Milan at Cassiacum (Lake Como) with a group of close confidants and his mother. There, they engaged in deep philosophical and theological discussions. It was during this time that Augustine experienced his conversion to Christianity. He stayed at Cassiacum for a time, studying the Scriptures before returning to Milan to be baptized by Ambrose during the Easter mass of 387.⁵¹

Augustine had taken a vow of celibacy when he converted to Christianity, thereby severing his engagement to the aristocratic young woman. As he had also given up his position as state *rhetor* due to his illness, Augustine's chances for advancement in the secular world, as Patricius and Monnica had always hoped for him, were over. But

⁴⁸ Brown, *Augustine*, 79.

⁴⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, VI.xv.25.

⁵⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, IX.ii.4.

⁵¹ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 118.

Monnica came to appreciate Augustine's commitment to the Church and ascetic vocation. Augustine even called her change of attitude a "conversion" of her own, to be happy for his spiritual advancement over and above his secular and social standing.⁵² Augustine, Adeodatus, and Monnica moved to Ostia and prepared to return to Africa.⁵³ In 387, while sojourning in Ostia, Monnica died. Augustine returned to Thagaste with Adeodatus and sought to become a hermetic monk.⁵⁴ His personality, however, dictated that he could not be a hermit and his ambitions had not waned, but were translated from the secular to the ecclesiastical. Augustine always had a retinue of sorts around him. The life of the solitary monk was not appropriate for him. Adeodatus had died in 390, and Augustine moved to Hippo in 391.⁵⁵ In that year, Augustine founded a monastery and was ordained a priest. He began his campaign against Manichaeism and became a popular preacher. By 395, Augustine had been proclaimed successor to Valerius as the bishop of Hippo Regius.⁵⁶

As bishop, Augustine composed many works to oppose the heresies and schismatics that abounded in Africa. A large amount of his energy during the early years after his conversion and consecration were devoted to addressing the Manichaean heresy. As Augustine had once been a Manichee, he knew the heresy intimately and could speak to Manichaean followers more directly than other orthodox theologians. He attacked his former religion with all the zeal of a convert.

⁵² Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII.vii.

⁵³ Willis, *Augustine's Confessions*, 85.

⁵⁴ Augustine, *Ep. X*.

⁵⁵ Brown, *Augustine*, 128.

⁵⁶ O'Donnell, *Augustine*, 28.

By the fifth century, the Pelagian heresy began to take root in Africa.⁵⁷ Augustine had long struggled to develop his ideas about the origins of evil in the world and in human nature. With Pelagius' teaching that evil is not inherent, passed through the sex act, but rather chosen, Augustine was faced with the philosophical opponent that would lead him to fully develop his doctrine of original sin. Pelagius and his most able disciple, Julian of Eclanum, preached that human free will allowed one to choose good or evil. They taught that human nature was not intrinsically sinful, and that human beings, through good works and asceticism, could achieve a perfect life as Jesus had done.⁵⁸ The same issues that had drawn Augustine to Manichaeism were at stake here: the origins of evil. In order to combat the ideas of Pelagianism, Augustine added to his doctrine of original sin the idea of the elect and the notion that only by grace are the elect saved. To Augustine, human beings were tainted by sin in the very act of their conception and because humans are inherently sinful they cannot choose a perfect life, nor can they hope to achieve one, sin is inherent in the human condition.

Augustine spent his life after his conversion trying to forge a unified and uncontested orthodoxy, and his part in determining orthodox identity against the "other" of heretics and pagans was his great lasting achievement.⁵⁹ After the sack of Rome, pagan Romans began blaming Christians for not propitiating the gods and bringing the destruction down upon the Eternal City. Augustine composed the twenty-two books of the *City of God* in response to that accusation. Augustine opens his *City of God* with Alaric's 410 sack of Rome and the overturning of the foundations of pagan religion, very

⁵⁷ Frend, *Early Church*, 207.

⁵⁸ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 314-315.

⁵⁹ O'Donnell, *Augustine*, 201.

literally pagan temples and statues are upended and destroyed, pointing up the profoundest transition the Roman world had seen to date--that of a formerly pagan empire turning Christian. The only places of safety were Christian basilicas, symbols of Augustine's eternal, immutable city, a place existing beyond the material boundaries of Rome's *pomerium* (religious boundaries of the city of Rome).⁶⁰ In this time, the transition was not complete, but for Augustine, the overturning of the temporal, material city of Rome (and her this-worldly preoccupations) represented the beginning of the final stage of Roman culture's transition to a more eternally-minded society and a city whose foundations, like those Christian basilicas, could not be destroyed even by the fiercest of enemies. Augustine saw himself as eyewitness, compiler, and guide as he led the populace down the path toward the true Christianity of God's eternal city.

Both Manichaeism and Donatism, polarizing issues that affected the North African Christian community, perhaps more than anywhere else in Christendom, prepared Augustine for his battle against Pelagianism and paganism. Due to his experiences with the Manichees, where he was forced to defend not only his past but to continually defend his current orthodoxy, and the Donatists, where he defended the position of Bishop thereby bolstering his own office and his personal authority in church matters, Augustine was in a position to counter the arguments of the Pelagians and pull the weight of his episcopal position to win the orthodox church. It is impossible to know if Augustine won the argument in the minds of the common people, but among the *cognoscenti* of the ecclesiastical elite he was victorious. And though his views were contrary to many former and contemporary Christian thinkers, Augustine's notions of

⁶⁰ Augustine, *City of God*, I.iv.

original sin, predestination and grace came to be those held by the orthodox Christian church administrative center.

Augustine remains one of the most influential, complex, and prolific Christian authors of any era. Throughout his autobiographical but pointedly didactic *Confessions*, he consistently returned to the women in his life, most notably his unnamed concubine and his mother Monnica, claiming time and time again that these figures most profoundly guided his path to conversion. Taken together, Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine, three of the four Latin Church Fathers, held enormous influence and sway in their own times and in times to come. And yet, their open-armed embrace of women as vessels of ideal holiness has not been explored fully.

The Latin Church Fathers: The State of Scholarship

To date, there has been much study of the Latin Church Fathers. The world of late antiquity, after the path-breaking work of Peter Brown in the late 1960s, with his biography of Augustine, and early seventies, has become a richly-researched, variegated and extremely popular field of study.⁶¹ There have even recently been a number of studies on the role of women in society. The best of these studies focus on the role of women in secular society and legal codes.⁶² There are studies that try to look at the portrayals and attitudes towards women in the writings of any one of the Church Fathers. These studies, however, do not often differentiate between the prescriptive passages and

⁶¹ Peter Brown, *Augustine; The World of Late Antiquity*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1971); "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Roman Studies*, 61 (1971): 80-101; *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992); and *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).

⁶² Jane F. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). And Beryl Rawson, *Marriage, Divorce and Children in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004).

the passages that may reveal the practiced role of women in the expressed attitudes of Ambrose, Augustine, and Jerome. They also tend to simplify the audience intended for each composition. Elizabeth Clark has argued, for example, that Church Fathers used female exempla solely to shame male Christians and ascetics into better behavior rather than looking at the role women could play as models for all Christians.⁶³ This often leads to a misperception of the way Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine viewed women. Clark's exploration of writing as a manipulative tool is somewhat limited in supposing that the authors were merely trying to manipulate the behavior of men, rather than women, or even mixed populations of ascetics. Though Clark does mention some instances where females who appear in the writings actively exhort male players to behave more rightly, her sources—histories, hagiographies, and letters—cannot be said to have a solely male audience and therefore solely intended to manipulate male behavior.⁶⁴ The writings, of Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine contain many instances of female righteousness and purity, both biblical and historical. But these compositions were not addressed to men only and intended only for male communities. They often wrote specifically to female recipients and addressed female communities.

Another feminist approach to the works of Augustine is the collections of essays edited by Judith Chelius Stark, *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine: Re-Reading the*

⁶³ Elizabeth A. Clark, "The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the 'Linguistic Turn,'" *Church History* 67, no. 1 (Mar. 1998): 27; and "Asceticism, Class, and Gender" in *Late Ancient Christianity: A People's History of Christianity*, ed. Virginia Burrus, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 38-43.

⁶⁴ Clark, "Asceticism, Gender and Class," 38. Clark tells the story from Palladius' *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, IV.62, when a monk had turned off the road to avoid gazing too intently upon a passing group of nuns, the abbess chided him for being an imperfect renunciant, saying that if he had truly renounced his worldly ways he would not have even looked closely enough to notice whether the members of the passing group were male or female.

Canon.⁶⁵ In this collection, there are a range of views on the misogyny of Augustine. The essay which opens the collection is Rosemary Radford Ruether's "Augustine: Sexuality, Gender and Women."⁶⁶ In this essay, Ruether does a very thorough job of backing up her claims of Augustine's misogyny with textual evidence. Many of her sources are the same that I will be using, though often she uses a much more narrow passage that, without its surrounding context, can be skewed to seem denigrating and anti-female. Like many scholars of early Christianity who cherry-pick, even passages of the New Testament, outside of the wider more holistic context in which they are written, Ruether often investigates the works of the Latin Church Fathers in a somewhat limited scope without taking the bigger picture into account. Another essay interprets Augustine in a more positive light. E. Ann Matter, in "De cura feminarum: Augustine the Bishop, North African Women, and the Development of a Theology of Female Nature," sees Augustine as compassionate and kind to his female correspondents.⁶⁷ And in yet another essay, "Augustine's Letters to Women," Joanne McWilliam considers Augustine's tendency in his letters to women to express respect for various virtues and talents.⁶⁸

The Latin Church Fathers: the Road Behind, the Road Ahead

In recent years, the figures of the Latin Church Fathers have been given a reprieve from accusatory scholars, but no one has sought to look beyond the surface of the patristic representations of women. Even the eminent Dr. Brown has admitted that he

⁶⁵ Judith Chelius Stark, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine: Re-Reading the Canon* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Press, 2007).

⁶⁶ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Augustine: Sexuality, Gender and Women," in *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine: Re-Reading the Canon*, ed. Judith Chelius Stark (University Park: Pennsylvania State Press, 2007), 47-68

⁶⁷ E. Ann Matter, "De cura feminarum: Augustine the Bishop, North African Women, and the Development of a Theology of Female Nature," in *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine: Re-Reading the Canon*, ed. Judith Chelius Stark (University Park: Pennsylvania State Press, 2007), 203-214.

⁶⁸ Joanne McWilliam, "Augustine's Letters to Women," in *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine: Re-Reading the Canon*, ed. Judith Chelius Stark (University Park: Pennsylvania State Press, 2007), 189-202.

was overly harsh when interpreting and judging Augustine in his landmark biography. But a proper treatment of the relatively progressive views espoused in the compositions of the Ambrose, Jerome, or Augustine has yet to appear. Ben Witherington has done much to further the study of women in early Christian communities from the Pauline *ecclesiae* forward and how the position of women therein was much freer and more potent than the position of women in contemporary pagan, Jewish and secular societies.⁶⁹

Kenneth Holum and Anne Jensen also look at women of the late fourth-early fifth centuries and how the acceptance of Christianity played out in their lives. Holum, however, studies women in the upper echelons of society, even higher up than those of Jerome's acquaintance. Holum's *Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity* discusses the unheard of prominence that Theodosian empresses held in both secular and ecclesiastical affairs.⁷⁰ In *God's Self Confident Daughters: Early Christianity and the Liberation of Women*, Jensen contends that the overall viewpoint of early Christian thinkers held that women were individuals, capable of true virtue and that the Church was a community of equals.⁷¹ Jensen argues that in the time period with which we are concerned, female martyrs and saints were held in the same esteem, as equals. These works are in keeping with my thesis, that Christianity, with its emphasis on good works and virginity, gave new scope to the potential role for women as exemplars in society. This was done intentionally, perhaps to attract new

⁶⁹ Bruce Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: the appearance of new women and the Pauline communities* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2003); and Ben Witherington, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus: a study of Jesus' attitudes to women and their roles in earthly life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984); cf. *Women in the Earliest Churches* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); cf. *Women and the Genesis of Christianity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁷⁰ Kenneth G. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

⁷¹ Anne Jensen, *God's Self Confident Daughters: Early Christianity and the Liberation of Women*, trans. O.C. Dean, Jr. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996), 9.

followers, but primarily to lift up a proper and correct Christian orthodoxy that, in at least some respects, hearkened back to the Pauline house churches.

In 312, Constantine I issued the Edict of Milan, establishing Christianity as the preferred religion of the Roman Empire. He later made provisions for the donation of lands and monies to the church. With the influx of new converts and wealth, the position of the Church was dramatically altered, and with it the notion of what it meant to be a good Christian. With the new developments in the church, ascetics came to be the epitome of Christian righteousness. These developments also changed the position of women within the church.

The position of women in the late fourth and very early fifth centuries was by no means cemented. This is made clear by the letters, sermons, and treatise of Ambrose, Augustine, and Jerome. In their lives, women played prominent roles, from the powerful Theodosian empress that confronted Ambrose, to Augustine's pious mother, Monnica, to Jerome's retinue of educated, elite, ascetic women. In their works also, women play significant roles as the guides and role models for Christian behavior, especially in the figures of consecrated virgins, and pious mothers. The picture given by these Latin Fathers of the Catholic Church of women as intellectually capable, and influential in the lives of many, contrasts with the picture one has by simply looking at the law codes of Rome. Even though the cultural mores of their time did little to further the cause of women, I argue that these Latin Fathers placed women at the heart of Christian society by designating women as the idea role model and exempla for all Christians.

My first chapter will deal with epistolary correspondence. I will argue that Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine used their letters to emphasize women's role as

teachers and guides to developing Christians. Letters are important because they are often written to individuals and/or communities and address specific and unique issues that are not always treated closely in sermons and treatises. Because they are addressed in this way, it is possible to know the gender of the intended audience for a specific message. Although letters contain rhetorical devices, not unlike what we find in the aforementioned sermons and treatises, I would argue that they are more personal and less rhetorical. Their focus is commonly more practical than theological. Within these letters, the manner in which each author addressed similar issues to male or female recipients changed. The purview of each gender was the primary focus of each letter. Men were the protectors of the home and providers of order within their *familias*. Women received specific curricula and prescriptive advice for raising children. What remained consistent in the letters of Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine, though, was women's role as teachers, guides, and role models for the spiritual development of Christians.

The second chapter also sees women as exempla for other Christians. I focus on sermons and treatises that deal with female sanctity and the role of women in the continuing Christian aspiration toward perfect holiness. By using issues regarding women, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine were able to shape their rhetoric to address the heresies and problems their specific audiences were concerned with. As such, as their audiences changed, their rhetorical uses of female issues also changed, but women remained paramount in their compositions as exempla for ideal Christian behavior. Where letters have a very specific audience, the sermons and treatises of the Church Fathers were meant for a far more general crowd. The audience would have been

composed of lay people and ascetics, married and celibate, male and female. By noting the developments in each man's arguments through time (whether amplified or scaled back), one can view the reactions of his congregation to sentiments expressed in earlier compositions. In the sermons and treatises of Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine, women are often used as models of ideal Christian behavior. To the authors, asceticism was the highest form of Christian expression and the *virgo dei* represented the purest representation of that asceticism. In the sermons, however, the importance of Mary as a mother and wife in addition to her role as virgin cannot be underestimated. By using Mary as *exemplum par excellence*, Ambrose, Augustine, and Jerome could appeal to all Christians, married and celibate ascetics alike.

In the final chapter, I analyze one of the most important and fascinating works in all of Christian literature, Augustine's autobiographical and theologically charged *Confessions*. The role of the holy mother here extends even beyond the figure of Mary and is deeply internalized in the person of Augustine in his relationship with his own mother, the very inspiration for his conversion to Christian orthodoxy. But she was not the only woman who played a significant role in Augustine's theological development. Augustine's unnamed concubine, the mother of his child, Adeodatus, held great sway over him and his intellectual conception of Christianity and conversion, as well. The *Confessions* were meant to help sway people, especially Manichees, to orthodoxy. I will argue that by choosing women as the vehicle of his conversion, Augustine placed women as the role models and guides for all potential Christians.

When viewing Christianity's rocky relationship with women through a twenty-first century lens, one finds medieval philosophers citing the works of the Latin Church

Fathers to justify their patriarchal and anti-female, even blatantly-misogynist policies. Misunderstanding or misreading along with centuries of mistranslation has led to the misassignment of overly patriarchal and anti-female ideas to these men that simply do not hold up under scrutiny. But under a careful examination of the corpus of their extensive extant compositions, these men display a far more nuanced and decidedly more complex picture of societal norms and patristic views of women. Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine espoused views of gender equality in regards to access to salvation and righteousness. They also readily admitted to women's potential for power, intelligence, and influence and the closeness to God that women possessed sometimes in excess of their male counterparts. It was not until well into the early years of the Middle Ages that society, based on a revival of Aristotelian philosophy, applied the misogynistic views of Aristotle to the doctrines of the Church that women's position actually declined and stayed relatively stagnant until the nineteenth century. By better understanding the teachings of Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine expressed their attitudes about women, we will be better able to understand how Christianity allowed women to be the guides for all Christians.

CHAPTER II

EDUCATING VIRGINS: FEMALE GUIDES AND THE PATH TO HOLINESS

In many parts of the Roman world, Christianization was far from complete, and women, living and biblical, served for Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine as living *exempla* for those people they wished to convert and guide to orthodoxy. Throughout the sources women served as models for Christian behavior. In their communication with women and regarding women, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine frequently reinforced

orthodox ideas and behaviors by either censuring women who did not live up to them, or praising the women that exhibited ideal orthodox conduct. Often it seems as though, because of their great respect for the potential of women to be more religiously virtuous, when a woman should err, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine held her to higher standards than men. Because women's primary role in the compositions of Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine was to serve as exempla, the authors were at times harsher in their criticisms of female models than with their male counterparts. Even in their reproach, however, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine crafted their compositions to function as a guide for Christian behavior. By addressing and discussing women, the authors could demonstrate what the epitome of Christian behavior may look like in living examples, or what it should look like in the absence of such examples.

In their letters addressed to women, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine very plainly admired many of the women with whom they had close contact, such as Ambrose's Marcellina, Augustine's Demetrias, Juliana, and Proba, and Jerome's Paula the elder, Eustochium, and Marcella. In letters to other women, the authors also exhorted their correspondents to emulate the lives and practices of the above-mentioned exemplars of feminine purity. When writing to men, however, even about issues regarding women, such as the upbringing of a young girl dedicated to virginity, the abundant praise of women was notably tempered (though praise of righteous men did not fill that gap). In fact, the very nature of their correspondence with men seems to have been of a more temporal nature (news of the empire, commenting on the current state of affairs, *etc.*), whereas discussions with women were almost entirely doctrinal, scriptural, or practical, *i.e.* advising on the proper exercise and expression of a chaste life. An exception is

Ambrose's letters to his sister, Marcellina, which included updates on his daily life, his interactions with emperors and empresses, as well as discussions of religion, chastity, and sermons.

Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine lived and wrote at a moment when institutional, orthodox Christianity was not only, perhaps for the first time, really and truly winning, it was seeking to eliminate its opponents from within and without. In addition to the enduring pagan tradition, alternate Christianities were also practiced (Arianism, Donatism, Manichaeism) and many bishops, including Ambrose and Augustine, were faced daily with the task of ensuring Nicene Christianity was practiced in their episcopal sees. Orthodoxy in the Roman Empire was not firmly established. Only with the edict of Theodosius I and the Council of Constantinople in 381 had Nicene doctrine firmly triumphed over an Arianism that had won back even Constantine I earlier in the fourth century. Theodosius I had also taken the fight to paganism by making Nicene Christianity the empire's only legal religion, not only by ordering pagan temples closed,⁷² heretical churches handed over to orthodox bishops,⁷³ and denying heretics⁷⁴ and pagans access to public office,⁷⁵ but by also penalizing heresy and paganism by stiff fines, or even capital punishment.⁷⁶ Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine often used their letters to combat instances of heterodoxy and paganism as they arose by encouraging right

⁷² *CT*, XVI.x.8, 382 CE. Pagan temples were later ordered destroyed by emperors Arcadius and Honorius in 399 CE, *CT*, XVI.x.16.

⁷³ *CT*, XVI.v.6; XVI.v.8, 381 CE.

⁷⁴ *CT*, XVI.v.25; XVI.v.29, 395 CE.

⁷⁵ *CT*, XVI.x.21, 416CE.

⁷⁶ *CT*, XVI.v was dedicated to the legislation against heresy. It is the longest section in book XVI of the *CT*. The most common punishment for heresy was banishment or exile, e.g. XVI.v.10-11, XVI.v.13-14, XVI.v.18, and XVI.v.20. *CT*, XVI.x contained legislation against paganism. The penalty for paganism, sacrifice, divination, or magic was most often a fine, e.g. XVI.x.7, and XVI.x.10-12. If non-Christians or anyone hostile to the orthodox Christian faith were to disturb the peace or demonstrate against the emperor would be charged with treason and tortured or put to death, XVI.x.1.

behavior, especially of the right behavior of woman as role models and guides to young Christians.

Late antique letter writers sought not only to convey information but to manipulate their readers to produce a desired behavioral result.⁷⁷ Jennifer Ebbeler and Christiana Sogno argue that, for fourth-century letter writers as seemingly disparate as pagan Rome's last true champion, Symmachus, and Christian orthodoxy's preeminent theologian, Augustine, letters served as the means of manipulation intended to encourage the performance of certain behaviors that the writer desired, such as the proper way to pray, educate one's children, attain elected office, and even fast.⁷⁸ Cicero himself, the most celebrated of all non-Christian Roman letter writers, asserted that letters were intended to convey such information, particularly from a distance.⁷⁹

Our authors, especially Jerome in his many letters on the proper behavior and care of virgins, employed their epistolary exchange as both informational and persuasive. Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine certainly used their letters to produce desired behaviors by conveying information and manipulating the behavior of their recipients by means of specific rhetoric. Rather many of them were meant for women and larger communities of female ascetics, and many of the letters which include female exemplars of proper Christian ascetic behavior were sent to people other than the original addressee and distributed to various members of the Latin Christian community.⁸⁰ In spite of the fact that they were living in an overtly patriarchal society, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine

⁷⁷ Jennifer V. Ebbeler and Christiana Sogno, "Religious Identity and the Politics of Patronage: Symmachus and Augustine," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 56, no. 2 (2007): 230.

⁷⁸ Ebbeler and Sogno, "Religious Identity," 230. Ebbeler and Sogno refer to JF Matthews, "The Letters of Symmachus" in *Latin Literature of the Fourth Century*, ed. JW Binns (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 64 to support this supposition.

⁷⁹ Ebbeler and Sogno, "Religious Identity," 230 n.1.

⁸⁰ A. Gillett, "Communication in Late Antiquity: Use and Reuse," in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. S.F. Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 828.

did not exhibit the clear misogynist perspective that scholars such as Clark have often assigned to them. It is quite clear that Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine were concerned with manipulating behavior and presenting both male and female exemplars in order to shame, admonish or encourage all of their readers and congregants. They were not presenting female stories to shame only male ascetics, but rather to demonstrate to all ascetics the manner in which they ought to live. Where the example of a male may have only been applicable in practice to other men—in this misogynistic and male-dominated society, women and children did not have the same opportunities as grown men—the example of a woman could have been applied to anyone. Simply put, if a woman could reach a state of intense piety so could other women, children, and most certainly men. Moreover, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine’s messages of renunciation and righteous living did not only reach ascetics, but because of the nature of letter writing and the exchange of literature throughout the Roman Empire, lay people also had access to patristic works.⁸¹

The nature of literacy and its connections to orality, with letters commonly being read out to a community, and the few passages that suggest Jerome’s descriptions of female asceticism were not always followed shows that his expressions of female righteousness, and those of Ambrose and Augustine, were idealized notions of what

⁸¹ Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil, *Crisis Management in Late Antiquity (410-590 CE): A Survey of the Evidence from Episcopal Letters* (Boston: Brill, 2013), 20. On the public vs. private nature of epistolary exchange where private letters were commonly, and even expectedly read aloud multiple times. Allen and Neil cite Augustine’s *Ep. CLXII.i*, and his dismay that the transmission of and access to letters could not be controlled, and therefore the information within a given letter could sometimes be misunderstood by unintelligent or uneducated people: “*Huc accedit, quia non tu et tales tantum modo cogitandi estis lecturi esse, quod scripsimus, sed utique et illi, qui minus acuto minusque exercitato ingenio praediti eo tamen studio feruntur ad cognoscendas litteras nostras siue amico siue inimico animo, ut eis subtrahi omnino non possint.*” “In addition there is the fact that we must bear in mind that it is not only you and persons like you who are going to read what we write, but there are of course also those persons who are endowed with a mind that is less sharp and less well-trained but who are carried along by a desire to know our writings, whether with a friendly or hostile intention, so that they can by no means be kept from them.”

female ascetics ought to strive for, sometimes with correlations to real women, such as Jerome's companions Paula the elder and Eustochium. It is impossible to know how well the people to whom Jerome directed these counsels took them to heart and enacted them dutifully. We do know even from Jerome's own letters, however, that not all of his admonitions were followed.⁸²

Even though we grant that letters are rhetorical devices, often bursting with pedagogical tropes and ideals that often went unheeded, they were nevertheless representative of the overarching preoccupations of the letter writer, and in this case, arguably the three most influential Christian letter writers of the later fourth and early fifth century. The epistles of Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine are some of the most useful and abundant resources for understanding their world and that of their correspondents. Beyond theological tractates and sermons filled with philosophical and doctrinal ideals to interpret, letters were written to real people, often in response to real questions and concerns or regarding real events in the lives of the authors. As Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine addressed those questions and events, women featured prominently in their letters as transmitters of Christian righteousness and teaching. While the letters of Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine also included ideals and rhetoric that may not always be reliable indicators of life on the ground in the late fourth and early fifth century, the very nature of epistolary exchange between communicants provides the modern reader with information about the writer, his preoccupations, and his audience.

⁸² Jerome, *Ep.* CXIII.iii. Jerome had implored Laeta, the mother of young Paula, to send the child to Bethlehem to be educated and reared by her grandmother and aunt. Laeta apparently did not send Paula the younger to the Holy Land until after she was sixteen years old, a very significant age for a young Roman woman (as will be discussed). Upon the death of Eustochium, in 419, Jerome remarked to Pope Boniface, who had been Paula the younger's former spiritual guide, that he was not certain he could bear the burden of raising her by himself, "*infans Paula, quae in tuis nutrita est manibus...quod onus utrum ferre ualeamus, domini est scire.*" "The infant Paula, who has been nurtured in your hands...if we are able to carry that burden, it is for God to know." (Translation my own).

The audience of late antique epistles was two-fold. Not only were letters written to and for a specific person or persons, they were also meant to be read aloud to the addressee's community.⁸³ At this point, the epistle was also likely to be copied and distributed to interested parties without the specific knowledge or possibly even consent of the author, and thus being exposed to a much larger audience than simply the addressee. The most important audience member for our purposes, however, remains the addressee and, by extension, his or her individual, personal community to whom the letter would have first been read. Though there were known to have been monasteries that housed both men and women, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine all seem to have disapproved of this trend of co-habitation, and monastic communities largely tended to be composed of one gender.⁸⁴ As such, the intended audience of each letter will be understood to mean both the specific recipient and his or her family or gendered monastic community.

Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine often wrote multiple letters to recipients of different genders on the same subject. These letters are very useful for looking at the manner in which the authors addressed women as opposed to men. Common currents of interest for the three writers were the decline of the city of Rome and Roman morals, the sickness or death of close friends, and the upbringing of children dedicated to virginity, addressing men, women, and sometimes the children themselves. One such example is the set of letters Ambrose wrote in 388, one to his sister, Marcellina, and another to the emperor Theodosius I (r. 379-395), after he had learned of the burning of the Jewish

⁸³ Henry Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 30.

⁸⁴ Maribel Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims: Ascetic Travel in the Mediterranean World, A.D. 300-800* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 109.

synagogue by a bishop in Callinicum on the Euphrates. In his letter to Theodosius I, Ambrose included little praise for the righteousness of mankind, though the biblical exemplar he held up for Theodosius I to emulate was the sinful woman who washed Jesus' feet at the house of the Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50).⁸⁵ Ambrose, though he censured Theodosius I for ordering the synagogue to be rebuilt, wrote the letter as an entreaty to the emperor, begging him not to force the rebuilding of the synagogue lest he do a disservice to those who had been martyred and those churches that had been burned by the Jews.⁸⁶ Ambrose's subsequent letter to Marcellina, included brief praises for her own virtue before he launched into an exceptionally detailed account of the interaction between himself and the emperor where again, he held up the woman from Luke 7:36-50 as an ideal not only for the emperor to emulate, but for the entire church itself. Where Ambrose had proceeded with diplomacy, reason, and entreaty in his correspondence with Theodosius I, his letter to Marcellina is filled with discussion of the Christian duty Theodosius I had as a Christian emperor. He included a lengthy sermon which he had preached in his efforts to bring the emperor to heel. Perhaps a more honest accounting of his machinations against the emperor, or a boastful account to garner the admiration of his beloved sister, Ambrose's letter to Marcellina has a more overt religious tone than the active diplomatic tone of his letter to Theodosius I. This speaks to the differences in Ambrose's perception when addressing a male versus a female audience, because Ambrose's tone was more overtly religious and spiritual when addressing women, it is clear that he viewed women's roles as intrinsically tied to religion and virtue.

⁸⁵ Ambrose, *Ep.* XL.xxiv.

⁸⁶ Ambrose, *Ep.* XL.viii.

There are three extant letters from Ambrose to his sister Marcellina. For each of these, Ambrose also wrote a letter to a male correspondent on the same subject. This provides us with a lens with which to view the way Ambrose addressed both men and women, and also to view how important his relationship with his sister was. Though only three letters remain between Ambrose and his sister, he made it clear in each letter to her that she was one of his most cherished and important confidants and that they enjoyed regular epistolary exchanges. So frequent and expected were these correspondences that in one instance Ambrose noted her particular anxiety in not receiving a letter from him in a relatively short period of time.⁸⁷ Ambrose was concerned with keeping his sister informed about the events in his life, but each letter he wrote to Marcellina, as that regarding the Synagogue in Callinicum, contained extensive religious inclusions.⁸⁸ The letters Ambrose wrote to men on the same subjects he wrote to Marcellina were more to the point, more concerned with temporal events, and included fewer abstract religious ideas. Ambrose's correspondences with his sister are more about philosophical and religious ideals, far removed from political and bureaucratic meanderings. She is, for him, a blank canvas, not to be sullied with temporal or political events, but to be consumed and colored with the singular quest for holiness, apart from the world and its travails.

⁸⁷ Ambrose, *Ep. XLI.i*. "*Sollicitam sanctitatem tuam esse adhuc scribere dignata es mihi, eo quod sollicitum me esse scripserim; unde miror quod litteras non acceperis meas, quibus refusam mihi scripseram securitatem.*" "You had written to me that your holiness was still anxious, because I had written to you that I was anxious, I wonder, then that you have not received the letter from me in which I wrote that freedom from anxiety had been granted to me." (Translation my own).

⁸⁸ Ambrose, *Ep. XXII.i*. "*Dominae sorori vitae atque oculis praeferundae frater. Quia nihil sanctitatem soleo eorum praeterire, quae hic te geruntur absente...*" "To the lady, the sister, to the one to be preferred over his life and eyes, the brother (writes). Because I wish that nothing which takes place here in your absence should escape the knowledge of your holiness..." (Translation my own).

Though the difference in the character of these letters of Ambrose is slight (albeit significant), the distinction in the letters of Jerome is far more overt. Jerome was often asked to provide instruction for how to properly raise young girls who had been dedicated to virginity. Education for ascetic Christian children and non-ascetic Christian children was very different.⁸⁹ Christian education for children who were not already committed to lives of asceticism was an adaptation of Greco-Roman education, highly dependent on literature and the study of texts. But where pagan parents sought education for their children in the interest of preparing them for the world and their proper roles in that world as men and women, Christian parents were more concerned with the salvation of their children and educating them in the faith from their earliest moments of infancy.⁹⁰

The roots of Christian education in the Greco-Roman tradition led parents to inquire and church fathers to respond, marking out clearly the most Christian means of undertaking an ascetic child's education. In the fourth century, at a time when Christianity was still trying to establish itself firmly in the wake of Julian the Apostate's reign (361-363 CE) and becoming the newly adopted religion of the Roman Empire, Christianity grappled with creating a system of education to rival and supersede that of traditional pagan Roman society. Peter Brown comments on this struggle, "It is not surprising, therefore, that pagans and Christians fought so virulently throughout the

⁸⁹ Phyllis B. Katz, "Educating Paula: A Proposed Curriculum for raising a Fourth-Century Christian Infant," *Hesperia Supplements* 41, *Constructions of Childhood in Ancient Greece and Italy* (2007): 117. Katz cites M. Laistner, *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1951), 25-73; H. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, trans. G. Lamb (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956), 274-291; Stanley F. Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome from the Elder Cato to the Younger Pliny* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 135-136; and J. Petersen, "The Education of Girls in Fourth-century Rome," in *The Church and Childhood*, ed. D. Wood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 30-37.

⁹⁰ Katz, "Educating Paula," 116.

fourth century as to whether literature or Christianity was the true *paideia*, the true Education: for both sides expected to be saved by education."⁹¹

Jerome wrote two letters regarding proper Christian education to Laeta and to Gaudentius, both regarding their infant girls.⁹² Jerome opened his letter to Laeta by discussing her father, a pagan. Prior to any discussion of how to raise the infant Paula the younger, Jerome argued that by dedicating her daughter to Christ Laeta may effect her father's conversion.⁹³ After this introduction, Jerome compared the young Paula, the first-born dedicated to God, to the paragons of Hebrew scripture, Samuel and Sampson and to John the Baptist.⁹⁴ In this instance, Jerome presented, not only a woman, but a young woman, a child far below the age of majority, who might in some way steer her grandfather down the path of righteousness.

He also went into great detail about what pains ought to be taken to properly rear a child dedicated to virginity: she must not hear unclean words, no worldly songs; she

⁹¹ Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, 32. A sentiment Brown reprises in *Rise of Western Christendom*, 518 n.7.

⁹² Jerome, *Ep. CVII* and *Ep. CXXVIII*, respectively. Laeta was a Christian matron living in Rome, She was Paula the elder's daughter-in-law, married to the pagan Toxotius. Gaudentius also lived in Rome and was the *magister equitum*, or master of the cavalry. He may be the same Gaudentius that Augustine credited with destroying pagan temples in Carthage in *City of God XVIII.liv*.

⁹³ Jerome, *Ep. CVII.i.3* "*Quis hoc crederet, ut Albinus pontificis neptis de repromissione matris nasceretur, ut praesente et gaudente auo paruulae adhuc lingua balbutiens alleluia resonaret et uirginem Christi in suo gremio nutriret in senex?...Candidatus est fidei, quem filiorum et nepotum credens turba circumdat.*" "Who would ever have believed that the granddaughter of the Roman pontiff Albinus would be born in answer to a mother's vows; that the grandfather would stand by and rejoice while the baby's yet stammering tongue cried 'Alleluia'; and that even the old man would nurse in his arms one of Christ's own virgins?...He is a candidate for the faith, who has around him a throng of believing children and grandchildren."

⁹⁴ Jerome, *Ep. CVII.iii.2* "*Fidens loquor accepturam te filios, quae primum foetum domino reddidisti. Ista sunt primogenital, quae offeruntur in lege, Sic natus Samuel, sic ortus est Sampson, sic Iohannes propheta ad introitum Mariae exultavit et lusit.*" "I tell you confidently that you who have given your first-born to the Lord will receive sons at his hand. The first-born are the offerings due under the Law. Such was the case both with Samuel and with Samson, and so it was that John the Baptist leaped for joy when Mary came in."

must be kept apart from the “lasciviousness of boys,”⁹⁵ and only keep company with other chaste young women; even her maids should be dedicatees to virginity. Jerome expected Laeta to personally undertake young Paula the younger’s education, as a part of her role as a mother, and so included very detailed instructions on how to proceed. Jerome even dictated how to teach her to read by making her toys also instruments of instruction.⁹⁶ He included also a dire warning that the parents of such a child are liable for her actions. Since Paula the younger had been dedicated to virginity, Jerome warned her parents not to let her fall away from that vow lest she and they too be eternally damned.⁹⁷ Jerome’s program for Paula the younger’s upbringing spanned beyond her infancy through her childhood and adolescence and into her young adulthood. He continued to discuss the proper behavior of a virgin once she had come of age and was no longer a child. Among the exhortations to pray and fast, Jerome insisted that she should read all the parts of the Bible and emulate the righteous men and women found therein.

Finally, Jerome advised that, if Paula the younger was to reach her full potential, the tutelage of her mother, untrained in the arts of Christian chastity though adequate for a lay Christian would be insufficient for an advanced ascetic, especially in a place as dangerous for one’s virtue as Rome. Jerome advocated that Paula the younger be sent to Bethlehem to be under the female fosterage of Paula the elder and Eustochium. Katz argues that Jerome's advice to send Paula the younger away to be educated at a convent

⁹⁵ Jerome, *Ep.* CVII.iv.1 “*Procul sit aetas lasciuia puerorum.*” “Let her life be far from the lasciviousness of boys.” (Translation my own. Most translations make the boys and their wantonness the subject of the sentence, rather than Paula the younger and her *aetas* or lifespan as in the Latin.)

⁹⁶ Jerome, *Ep.* CVII.iv.

⁹⁷ Jerome, *Ep.* CVII.vi. “*Si perfecta aetas et sui iuris inputatur parentibus, quanto magis lactans et fragilis et quae iuxta sententiam domini ignorat dexteram aut sinistram, id est boni ac mali nescit differentiam!*” “If parents get the credit for their children’s deeds, even when they are of ripe age and their own masters, how much more are they responsible for a frail baby girl, who, as the Lord says, cannot discern between the right hand and the left, that is, does not know the difference between good and evil.”

was unusual and contrary to the advice of his contemporary John Chrysostom, who advised that young boys should not be sent away from their families until the age of 10.⁹⁸

One thing Katz does not consider is the difference in gender of the children being considered in each instance. A girl's status as *virgo dei* was particularly vital; the upkeep of such a child within the *domus* was most important for she enhanced the piety of the household. For young boys, who were expected to venture out into the world and become functioning citizens with an active public life, maintenance within the home was not a priority as it was for the young *virgines dei* who were meant to stay away from the corrupting influence of the world outside the home. In this section of his letter to Laeta, Jerome submitted two women as the ideal teachers and guides for Paula the younger's ascetic education, her mother and Paula the elder. He never suggested a male guide or teacher, and in fact, recommended that aside from himself and her father, Paula the younger be largely kept away from males.

In putting Paula the elder forth as exemplum and teacher, Jerome also used terminology reserved for true virgins to emphasize the virtue and lifestyle of Paula the elder.⁹⁹ By imbuing Paula the elder with such virginal honor, he endorsed her as the ideal instructor for a young dedicatee, the likes of which could not be found in Rome. He had previously laid out, in a letter to Pammachius, the metaphor of marriage/motherhood, widowhood, and virginity being like the yield from a sown field wherein marriage/motherhood yields thirtyfold, widowhood sixtyfold, and virginity one

⁹⁸ Katz, "Educating Paula," 117. Katz also notes that Chrysostom goes on to amend his former counsel to send boys away for education and advises parents to keep their children home and undertake educating their children themselves.

⁹⁹ Jerome, *Ep.* CVII.xiii.3 "*In cuius corona centenarii cotidie numeri castitas textitur.*" "In whose crown every day is woven the mystic hundred of chastity."

hundredfold.¹⁰⁰ Jerome lauded the lifestyle and practices of Paula the elder by associating with her, hardly virginal as a mother of five, the virginal crown. At a time when the cult of the Virgin Mary was not yet widely celebrated—a half century before the building of the great station church Santa Maria Maggiore, in Rome—Jerome compared Paula the elder to the ideal of the mother virgin thus recommending her and her daughter whom she raised as those best suited to ensure Paula the younger’s perfect upbringing.

In contrast to the detailed curriculum Jerome laid out for Laeta and Paula the younger, the letter he wrote to the male Gaudentius regarding the care of his infant daughter Pacatula was a more abstract contemplation of how to approach the idea of raising a child. Jerome began the letter by questioning whether strict religious education ought to be started immediately at all.¹⁰¹ Jerome quickly changed the subject and went on to discuss the dangers of interactions between the sexes. Far from advising a father on how to raise his daughter, he advised that grown men should not surround themselves with nubile women and servants for fear of their own weakness in the face of temptation

¹⁰⁰ Jerome, *Ep. XLIX (XLVIII).ii.7-8* “*Triginta referuntur as nuptias; nam et ipsa digitorum coniunctio et quasi molli osculo se complexans et foederans maritum pingit et coniugem. Sexaginta uero ad uiduas, eo quod in angustia et tribulatione sint positae, unde et superiori digito deprimuntur, quantoque maior est difficultas expertae quondam voluptatis inlecebris abstinere, tanto maius et praemium. Porro centesimus numerus—diligenter quaeso, lector, adtende—de sinistra transfertur as dextrum, et isdem quidem digitis, sed non eadem manu, quibus in laeva nuptiae significantur et uiduae, circulum faciens exprimit uirginitatis coronam.*” “The yield thirtyfold signifies wedlock, for the joining together of the fingers to express that number, suggestive as it is of a loving gentle kiss of embracing, aptly represents the relation of husband and wife. The yield sixtyfold refers to widows who are placed in a position of distress and tribulation. Accordingly, they are typified by that finger which is placed under the other to express the number sixty; for, as it is extremely trying when one have once tasted pleasure to abstain from its enticements, so the reward of doing this is proportionately great. Moreover, a hundred—I ask the reader to give me his best attention—necessitates a change from the left hand to the right; but while the hand is different the fingers are the same as those which on the left hand signify married women and widows; only in this instance the circle formed by them indicated the crown of virginity.”

¹⁰¹ Jerome, *Ep. CXXVIII.i.* “*Causa difficilis paruulae scribere, quae non intellegat, quid loquaris, cuius animam nescias, de cuius periculose voluntate promittas...Itaque Pacatula nostra hoc epistulum post lectura suscipiat; interim modo litterularum elementa cognoscat, iungat syllabas, discat nomina, verba consciat.*” “It is a difficult matter to write to a little girl who will not understand what you say, of whose mind you know nothing, and whose inclinations it would be dangerous to warrant...So my little Pacatula must read this letter herself in days to come; and in the meantime learn her alphabet, spelling, grammar, and syntax.”

and advised virgins and widows to deny the private company of men as, though it was not inherently sinful, it may have appeared to be.¹⁰² If Pacatula's teacher could not be her mother, then Jerome advised Gaudentius to choose an old, misshapen woman who would not tempt him into sin, and would present a suitable example for Pacatula's emulation.

Scholars often point to the similarity between these letters to Laeta and Gaudentius, remarking only that the letter to Gaudentius is much shorter, but there is rarely discussion regarding the reason for this difference.¹⁰³ In Jerome's letter to Laeta, the education of the child was directly in the hands of the letter's recipient and so warranted a detailed instruction of how to proceed. Pacatula's education, however, would not have been undertaken by Gaudentius himself, so Jerome did not include such details. Jerome emphasized the importance of women as role models of continence and virtue while also reinforcing Roman stereotypes of the male as guardian of the household, stressed that Gaudentius' duty to his family was to safe-guard the home and its inhabitants. Much of the patristic literature that deals with asceticism relates female piety to the private realm, that of the home. Homes, with their walls as clear *limes* between the secular world and that of the enclosed virgin, were the first and primary defenders of virtue.¹⁰⁴ The man's role as *paterfamilias* and guardian of the home was even more vital when a young virgin dedicated to God lived in that home and was necessary for the

¹⁰² Jerome, *Ep. CXXVIII.iii.5* "*Elige ergo anum, elige deformem, elige probatae in domino continentiae. Quid te adulescentia, quid pulchra, quid luxuriosa delectat?*" "Choose and old woman, then, choose one who is misshapen, choose one of proved continence in the Lord Why should you take pleasure in a young girl, pretty and voluptuous?" *Ibid.*, iii.5-6 "*Cum etiam ipse non pecces, aliis peccare uidearis, ut exemplo sis miseris, qui nominis tui auctoritate delinquant. Tu quoque, uirgo uel uidua, cur tam longo uiri sermone retineris? Cur cum solo relicta non metuis?*" "Why, even if you do not sin yourself, do you seem to others to be sinning, leading poor wretched into error by the authority of your name? You also, my sister, whether you are a virgin or a widow, why do you spend so many hours in talking with a man? Why are you not afraid to be left with him alone?"

¹⁰³ Katz, "Educating Paula," 122 n.35.

¹⁰⁴ Kim Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 203.

upbringing of a young female ascetic. Jerome went so far as to consider the home as a castle or fortress surrounding and safeguarding the virtue of dedicated virgins who dwelt there.¹⁰⁵ In this light, Jerome's advice not to employ nubile young women for fear of temptation is actually advice to avoid undermining the stability and Christian foundation of the home (as adultery would do). At this point, Jerome proceeded to lay out a plan for educating and raising a dedicated virgin.

Jerome's letter to Gaudentius presented women as the ideal teachers and exemplars for young Christians, never suggesting that Gaudentius, or any male, could be responsible for her education. Where his epistle to Laeta included both detailed instructions on how to raise Paula the younger from an infant to a woman and an entreaty to send her to a monastery where she could practice and learn more faithfully, Jerome included no such detail in his letter to Gaudentius, advising him mostly to give over his daughter to the instruction of her mother and a chaste female nurse.¹⁰⁶ He briefly explained that she must be taught to be modest and kept apart from men and too much company and provided with a chaste and sober nurse as an example. His discussion of the child, Pacatula, occupies a compact 26 lines, roughly a sixth of the total letter. The educational and spiritual upbringing of Pacatula, ought to be entrusted to the woman of the house, and as such, Jerome advised Gaudentius to do just that. He closed his epistle

¹⁰⁵Jerome, *Ep. XXII.xxv*; *Ep. XXII.xvii*; *Ep. XXIV.iii-iv*; *Ep. CVII.vii*; and *Ep. CXXVIII.iv*. This idea was also expressed by John Chrysostom in *An Address on Vainglory and the Right Way for Parents to Bring Up Their Children*. Jerome and Chrysostom disagree in many ways on the proper place, method, and severity of Christian education.

¹⁰⁶ Jerome, *Ep. CXXVIII.iv*. "*Matris nutum pro verbis ac monitum pro imperio habeat. Amet ut parentem, subiciatur ut dominae, timeat ut magistram...Sit ei magistra comes, paedagoga custos non multo vino dedita, non iuxta apostolum otiose ac verbose, sed sobria, gravis, lanifica et ea tantum loquens, quae animum puellorum ad virtutem instituant.*" "Her mother's nod should be as good as speech, her mother's advice equivalent to a command. She should love her parent, obey her as her mistress, fear her as her teacher...Let her teacher be her companion, her attendant her guardian, and let her be a woman not given to much wine, one who, as the apostle says, is not idle nor a tattler, but sober, grave, skilled in spinning, saying only such words as will train a girl's mind in virtue.

to Gaudentius with a lament for the sack of Rome, a threat to Christendom itself, and another threat to the safety and stability of the home for which Gaudentius was responsible.¹⁰⁷ In another comparison of the *virgo dei* as spiritual leverage for the household, Jerome lastly related Moses offering his life to Yahweh as payment for the sins of the Hebrews to Pacatula's position in her home after the fall of Rome, an event that he saw as portent of the assured downfall of the earthly realm.¹⁰⁸

Jerome's predisposition towards celibacy and asceticism is clear in both letters. And he indicated women as the prime examples of how to undertake that asceticism and celibacy properly. Additionally, the women in Jerome's life and letters exhibited his recommended asceticism and teaching that by controlling the body one could control the mind or soul.¹⁰⁹ By fasting and renunciation, a woman might stop menstruating and thereby become more pure.¹¹⁰

Jerome championed renunciation and viewed the ascetic lifestyle as the best preparation for the priesthood and episcopate, which, by the fourth century, would have excluded the young girls about whom he wrote.¹¹¹ But Jerome's advice for undertaking

¹⁰⁷ With Rome representing the metaphorical home for which Christians were responsible.

¹⁰⁸ Jerome, *Ep. CXXVIII.v.* "*Pro nefas, orbis terrarum ruit et in nobis peccata non corrunt. Urbs inclita et Romani imperii caput uno hausta est incendio...aedificamus quasi semper in hoc victuri saeculo...His Pacatula est nata temporibus.*" "Shame on us, the world is falling in ruins, but our sins still flourish. The glorious city that was the head of the Roman Empire has been engulfed in one terrific blaze...but we build houses as though we were going to live forever in this world...Such are the times into which our Pacatula has been born."

¹⁰⁹ Aelius Aristides received remarkably cruel proscriptions, in dreams, that included giving up hot baths for upwards of five years, running barefoot in winter, taking baths in the icy river, mud baths in freezing winds, and willfully making himself seasick in order to purify the body and the mind. Devotees of the cult of Isis engaged in similar ascetic feats, Juvenal *Satire* VI.522. See the discussion of E.R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in the Age of Anxiety*, reprint (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 42.

¹¹⁰ Lisa A. Alberici and Mary Harlow, "Age and Innocence: Female Transitions to Adulthood in Late Antiquity," *Hesperia Supplements*, Vol. 41, *Constructions of Childhood in Ancient Greece and Italy* (2007) 197. Alberici and Harlow also cite P. Garnsey, *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 97. Pagans often sought to encourage fertility and menarche, quite the opposite of Christian ascetics.

¹¹¹ Katz, "Educating Paula," 116 n. 9, wherein she cites S. Rebenich, *Jerome (The Early Church Fathers)* (London: Routledge, 2002), 131; B. Feichtinger, *Apostolae apostolorum: Frauenaskese als Befreiung und*

asceticism depended on women as exempla and teachers. Clearly, Jerome's vision of the usefulness of asceticism went beyond the role of training clerics. The Christian vocation afforded similar options to children as to women: the option of devoting one's life to God and living together in a community of like-minded and same-gendered individuals.

Asceticism was not just for men. Similarly, Jerome's advice regarding asceticism was not just for men as preparation to become priests or bishops, but for women to become nuns and abbesses, and as preparation for the eternal life to come.¹¹² There is a stark difference between the manner in which Jerome addressed a woman's request for guidance and a man's with regard to a young virgin's upbringing. His opinion on who would be the best role model and guide for a young virgin remained constant. His advice to the woman was long and detailed; his advice to the man was largely to ensure his household was secure and to keep young Pacatula away from men and submit her to her mother's teaching, but both young girls were to be tutored and led by Christian women.

Augustine responded to male inquirers about tutelage and guidance of a young girl in a similar fashion to Jerome. The letters of Augustine also reveal a gendered division of duties regarding a young Christian's upbringing. Rather than laying out an extensive curriculum by which a child should be educated, Augustine focused on who was an appropriate teacher or guide for the child. A girl whose father had died and mother had abandoned her was commended to Augustine's tutelage by her uncle, Felix, and a fellow bishop, Benenatus. Augustine responded to each man in a series of letters.

Zwang bei Hieronymus (Frankfurt-am-Main: P. Lang, 1995); and Peter Brown, *The Body and Society*, 366-386.

¹¹² Perhaps Jerome is hearkening back in some way to the early days of the Pauline churches wherein women were able to hold positions of power and authority. Perhaps these female ascetics to and about whom he writes so passionately about following the ascetic lifestyle are preparing for the presbytery in heaven.

He listed in order the people who ought to be responsible for her education or her guardianship before him.¹¹³ Though Augustine had acknowledged that he was not the proper person to determine the girl's education, or her betrothal, upon learning that Benenatus was seeking to engage her to a pagan, Augustine appropriated for himself the role of protector of her virginal status until she reached such an age where she might be married or officially take her vows,¹¹⁴ denying proposed betrothals on her behalf¹¹⁵ and dismissing her own expressed desire to remain a *virgo dei*.¹¹⁶

As Jerome had suggested himself as the only male suitable to guide Paula the younger, Augustine here saw himself as the only male who could rightly protect her virtue. To Augustine, mothers and fathers had the prerogative to donate their daughters to the church as virgins, but a child could not take it upon herself to do so until she had reached an age when her childhood "inconstancy" had passed. Though he does not list a

¹¹³ Augustine, *Ep.* CCLII, to Felix, "*nec potui nec debui passim puellam cuiquam committere, praesertim quia eam ecclesiae commendauit;*" "I neither could nor should entrust the girl to anyone at random, especially as he had confided her to the care of the Church." In *Ep.* CCLIV, Augustine admonished Benenatus for trying to arrange a marriage for the girl without first consulting her aunt and uncle, who had the right to be consulted if her mother, whose presence and permission would have been ideal, were absent, "*deinde habet materteram, cuius uir honorabilis frater noster Felix, dum de hac re contulisses cum illo—neque enim possem aliter uel deberem...Fortassis enim, quae nunc non apparet, apparebit et mater, cuius voluntatem in tradenda filia omnibus, ut arbitror, natura praeponit, nisi eadem puella in ea iam aetate fuerit, ut iure licentiore sibi eligat ipsa, quod uelit.*" "Besides, she has a maternal aunt, whose husband is our honorable brother Felix, and when I had conferred with him for I neither could nor should have done otherwise...Perhaps, too, her mother will come forward which up to now she has not done and her wish, I think should naturally prevail over all others in the matter of handing over her daughter, unless the girl is by that time of an age which will give her a legitimate right to choose for herself what she wants to do."

¹¹⁴ Augustine, *Ep.* CCLIV, "*quia eam deus in ecclesia sic tuetur, ut contra improbos tueatur, non ut, cui uoluerit, tradi possit, sed ut, a quo non oportet, rapi non possit.*" "God gives her his protection in the Church to shield her from unprincipled men, not to allow me to hand her over to whomever I choose, but to prevent her from being carried off by an unsuitable person."

¹¹⁵ Augustine, *Ep.* CCLV, "*etiamsi nostrae absolutae sit potestatis quamlibet puellam in coniugium tradere, tradi a nobis Christianam nisi Christiano non posse.*" "even if it were in my unchallenged power to arrange a marriage for any girl, we cannot give a Christian maiden to anyone but a Christian."

¹¹⁶ Augustine, *Ep.* CCLIV, "*quia in his annis est, ut et, quod se dicit uelle esse sanctimoniam, iocus sit potius garrientis quam sponsio profitentis.*" "Because she is of an age where her expressed wish to become a nun might be the light whim of a chatterer rather than the solemn undertaking of religious profession."

specific age, Augustine claims the girl is too young to dedicate herself to asceticism.¹¹⁷ Ideally, her mother would return for her to undertake her education, but if not her aunt should with the permission of her uncle. And, finally, when she became old enough to choose for herself, she could take her vows and come under Augustine's tutelage. This notion of the early education being in the hands of the mother (or in this case the aunt) in the home before an advanced education under a renowned teacher was advocated as both proper and standard by both Augustine and Jerome. It is clear, however, that not just any teacher would do. For Augustine, even a fellow bishop like Benenatus, who would engage a young girl to be married before the appropriate age, was not a suitable guardian or teacher. Likewise, Jerome advocated quite strongly that Laeta send Paula the younger to Bethlehem to be reared by only the best prepared women in his estimation, Paula the elder and Eustochium.

For Augustine and Jerome, the piety and holiness of the individual superseded the question of gender when it came to locating the ideal tutor. Neither author ever set forth a male tutor whom they thought adequate for a young girl dedicated to virginity. Regardless of the gender of the recipients of these letters, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine maintained that female individuals were able to reach high states of sanctity and to serve as guides and role models for other Christians. All Christian women could serve as guides, at least to children, but only very well-educated ascetic men, seemingly only the authors themselves, could do the same.

In the hands of their tutors, young women dedicated to virginity progressed through their education, but, as they matured, the manner of that education and their very

¹¹⁷ Though Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine do not make mention of a particular age at which girls can choose for themselves to take the veil, Basil of Caesarea (*Ep. CXCIX.xviii*) explicitly says that sixteen or seventeen is the proper age.

way of life changed. In his letters to Laeta and Gaudentius, Jerome went on to discuss the advanced education of women with all the praises of the virginal life and specifically Paula the elder and Eustochium as exemplary teachers. Augustine also noted the change in a girl's education when she reached a certain age. According to Augustine, a girl was able to decide for herself whether to take the veil or not at around the same age that Jerome advised an advanced tutor in the ways of a celibate life and Christian contemplation.¹¹⁸ The age at which a Christian child becomes capable of the self-determination to choose the veil or to begin an advanced education occurred during a girl's *adulescentia*, the transitional age during which one was no longer a child and was not yet an adult of full majority. This period, from 14-28 years of age was also the time when a woman who had not dedicated herself to virginity would take a husband (aristocratic girls would wed as young as 12 or 14, but the average age of marriage for pre-Christian women was 15-20), donning quite another kind of veil than her consecrated sistren.¹¹⁹ The rite of passage each woman would participate in, either nuptial or consecration, was a mark of this transitional *adulescentia* when a young woman would leave her father's house. One would don the veil to be under the hand of her husband, and the other, a "bride of Christ," would theoretically be under the hand of no human, but rather that of God. In the letters of Augustine and Jerome, consecrated virgins were not answerable only to God, for, in taking the veil, they came under the tutelage of either exceptionally advanced women, or even the authors themselves. Upon taking the veil, of

¹¹⁸ See note 46.

¹¹⁹ Walter Scheidel, "Roman Funerary Commemoration and the Age at First Marriage," *Classical Philology* 102, no. 4 (October 2007): 389. Scheidel presents two theories: that of Richard Saller and Brent Shaw, 1987, that non-elite women wed at age 18-20; and that of Arnold Lelis, William Percy, and Beert Verstraete, 2002, that women of all classes wed between 12-18. Scheidel analyzes both methods extensively and comes to a compromise, though it is a somewhat wide age range, 15-20 years old at age of first marriage.

marriage or virginity, a woman would also be able to serve as a teacher or role model herself. The majority of the women named and written about at length were regarded as righteous, wise, and proper teachers. Augustine and Jerome wrote about them both as exemplars and as leaders of monasteries and house groups.¹²⁰

Jerome maintained this usage of contemporary women as exemplars in his correspondence with other women, be they virginal, married, or widowed, and especially when responding to a request for advice on how to live a chaste life. When corresponding with the widow Furia about the manner in which she ought to preserve her chastity, Jerome intimated that Paula the elder and Eustochium were such paragons of virtue as to be beyond emulation by either gender.¹²¹ He continued his letter, however, including many chaste women to whom Furia should have instead looked as teachers and examples for her life. Jerome even desired that men should follow the examples of such women, though he knew that he may be denounced for such a statement.¹²² Although Jerome's intended recipient for this letter was a single female widow, he pointed out that the examples of Paula the elder and Eustochium and other women were the ideal models for human holiness, not only among women but for men.

As each author addressed the manner in which a Christian woman—especially an ascetic Christian woman—ought to be brought up and go on to take the veil as a bride of Christ, they were also explicit about how women ought to behave in the face of death and mourning. Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine addressed men and women differently

¹²⁰ Clark, "The Lady Vanishes," 27.

¹²¹ Jerome, *Ep.* LIV.ii.1, "*Taceo de Paula et Eustochio, stirpis uestrae floribus, ne per occasionem exhortationis tuae illas laudare uidear.*" "I say nothing of Paula and Eustochium, those fair flowers of their stock, lest I should use the opportunity of exhorting you to praise them."

¹²² Jerome, LIV.ii.1, "*Atque utinam praeconia feminarum imitarentur viri...Sciens et uidens in flammam mitto manum.*" "I only wish that men would follow the example that women have publicly given them...I am thrusting my hand into the fire knowingly and with my eyes open."

regarding their roles after the death of a fellow Christian. Both Christian men and Christian women were expected to bear their grief with dignity, and either show only the slightest outward signs of sorrow or rejoice that the departed had finally left the mortal world and had, in their view, rejoined Jesus in heaven. The manner in which the authors instructed men and women to do so was markedly different. In fact, neither Augustine nor Jerome ever spoke to the issue of mourning in their letters to men, though Ambrose did address it briefly in his panegyric to his brother, Satyrus. It is, however, a subject with which they dealt repeatedly and in detail in their correspondence with women.

Jerome made it quite clear that Christian women were not supposed to be seen weeping and rending their clothes because they would be acting as pagans and even Jews, who continued to make great shows of mourning and who did not recognize Jesus as the fulfillment of the law.¹²³ Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine specifically addressed women rather than both men and women about curbing ostentatious mourning because of the gendered roles present in Roman, pagan mourning.¹²⁴ Roman authors consistently advocated a kind of Stoic moderation and austerity and controlled emotions in men.¹²⁵ Where men were supposed to mourn their dead in public while exhibiting control of their emotions, women were designated as the wailing, lamenting mourners. The traditional role of pagan Roman women in pagan death ritual was to perform the most extreme displays of grief; singing dirges, wailing as if giving birth, rending their clothes and

¹²³ Jerome, *Ep.* XXXIX.iv.6.

¹²⁴ Angela Standhartinger, “‘What Women Were Accustomed to Do for the Dead Beloved by Them’ (‘Gospel of Peter’ 12.50): Traces of Laments and Mourning Rituals in Early Easter, Passion, and Lord’s Supper Traditions,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 560.

¹²⁵ Servius Sulpicius Rufus in Cicero, *Letters to Friends*, IV.v.4. When Cicero’s daughter died and he retired from the city to the country he was repeatedly hounded by his correspondents to account for himself lest he be disgraced by his unmanly grief.

tearing at their hair and flesh.¹²⁶ Seneca elaborated on this, noting that the restrictions on length of mourning applied only to women, for it was dishonorable for men to mourn at length at all.¹²⁷ As pagan women were expected to mourn the dead with ritual wailing, Jewish tradition was also marked by keening women.¹²⁸

If women in the pagan and Jewish contexts were the only ones who were expected to mourn loudly, and did so to such excess as to warrant several philosophical and legal limits to that mourning, then it is even clearer why Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine would concern themselves with the mourning practices of Christian women as exemplars for other Christians. Surrounded as they were by traditions of wailing women, Christian women were the ones to be reminded of the proper behavior of a mourning Christian. Excessive mourning of any kind was no longer seen as undesirable for only men; it had become an unchristian expression for both men and women, as the mourner had allowed him or herself to become unduly attached and overcome by the carnal attachments of the world. Ambrose discussed his own grief in his sermons upon the death of his brother Satyrus and the need for moderation in sadness and rejoicing that the deceased was now with Jesus.¹²⁹

But even though dealing with a similar issue, the manner in which Ambrose discussed his own mourning was far less critical than the discussion of female mourning. Whereas Ambrose remarked that in his grief and with his tears he has committed no

¹²⁶ Anthony Corbeill, *Nature Embodied: Gesture in Ancient Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004): 84-97. In *On the Death of His Brother Satyrus*, II.xii, Ambrose also described the manner in which it was common for Roman women to mourn including covering their bodies and hair with filth and ripping their clothes apart to reveal their nakedness, publicly wailing lest their grief go unnoticed.

¹²⁷ Seneca, *Ep.* LXIII.xiii.

¹²⁸ Standhartinger, "What Women Were Accustomed to Do," 561.

¹²⁹ Ambrose, *de Excessu Satyri*.

grave sin, the women to whom the authors wrote were not always so blameless.¹³⁰ And thus, Jerome censured Paula the elder and instructed her how to mourn properly so she could be an appropriate exemplum to others. For Jerome and Ambrose, even in times of mourning, a woman's position as role model for Christian behavior and virtue was constant.

After the death of her daughter, Blaesilla, in 389 CE, Paula the elder was devastated.¹³¹ In his letter to Paula the elder, Jerome was quite harsh when discussing her behavior at Blaesilla's funeral, where she wept loudly and had to be carried out.¹³² Not only did Jerome scorn her public weeping, but he very nearly accused her of not being a true Christian. He asked her if her religious vows were sincere. He asked if a female ascetic, sworn to experience earthly things only in moderation, should be so immoderate and ostentatious in her grief.¹³³ The crux of his discontent with her behavior lies in two passages. First, Jerome contrasted Paula the elder with a priestess of Ceres, a "handmaiden of the Devil", who calmly handled the death of her husband, assured that he had been translated to the realm of the gods.¹³⁴ Then he despaired that Paula the elder "has been put to shame by the example of a heathen."¹³⁵ Jerome went on to mention yet

¹³⁰ Jerome, *Ep.* XXXIX.ii, "*Sed quid agimus? Matris prohibitori lacrimas ipsi plangimus. Confiteor affectus meos, totus hic liber fletibus scribitur.*" "But what is this? I wish to check a mother's weeping, and I groan myself. I make no secret of my feelings; this entire letter is written in tears." Jerome described himself weeping over Blaesilla's death, a decidedly inappropriate reaction not only for a Christian but for a Roman man in general, while at the same time he was censuring Paula the elder for wailing at the funeral.

¹³¹ Blaesilla had been married and after seven months of marriage became a widow and made a vow of chastity. Her asceticism, under the tutelage of Jerome, was so intense that she was constantly ill and after only three months died from privation.

¹³² Jerome, *Ep.* XXXIX.ii

¹³³ Jerome, *Ep.* XXXIX.iii, "*hoc est, quod mihi monasterium promittebas, quod habitu a matronis ceteris separato tibi quasi religiosior uidebaris? Mens, ista quae plangit, uestium sericarum est.*" "Is this the meaning of your vow to me that you would lead a religious life? Is it for this that you dress yourself differently from the other matrons, and array yourself in the garb of a nun?"

¹³⁴ Jerome, *Ep.* XXXIX.iii, "*diaboli ancilla*" *handmaiden of the devil.*"

¹³⁵ Jerome, *Ep.* XXXIX.iii, "*Erubescere, ethnicae comparatione superaris.*" "Blush, for you are put to shame by the example of a heathen."

another example of dignified mourning, that of Melania the Elder (d. 410). Here is where Jerome explained his true distaste for Paula the elder's behavior. Because Paula the elder was one of the leading Christian women of aristocratic Roman society, just as Melania was, her behavior ought always to reflect the epitome of Christian virtue.¹³⁶ Where Melania handled the death of not only her husband but her son with tearless austerity, Paula the elder had behaved shamefully.¹³⁷ Jerome then implored her to think of the effect of her behavior on Eustochium, who at that point had not completed her education, and the women of her community.¹³⁸

Paula the elder's excessive mourning hearkened back to pagan and Jewish rituals that Jerome and the other church fathers could not reconcile with appropriate Christian behavior. Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine—and other Christian philosophers after them—were inclined to point out "empty rituals" void of what they saw as any true meaning or spirit. The contrast between these "bad rituals" and their own rituals, rich in "transcendental content or referent," served to differentiate them from the pagans and wayward Jews who blindly still performed the rituals from the Old Testament, even though as the Christians saw it, the events of the New Testament had abolished the need for the Old Law.¹³⁹ With regards to mourning practices, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine point to stark differences between appropriate Christian behavior and the behaviors of both pagan and Jewish women, who wailed and tore their hair in

¹³⁶ This letter was written prior to Jerome's conflict with Rufinus and subsequent disavowal of his admiration for Melania.

¹³⁷ Jerome, *Ep.* XXXIX.v.

¹³⁸ Jerome, *Ep.* XXIX.vi, "*parce saltim Eustochiae tuae, cuius parua adhuc aetas et rudis paene infantia te magistrante.*" "At least spare Eustochium, whose tender years and inexperience depend on you for guidance and instruction."

¹³⁹ Phillippe Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual: Between Early Modern Texts and Social Scientific Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 8.

ostentatious display, not fitting for an upright Christian.¹⁴⁰ The rituals of women, as exempla, were the prime targets for the discussion of right behavior by Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine. By addressing these issues, and presenting women as ideal role models, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine were able to address heresy and paganism in its ritual expression.

Because ritual practice was tied to every aspect of Roman life, individuals may not have been able to extricate the religious from their worldview. Religiosity infused every aspect of life. To that end, right performance of good rituals—that is, proper propitiation of the gods or divine power—was paramount in the early centuries of Christianity’s ascendancy. Behaviors were learned through custom and the imitation of elders, not a prescribed dogma or regulated set of rules.¹⁴¹ For Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine, women were those “elders” whom other Christians would be looking as exempla. To create distinct Christian behavior, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine addressed pagan and Jewish female behaviors, education and mourning, in their letters and laid out a sort of *regulae* by which Christians, especially those dedicated to virginity, could live. As a part of the endeavor towards a complete Nicene indoctrination of the Roman world, strict censures were placed upon these women. They were, after all, paragons of Christian virtue and behavior and, as such, must distinguish themselves by their practices and purity from pagan and Jewish custom.

¹⁴⁰Buc, *Dangers of Ritual*, 7.

¹⁴¹ Neil S. Price, “Bodylore and the Archaeology of Embedded Religion: Dramatic License in the Funerals of the Vikings,” in *Belief in the Past: Theoretical Approaches to the Archaeology of Religion*, ed. David S. Whitley and Kelley Hays-Gilpin (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2008), 146.

CHAPTER III
FEMALE MODELS OF HOLINESS: VIRGINITY, MARRIAGE, AND THE
FOURTH-CENTURY AUDIENCE

The influence of Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine cannot be overstated when considering the establishment of organized Christianity and Catholic doctrine. They have come to be recognized as some of the chief conduits of orthodoxy, developing and disseminating “right” theology, in the early centuries of Christianity. It was not a foregone conclusion in their own time, however, that their words and philosophies would pass into history as definitive doctrine for the whole of the Christian community. They were not writing to address the issues that would face Christians for millenia to come. Rather, they were addressing the issues, large and small, brought to their doorsteps by the people and preoccupations of the later fourth century in the Latin west. The people, events, and movements that Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine encountered daily colored the subjects they chose and the manner in which they discussed those subjects. Across the years, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine repeatedly addressed female asceticism and virginity. They presented virgins as the most holy of Christians, positioning women as exempla for their Christian congregations. As attitudes changed and their congregants were exposed to different heresies and influences, the manner in which Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine discussed virginity changed and softened. But regardless of whether they used tactless or cleverly crafted rhetoric, the Church Fathers maintained that women, especially in the person of the Virgin Mary, were the ideal role models for all Christian emulation, male and female, lay and ascetic. Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine were men of their times, speaking to their times and, as such, when their audience changed, or when what

they deemed were heterodox influences came to bear upon their audience, their ideas changed as well.

For Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine, asceticism had become the exemplar of a pure, Christ-emulative orthodoxy at a time when the Roman west was reeling from barbarian invasions, poor leadership, corruption, economic dislocation and theological uncertainty in the form of the continuing and vital presence of Arianism and other heresies. The later fourth century saw a flowering of ascetic communities, especially at Rome, where Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine all found themselves during formative periods of their intellectual development. A critical element of asceticism is renunciation of worldly and carnal desires. Foremost among them was sexual desire. One need look no further than Augustine's emotionally overwrought discussion of his own sexual urges and conquests as a young man to see that the topic was at the forefront of discourse among the literate classes. Because of biblical precedents, especially Eve, female sexuality was both the conduit of shame and redemption. Eve's sin and her shame, ultimately, led to the birth of the sexually-pure, virgin mother, Mary, who bore the savior of humankind, Jesus.

The parallel and paradox between Eve and Mary is rife with literary, theological and rhetorical possibilities and, by extension, female bodies and virginity became the focus of considerable theological fodder. Interestingly, there is a clear implication among our Latin Church Fathers that through virginity women could actually attain a higher, purer state of holiness than men though women had formerly been considered a preeminent force of human corruption in Mediterranean society. Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine were acting in response to a particular "moment" in the development of

institutional Christianity and its ascetic bulwark, preaching to very specific people and circumstances when considering the discrepancies and evolution of ideas within each man's body of work. Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine used ideas of female purity and virginity to emphasize aspects of orthodoxy in response to persistent and lingering heresies. As they developed their ideas about women and virginity, they often had to modify their rhetoric to make their promotion of asceticism as the highest virtue palatable to a lay, married audience. Because they have been placed in a position of such doctrinal primacy, understanding the circumstances of their treatises and sermons, who they were preaching to and what was happening in the world of Christian doctrine at the time, becomes necessary for a full understanding of the institutional church they came to represent.

The sermons, works of exegesis, and doctrinal treatises of Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine lay bare the foundations of each man's philosophy of the importance and biblical foundations of religious celibacy. These works were not addressed to specific individuals with questions about laying out a curriculum or a proposed plan for the day-to-day life of a dedicated virgin, but the authors emphasized the importance of virginity and celibacy, no doubt because of the rising tide of asceticism that was sweeping the Roman west. These sermons or theological/polemical tracts were often composed to be delivered before congregations of men and women before being compiled and organized according to subject for wider distribution. Because of the general audience, rather than a targeted individual and a response to a specific request as their letters often were, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine used broader strokes, rather than the detailed and persuasive language used in their letters, to develop and deliver their philosophies

regarding celibacy and virginity according to doctrine and Scripture. Sifting through the inconsistencies and controversies of a fourth-century Christianity that was still very much in flux, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine were at the forefront of determining orthodoxy in the Latin west and their sermons, exegeses, and doctrinal treatises dealt with issues germane to those controversies. Particular heresies they faced, such as Arianism and Jovinianism, often circled around the subject(s) of virginity and/or asceticism.¹⁴² In their letters regarding women, female expressions of piety, and female religious dedication to virginity, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine most often wrote to people already sympathetic to the ascetic lifestyle who had inquired specifically about how to best approach asceticism. The sermons they delivered weekly and the treatises they published, however, would not have been directed solely at an ascetic community. The growth and prevalence of ascetic movements in the fourth-century west is made clear by the frequency with which virginity and celibacy appear in sermons and treatises addressed to congregations comprised of non-celibate lay Christians.

In one such treatise, in particular, the *Six Days of Creation (Hexameron)*, Ambrose discusses the six days of creation, arguing that the creations of God mirrored those things which human beings ought to embody. He made the case that turtle doves, once widowed, do not mate again.¹⁴³ Ambrose then noted that vultures do not engage in

¹⁴² Arianism's concern with the divinity of Jesus brought the question of the virgin birth into focus and the anti-ascetic Jovinian argued that widows, married people and virgin were all equally righteous and ought to be held in equal esteem.

¹⁴³ Ambrose, *Six Days of Creation*, V.xix "*fertur etemin turtur, ubi iugalis proprii fuerit amissione uidiata, pertaesum thalamus et nomen habere coniugii...Itaque iterare coniunctionem recusat nec pudoris iura aut complaciti uiri resoluit foedera, illi soli suam caritatem reseruat, illi custodit nomen uxoris. Discite, mulieres, quanta sit uiduitatis gratia, quae etiam in auibus praedicatur.*" "It is related that the turtle-dove, when widowed by the loss of her consort, was 'utterly weary of the bridal bed' and even of the world itself...Therefore, she renounces any other marriage alliance and does not break the laws of chastity or her pledges to her beloved, reserving for him alone her love, for him alone cherishing the name of wife. Learn, women, how great are the joys of that widowhood which even birds are said to observe."

intercourse to procreate. For Ambrose, this was an example from the animal kingdom of the practice of virginity and continence.¹⁴⁴ Ambrose used the evidence he had provided for vultures procreating without intercourse to argue that there was a natural precedent for the virgin birth of Jesus. By inserting these small instances of *moralia* into the doctrinal discussion of the creation of the Earth, Ambrose exposes his purpose in constructing these sermons/treatises. Not only was he preaching to a congregation of Christians, but he was also providing rebuttals to the arguments of detractors of Christianity. The issues of virginity, those associated with Mary and the virgin birth and the sometimes controversial dedication of young virgins to the church rather than to their families, infused the the works of Ambrose. He was a very vocal proponent of “right” Christianity. The most righteous Christian path was that of asceticism and celibacy (the path Jesus himself walked), and he argued in favor of those things repeatedly no matter the ostensible subject of his sermon. In such a place as the discussion of Genesis, where the “frailties” or perceived inferiority of the female sex, as illustrated by the sin of Eve, are to be expected, Ambrose inserted a moral lesson about female continence and virtue into the foundations of the very creation of the earth.¹⁴⁵ The birds that God created, serve for humans, a paradigm of widowhood (and the ideal chastity that accompanies widowhood) and continence.

¹⁴⁴ Ambrose, *Six Days of Creation*, V.xx, “*negantur enim uultures indulgere concubitu et coniugali quodam usu nuptialisque copulae sorte miscere at que ita sine ullo masculorum concipere semine et sine coniuntione generare natosque ex his in multam aetatem longaeuitate procedere.*” “It is said that vultures ‘do not embrace in conjugal embraces’ or in any sort of union or nuptial tie. They are said to conceive without contact with the male seed and that without the union of sexes they generate offspring that live to a ripe old age.”

¹⁴⁵ To be sure, those mentions of Eve’s sin and the potential for women to err is present, but there is no more emphasis on female failings than male. Ambrose seems more focused on human sin rather than gendered sin.

On Paradise (De Paradiso), though written earlier, follows the *Six Days of Creation* in subject with its discussion of Genesis and the fall of man, that event which severed mankind from his closeness with God and cast him out of paradise, Ambrose discussed the creation of humankind in more detail. In discussing the creation of man and woman, Ambrose argued that men and women complete each other. He went back to the very language of the *Septuagint*, arguing that the use of the singular in Genesis 2:16 was unrelated to the plural in Genesis 2:17.¹⁴⁶ Ambrose argued that what was good, eating freely of all the trees in the garden was universally applicable to humankind, and that man and woman were one in receiving this good from God.¹⁴⁷ He argued that, because God had made them of “one body and one spirit,” man and woman ought to have taken the proscriptions of God as one.¹⁴⁸ If God commanded something of one, the other ought also to take it as a command.¹⁴⁹ As the narrative of Genesis unfolds, Ambrose’s take on Eve becomes much more negative and critical. Though Ambrose’s opinion of Eve was arguably more severe than his younger contemporaries, Jerome and Augustine,

¹⁴⁶ “καὶ ἔνετε λατὸς κριος θεὸς τὸν Ἀδὰμ λῶγων πᾶν τὸ ζῶλον τοῦ τὸ παραδεδόσθαι βρῶσει φῶγ πᾶ δὲ τὸ ζῶλον τοῦ γινῶσκῆν καλὸν καὶ πονηρὸν οὐ φῶγεσθε πᾶ αὐτὸ δὲ τὸν μῦρον φῶγητε πᾶ αὐτὸ θανῶν τὸ ποθανεσθε” The words of import for Ambrose’s argument: βρῶσει, and φῶγ both second person singular; and φῶγεσθε and φῶγητε both second person plural. “And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You may eat freely of every tree in the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.’” Hence, the second section of admonitions is addressed to both Adam and Eve collectively, whereas the first is addressed to them individually.

¹⁴⁷ Ambrose, *On Paradise*, I.v.26, “quod enim bonum hoc et faciendum consonans et adhaerens, quod uero turpe hoc dissonans, inconpositum atque discretum est. et ideo dominus unitatem semper intendens secundum unitatem praecepti.” “[Scripture] refers to something good and something that should be done. What is good is naturally associated with what should be done. On the other hand what is base is separate and unrelated to what should be done. And so the Lord, aiming always at oneness, gave orders in accordance with this principle.”

¹⁴⁸ Ambrose, *On Paradise*, I.v.26, “omnes enim unum corpus et unum spiritum esse nos iussit.” “For he bade us to be one body and one spirit.”

¹⁴⁹ This argument gets considerably more complicated when considering the plurality of the proscription against eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Ambrose argued that God was forbidding multiple people from eating from the tree because he knew that Eve was going to fail. He did not reconcile the fact that Eve had not yet been created in this creation story. He did mention that she did not receive the direction from God personally but he never tied that into his discussion of the plural, merely uses it as a possible reason for Eve mistelling the serpent about God’s rule.

he did not depict her as inherently sinful or spiritually inferior because of her gender. While he explained the sequence of events and Eve's realization that she had sinned, instead of imbuing her with the malicious intent to ensnare Adam in her sin, he argued that she turned to Adam because she did not want to be alone.¹⁵⁰

Ambrose did not castigate Eve because of her sex, but rather her actions. He argued that God looked upon his creation of Eve and called her good because through her sex, the savior would come into the world. While Ambrose did make mention of her gender as something of a factor in being the first to sin, he repeatedly commented on her humanity and oneness with Adam, and her ability to redeem herself through childbirth.¹⁵¹ Ambrose seems to waffle for a moment on Eve's culpability, suggesting that it is even possible that Adam expanded Yahweh's command to include not only the eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge but the very touching of it; in short, Adam takes the prohibition so far that both Eve and the Serpent find it ridiculous. As such, Ambrose's Adam may share at least some responsibility for Eve's sin, a huge concession or emendation to the long-held, Eve-centric version of the Original Sin story. Though feminist historians such as Clark largely understand Ambrose's discussion of Eve to be as the bringer of sin and suffering into the world, only offering her "redemption" in his later *Exhortation to Virginit*y (*Exhortatio Virginitatis*), Ambrose very clearly already had a

¹⁵⁰ Ambrose, *On Paradise*, I.vi.34, "*quod diligens virum ab eo timuerit seperari et hanc causam cupiditatis praetendant, quod esse uoluerit cum marito.*" "because she loved her husband, she was afraid that she would be separated from him. They offer this as grounds for her cupidity: namely, that she desired to be with her husband." Ambrose, earlier in his discussion of man and woman being like one, argued that God had brought the animals in pairs to Adam so that he would realize the natural way of the world, one should not be alone but have a partner. So too, in this moment Eve behaved naturally and did not want to be alone but rather sought her partner.

¹⁵¹ Ambrose, *On Paradise*, I.x, "*quamuis enim Adam non est seductus, mulier autem seducta in praeuaricatione fuerit, salua tamen inquit erit per filiorum generationem, inter quos generauit et Christam.*" "Although Adam was not deceived, the woman was deceived and was in sin. Yet woman, we are told, will be saved by childbearing,' in the course of which she generated Christ."

salvation theology in mind in which Eve as mother played a role.¹⁵² In these treatises, Ambrose consistently referred to the good that women could achieve, through continence, and again through childbirth, that act which had brought Jesus, the savior for Ambrose's fallen humanity into this earthly realm.

Other than *On Paradise*, Ambrose's earliest extant writings were concerned with virginity and widowhood. Female continence was the subject he wrote most frequently about (there are four treatises, *On Virgins (De Virginitate)*, 377), *Concerning Virginity (De Virginitate)*, 377), *On the Birth of the Virgin (De Institutione Virginis)*, 391/2), and *Exhortation to Virginity (Exhortatio Virginitatis)*, 393/4).¹⁵³ Though each of these treatises ostensibly deals with the same subject matter, the content and the manner in which Ambrose presented it differs with each new work. Ambrose's biographer Neil McLynn suggests that the evolution of Ambrose's discussion of holy virginity was directly in response to the cultural and social influences he was faced with at Milan.¹⁵⁴ Ambrose's first theological treatise after ascending the episcopal see at Milan in late 374 was *On Virgins*, a powerful endorsement full of stark ascetic imagery and depictions of independent-minded female martyrs. Within a year, Ambrose had written another discussion of virginity, *Concerning Virginity*, tempering this imagery to better suit the traditional mores of the Greco-Roman families of his congregation. Nearly two decades later, by which time his episcopal, political, and intellectual influence were at their peak,

¹⁵² Elizabeth Clark, "Devil's Gateway and Bride of Christ: Women in the Early Christian World," in *Ascetic Piety and Women's Faith: Essays on Late Ancient Christianity*, ed. Elizabeth Clark (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 25-27, 30-33.

¹⁵³ Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *Ambrose: Selected Works and Letters*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series II, Volume 10, reprint with annotated index (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994) xix. Schaff and Wace do not date *On the Birth of the Virgin*, and state only that it references *On Widows (De Viduis)*, which in turn references *On Virgins*, and so must have been written after that. Neil McLynn uses Schaff and Wace's dates in his biography of Ambrose, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 63-64.

¹⁵⁴ McLynn, *Ambrose*, xiii.

Ambrose ventured into the discussion of virginity once again, this time with a much subtler approach by including married women, and families into the hierarchy of piety and salvation.

Ambrose was acclaimed bishop of Milan in 374, a successor to the Arian Auxentius, mutually agreed upon by the Arian and Nicene Christians of Milan.¹⁵⁵ Though he had been approved by the Milanese Arians, Ambrose very quickly proved that he would defend the Nicene doctrine and seek to rout out the influence of those who did not uphold it. In his first foray into theological treatise writing Ambrose sought to establish himself as an intellectual authority in addition to his episcopal authority, having only been baptised three years prior upon his acclamation as bishop. McLynn argues that as the successor to an Arian bishop and in a city with the thriving Arian population, Ambrose was reluctant to address the heterodoxy of anti-Nicene Christianities at this early point in his career.¹⁵⁶ Instead he chose a topic with which he would have been very familiar and comfortable discussing, virginity. Ambrose was close with his sister, a consecrated virgin, and had grown up in Rome, where the burgeoning ascetic movement among elite women could not have been unknown to him.¹⁵⁷ McLynn regards the topic of *On Virgins* as a convenience to Ambrose for these reasons, but argues that he did not begin to address the Arian issue until later with *On Faith (De Fide, 378-380)*.¹⁵⁸ Virginia Burrus, however, argues that in *On Virgins* Ambrose does begin his pro-Nicene campaign by discussing the nature and trinity of God.¹⁵⁹ This pro-Nicene/anti-Arian stance was

¹⁵⁵ Paulinus of Nola, *Life of Ambrose*, II.vi.

¹⁵⁶ McLynn, *Ambrose*, 60.

¹⁵⁷ Paulinus of Nola, *Life of Ambrose*, V.i.

¹⁵⁸ McLynn, *Ambrose*, 102-106.

¹⁵⁹ Virginia Burrus, "*Begotten Not Made*": *Conceiving Manhood in Late Antiquity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 142.

rooted in the belief that the Council of Nicaea convoked by Constantine (r. 306-337) and dominated by the charismatic Athanasius of Alexandria in 325 was correct in its finding that Jesus the son was “one in being or substance with [*homoousios*]” the Father. Arius and his followers had taught that Jesus was a created being and, thus, not co-eternal with the Father, not sharing the same measure of divinity. When Ambrose likened consecrated virgins to brides of Christ, Ambrose argued that they must recognize his divine nature. Ambrose followed this with a brief recounting of the Nicene beliefs regarding Jesus’ divinity (such as his co-equality with the Father, and his pre-existence before the virgin birth), but he does not expand upon them. As McLynn has argued, perhaps this is in part because he did not yet want to fully engage the Arians, who acknowledged Christ’s divinity, but not his co-eternity or consubstantiality with the Father. Here we see the beginnings of what will become Ambrose’s fully developed doctrine of Mary’s perpetual virginity and the role of virginity in the hierarchy of holiness.

In his first tribute promoting the virtues of religious virginity and asceticism, Ambrose provided examples to illustrate the righteousness of female virgins. He used the example of Mary, the quintessential virgin, to develop the relationship of the virgin to Jesus. Ambrose argued that the virgin and virginity itself come from Jesus, that Jesus then came from a virgin, and Jesus is also the spouse of virgins, to whom they have pledged their continence.¹⁶⁰ The virgin is the daughter, mother and wife. Virginia Burrus argues that Ambrose uses the Virgin Mary in this way to reflect the triune God:

¹⁶⁰ Ambrose, *On Virgins*, I.v.

the Father, Son and Holy Spirit by portraying Jesus, or God, as father, son, and husband to the virgin.¹⁶¹

Ambrose also laid out several historic examples of Christian female martyrs, appealing to the salvific nature of martyrdom he declared, “For virginity is not praiseworthy because it is found in martyrs, but because itself makes martyrs.”¹⁶² Throughout the three books of *On Virgins*, Ambrose discussed the righteousness of Agnes, who had the courage of a man in the face of torment and death; Thecla, who though not technically a martyr was condemned to be one and thrown to the lions; an Antiochan virgin, who was condemned to a brothel and then escaped only to beg for martyrdom; and Pelagia, who along with her mother and sisters committed suicide in order to maintain her chastity.¹⁶³ Further pointing up the virtues of virginity, Ambrose sharply contrasted the many hardships that married life brought to women from the pain of childbirth to the abuses of unkind husbands, in addition to the lack of religious prestige.¹⁶⁴ These portrayals of virginity and the denigration of marriage in *On Virgins* was antithetical to gender roles, family, and civil structure within Roman society.

Ambrose’s romanticization of the martyrdom, self-sacrifice, and suicide in the face of violation does not appear to have been a popular one. In the rest of his works on virginity, Ambrose does not again try to hearken back to the brave young virgins of early Christianity, like Agnes or Thecla, dying for their virtue. Even Augustine, whose doctrine of Original Sin and the corruptive nature of sexual intercourse was quite severe, argued

¹⁶¹ Virginia Burrus, “*Begotten Not Made*,” 142.

¹⁶² Ambrose, *On Virgins*, I.iii.10. “*Non enim ideo laudabilis virginitas, quia et in martyribus reperitur, sed quia ipsa martyres faciat.*” “For virginity is not praiseworthy because it is found in martyrs, but because itself makes martyrs.”

¹⁶³ Ambrose, *On Virgins*, I.ii, II.iii, II.iv, III.vii, respectively.

¹⁶⁴ Ambrose, *On Virgins*, I.vi.

for four chapters of the *City of God* (*De Civitate Dei*) that consecrated virgins who were violated had lost no virtue.¹⁶⁵ And while he does say that it is understandable why a virgin would commit suicide after such a violation, he also repeatedly argues that suicide compounds the sin, and would be far worse than continuing to live.¹⁶⁶ Instead, Augustine makes a claim for the nature of virtue and purity. Rather than residing in the physical realm with one's physical body, Augustine argued that virtue and purity were a matter of the soul. For Augustine, therefore, another's sin could not taint the purity of one's soul even if that sin was the rape of a consecrated virgin.¹⁶⁷ This attitude was much more sensitive to the plight of violated women than that presented by Ambrose in *On Virgins*, and Augustine continued to develop his ideas of the physical versus spiritual realm further throughout his works.

It is clear not only from Ambrose's abandonment of the virginal martyrs, that his ideas in *On Virgins* were faced with disapproval. The very quick production of *Concerning Virginity* suggests that Ambrose faced serious criticisms for his stark advocacy of virginity. Ambrose's omission of female martyrdom and focus on the negative elements of childbirth—blood, pain and suffering—suggests that he is responding to a backlash from his married congregants, who were loathe to hear that they were not as worthy as the celibate or virgin. He even said as much, “I do not accuse anyone publicly, though I am here to defend myself.”¹⁶⁸ Rather than try to enmesh virginity into the discussion of the Trinity, Ambrose was largely concerned with

¹⁶⁵ Augustine, *City of God*, I.xvi-xix.

¹⁶⁶ Augustine, *City of God*, I.xvii and I.xx.

¹⁶⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, I.xviii. “*Non polluet si aliena erit; si autem polluet aliena non erit. Sed cum pudicitia uirtus sit animi.*” “It (lust) will not defile, if it is another's; and if it defiles, it is not another's. Modesty is a virtue of the soul.”

¹⁶⁸ Ambrose, *Concerning Virginity*, V.xxiv. “*Nec quemquam publice arguo, sed me ipsum defensatum uenio.*”

countering the criticisms leveled at him, and then embarking upon a new means of engendering good will towards the institution of virginity. In this defense, Ambrose presented no exempla of Christian martyrs, but rather turned to biblical portrayals of the virtue of virginity, paying particular attention to Jesus and Paul. Most of all, Ambrose focuses on the imagery of the virgin as the Bride of Christ, and his interpretation as such of Song of Songs.¹⁶⁹ By more firmly emphasizing a virgin's position as "bride" of the church and of Christ, Ambrose was able to reinsert the virgin into the vocabulary of Roman family life. Rather than an independent, strong-willed woman, denying the will of her family to marry and leaving the home to become a consecrated virgin, Ambrose portrayed the ideal virgin as meek and obedient waiting for her bridegroom to collect her. In addition to playing up the "marriage" of virgins, Ambrose also lessened his invective against actual marriage. Where in *On Virgins* he had grimly discussed the *molestiae*, *miseriae*, and *tormenta* of marriage for women, he softened his language in *Concerning Virginity*, considering it rather a yoke, *iugum*, or chain, *uincula*.¹⁷⁰

These earlier treatises of Ambrose may not have been much admired in Milan, where the influence of asceticism and monasticism was yet slight. Surely, the idea of asceticism was not unknown to Ambrose's congregation, which was comprised of men and women from every class, but the ideals Ambrose preached undermined of traditional familial relations, and at this point in his episcopate he had not yet become the authoritative church father he would become.¹⁷¹ Preaching to a largely married lay population who were not already amenable to his ascetic ideal, Ambrose's influence in his own see of Milan may have been less than he desired, but the monastic circles of Rome

¹⁶⁹ McLynn, *Ambrose*, 64.

¹⁷⁰ Ambrose, *On Virgins*, I.vi, and *Concerning Virginity*, VI.xxxi, xxxiii.

¹⁷¹ McLynn, *Ambrose*, 220-225

lauded his treatises. Although ascetic heroes like Martin of Tours (316-397) passed through Milan, he did not set up a community there, not like the large ascetic communities that were exploding at or growing out of Rome, many of them comprised of female members, such as Marcellina, Marcella, Paula and the Melanias. It is important to remember that Athanasius himself had lived in Rome during the seven and a half years (339-346) of his second exile under Constantius II, bringing, among his retinue, followers of Antony's Egyptian ascetic movement.¹⁷² Though he would come to greatly criticize much of Ambrose's work, Jerome, the ascetic promoter *par excellence*, sang the praises of *On Virgins* and *Concerning Virginitiy*.

As Ambrose was faced with criticisms of his ascetic preaching at Milan, even though he frequented the circles of the wealthy ascetics, Jerome also faced critics of his stringent asceticism and his fervent support of consecrated virginity. Like Ambrose, Jerome himself held a severe ideal of virginity and asceticism. Much of the material in question for Jerome consists of polemical works against critics, but because he was not a bishop we cannot look at the changes in his works in response to the attitudes of his audience as the sermons of Ambrose allow us to do. In his time at Rome, Jerome wrote about the virtues of virginity over married life against the anti-ascetic preachings of Helvidius. Much of the focus of Helvidius' argument was regarding the relative righteousness of married people and those virgins who had dedicated their continence to God. By using the example of Mary as both a virgin and a married woman, Helvidius argued that equal righteousness was enjoyed by all Christians regardless of their virginity or lack thereof.¹⁷³ By this time in the fourth century, the perpetual virginity of Mary had

¹⁷² Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book II.iii.

¹⁷³ Jerome, *Against Helvidius*, XX-XXII.

largely become church doctrine. There was some debate remaining over the stages of Mary's virginity, however, *ante-partum*, *in partu*, and *post-partum*.¹⁷⁴ Helvidius' position was not meant in any way to denigrate Mary or her virginity at the conception of Jesus, but for him the perpetual virginity of Mary was non-existent upon parturition. Jerome, in his polemic against Helvidius not only addresses the *virginitas ante* and *post-partum*, but also *in partu*. In the thick of the debate and seeking to maintain both the human, physical nature and divine nature of Jesus' birth, Ambrose made it a point to mention that while Jesus was born amidst blood and pain (which would indicate a physical tearing of the hymen thereby negating Mary's *virginitas in partu*), Mary, by nature of Jesus' divinity, retained her virginity *post-partum*.¹⁷⁵ Jerome's pamphlet on the perpetual virginity of Mary is marked by the abuse and denigration of Helvidius' character rather than a wholly doctrinal or scriptural rebuttal of Helvidius' arguments from the New Testament against Mary's perpetual virginity and for the equality of married people.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ The question of Mary's *virginitas in partu* (meaning during the actual birth) and *post-partum* seems to have been a purely philosophical one. It was not necessary for Mary to have maintained her virginity through giving birth to Jesus in order for her perpetual virginity to remain intact. Obviously, if a physical birth occurs, then the hymen will be torn and physical virginity voided. There was, however, the idea that though Mary may have had a physical birth, her virginity was restored post-partum and she remained a virgin for the rest of her life. The other argument, which when argued inelegantly can be borderline heretical, stated that Mary did not suffer a physical birth. This can easily be considered Docetism, because the humanity of Jesus is called into question if he does not endure a fully human birthing process. David Hunter gives a great discussion of the development of this debate though the third century and leading up to the time of Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine, in *Marriage Celibacy and Heresy in Ancient Christianity: The Jovinianist Controversy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007), 172-204

¹⁷⁵ Jerome, *On the Perpetual Virginity of the Blessed Mary against Helvidius*, XX. "*Junge si libet et alias naturae contumelas, nouem mensibus uterum insolescentem, fastidia, partum, sanguinem, pannos.*" "Add, if you like, the other humiliations of nature, the womb for nine months growing larger, the sickness, the delivery, the blood, and the swaddling-clothes."

¹⁷⁶ Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy*, 189.

Because of his fierce and biting tone, and his severe promotion of asceticism, Jerome began to face greater criticisms at Rome.¹⁷⁷ After his student Blaesilla died from the renunciations he had advised her to undertake, Jerome was exiled from Rome. As his time away from Rome grew longer and his stark view of asceticism received more and more stinging criticisms (he was, after all, the sole advisor of Blaesilla and was accused of being a party to her death), Jerome's own writings on asceticism and religious virginity began to change in response, initially softening, much as Ambrose's did in the early days of his episcopate. Though Jerome never abandoned his praise of Christian virginity, in response to his critics, he did come to admit that marriage undertaken with a shared faith, appropriate holiness, dedication to charity and chastity albeit with childbearing could lead to righteousness.¹⁷⁸

There continued to be resistance against the staunch asceticism preached by Ambrose and Jerome. Many councils were held throughout Latin Christendom to condemn many of these anti-ascetic movements. The hallmark of several authors who spoke against holy virginity was the denial of Mary's perpetual virginity. It was this denial of Mary's continued virginity that was primarily addressed at councils. Between 388 and 390, a council was held at Milan to denounce the heresy of Jovinian and another at Rome in 390.¹⁷⁹ His influence had been felt to a larger extent than Helvidius and by

¹⁷⁷ Jerome, *Ep. XLIX (XLVIII).ii* "*Reprehendunt in me quidam, quod in libris, quos aduersum Iouinianum scripsi, nimius fuerim uel in laude uirginem uel in suggillatione nuptarum, et aiunt condemnationem quodammodo esse matrimonii in tantum pudicitiam praedicari, ut nulla posse uideatur inter uxorem et uirginem comparatio derelinqui.*" "Certain persons find fault with me because in the books which I have written against Jovinian I have been excessive (so they say) in praise of virginity and in depreciation of marriage; and they affirm that to preach up chastity till no comparison is left between a wife and a virgin is equivalent to a condemnation of matrimony."

¹⁷⁸ Jerome *Ep. CVII.vi*. "*At e contrario de muliere scribitur, quod 'salua fiet et caritate et sanctificatione cum pudicitia.'*" On the other hand it is written of the woman: 'She shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with chastity.'

¹⁷⁹ Schaff and Wace, *Ambrose*, xx.

393, both Jerome and Ambrose had written treatises against him (Jerome was in Bethlehem but had been sent Jovinian's writings by Pammachius).¹⁸⁰ The anti-ascetic feelings that Ambrose had been confronting in his earlier treatises on virginity now had a loquacious monk, Jovinian, around whose words and work they could rally. By 393, Ambrose had already proven himself an eloquent and influential scholar of orthodoxy. And in response to the threat he saw in the anti-ascetic notions of Jovinian, Ambrose wrote a more forthright response to his opponents in another treatise on virginity, *De institutione virginis*.¹⁸¹ In addressing the anti-ascetic movement, Ambrose very closely ties the notion of religious virginity to the perpetual virginity of Mary and to the figure of Jesus according to Nicene doctrine. By connecting the issues of asceticism and virginity to Mary and the popular and largely accepted Nicene theology (by this time the influence of Arianism had largely waned), Ambrose pointed up the paramount importance of virginity to the very foundation of Christianity: Christ himself.¹⁸² Ambrose had spent years building himself up as a firm defender of Nicene orthodoxy and here against Jovinian and the anti-ascetic movement, he was able to use the rhetoric his congregants had heard for nearly two decades to assert the "rightness" of asceticism and virginity as an expression of asceticism/extreme religiosity. As Mary was the focus of many of the councils against anti-asceticism, in general, and Jovinian, in particular, Ambrose defended her perpetual virginity and placed her as the best example of the superiority of virgins over married women.

¹⁸⁰ Unfortunately, none of the writings of Jovinian are extant. Our only sources for the Jovinian heresy are the polemical treatises levied against him. The main thrust of his teachings, or rather what Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine seem to have taken exception to the most, was his idea that marriage and virginity were equally holy states.

¹⁸¹ Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy*, 17.

¹⁸² Daniel H. Williams, *Ambrose of Milan and the End of the Nicene-Arian Conflicts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 230.

The subject matter of *On the Birth of the Virgin* and the events around 392, Mary's perpetual virginity, her relationship with the church and the virgins of the church suggests that Ambrose composed it to promote the worship and emulation of the Virgin Mary as an important aspect of orthodox Christian expression. Though he did not specifically mention an individual against whom he wrote, the circumstances of Jovinian's ministry and his denunciation at both Rome and Milan the year before its construction are very probable reasons why Ambrose chose to discuss the topic of holy virginity for a third time. At this point in the fourth century, I would argue that the position of the *virgo dei* at the top of the hierarchy of righteousness was constantly under scrutiny. The Latin fathers discussed and expounded upon the issue repeatedly. Ambrose and Jerome both advocated the superior position of virgins over married people in the ranks of the church and both subsequently faced criticisms for their positions. As with Helvidius, Jovinian's opposition to this hierarchy presented itself in the debate over Mary's perpetual virginity. Ambrose addressed the question of Marian virginity fervently. Where in *On Virgins* he had discussed early Christian martyrs, emphasizing the salvific nature of virginity, in *On the Birth of the Virgin*, he again imbues religious virginity with soteriological properties, this time by equating the Virgin Mary with the Church itself, whose purity must remain intact for the whole of Christendom to be saved. These attacks, anti-ascetic rhetoric about the equality of the virginal and married states, directly endangered the ascetic profile Ambrose had been promoting, and could have potentially undone some of the work he had done in tying Jesus' divinity to the perpetuity of Mary's virginity.

Though dealing with a different opponent than the Arians of 377, Ambrose uses much of the same rhetoric against the Jovinians as he did in his polemics against the Arians. In *On the Birth of the Virgin*, Ambrose's denial of the consummation of the marriage of Mary with Joseph borrowed the invectives used against the Arians to tie the new opponents to them, and so tie his congregants' feelings for Jovinian's heresy with the same distrust they may have held for the largely disavowed Arians. Where Ambrose used similar rhetoric to discuss the nature of Mary's virginity, he approached the topic in a slightly different manner. In his earlier treatises he had tried to show that the virginal state was superior by also noting the pitfalls of marriage, such as the pain of childbirth. In *On the Birth of the Virgin*, Ambrose uses the perpetual virginity of Mary to emphasize unequivocally the superiority of virginity, while not actually denigrating the married state. By emphasizing the holiness of Mary, a virgin, Ambrose submitted her and other virgins who followed her path as exempla and guides for the rest of the Christian community.

In contrast to the sterile discussions of Mary's almost unattainable virginity from the earlier treatises, Ambrose used the far more sensual *Song of Songs 4:9-15*, in which the poet serenaded his bride. By assigning metaphorical authorship to Jesus, this passage was commonly used by theologians to represent Jesus and his bride, the *virgo dei*.¹⁸³ Ambrose employed the sealed fountain, and the example of Mary not just as a call to purpose for the *virgo dei*, to use her as their example and inspiration for virtue and chastity, but also as a metaphor for the church itself.¹⁸⁴ As Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit and gave forth Jesus without the corruption of sexual intercourse or the pain of

¹⁸³ *Song of Songs* 4:12: "A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden locked, a fountain sealed."

¹⁸⁴ Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy*, 197.

physical human childbirth, so too did the church give birth to more Christians. The idea of Mary's *virginitas in partu*, and her metaphorical connections with the church developed in Ambrose's theology from the beginning of his episcopate, culminating in its expression here and in the Exposition on Luke. For Ambrose, the virginal, married, mother of Jesus was like the ideal church: virginal, married to Christ, and mother of all Christians.¹⁸⁵ Mary as the example for the church became vital to his view of salvation. If salvation could be gained through the church and the church is like Mary, then salvation could also be gained through following the example of Mary.¹⁸⁶ Hunter argues that for Ambrose, high Mariology and soteriology folded into his asceticism. In order for salvation, Mary had to be a virgin (to avoid tainting Jesus with the sin of sexual intercourse),¹⁸⁷ the church had to be pure like her, and therefore virginity was the superior state to gain salvation.¹⁸⁸

Where Ambrose advocated a high Mariology, including the *virginitas in partu*, Jerome, in his first polemic against Jovinian sidestepped the issue. Rather than addressing the *virginitas in partu*, he focused on the *ante-partum* and *post-partum* virginity of Mary. In fact, Jerome only dealt with the virginity of Mary for a relatively brief time given the nature of Jovinian's criticisms. From Jerome's account, some of Jovinian's arguments are preserved. He had accused Ambrose of heresy for upholding the *virginitas in partu* and Hunter argues that Jerome had not made up his mind on the

¹⁸⁵ Ambrose, *Exposition on Luke*, 2.7

¹⁸⁶ Ambrose, *On the Birth of the Virgin*, 5.35.

¹⁸⁷ It is important to remember, when considering Ambrose's and Jerome's views on sexuality, that the notion of sin being passed through the sex act and the veniality of desire and lust inherent in many sexual encounters was a common notion among church philosophers. Though this idea was co-opted by Augustine and used, to some detriment to the psyche's and guilt complexes of countless future Christians, to a much greater extent, it did not begin with him. Many fathers of the Church including Origen, Tertullian, and Athanasius held such views, citing the words of Paul in 1 Cor. As biblical evidence.

¹⁸⁸ Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy*, 202.

issue and rather than be accused of heresy avoided discussing it.¹⁸⁹ Even though Jerome brought up the sealed fountain from Song of Songs 4:12, a trope often used by Ambrose in reference to Mary's *in partu* virginity, he did not broach the topic. Hunter does note, however, that upon learning of Jovinian's condemnation at Rome and Milan, Jerome defended his earlier treatise (presumably against criticism that it was not bold enough) and discussed the issue of Mary's virginity much more fully, here utilizing Song of Songs 4:12 for this purpose.¹⁹⁰

Jerome's discussion of Mary's virginity did change slightly given the information he had regarding his opponents and in the face of certain criticisms, but Ambrose's works display much greater change through each incarnation. Ambrose's final treatise on virginity, the *Exhortation to Virginity* complements his treatment of the redemptive nature of Mary's perpetual virginity by connecting her with the example of Eve. Here, more than anywhere else thus far Ambrose showed that he was sensitive to the fact that much of his audience was comprised of married lay people. By associating Eve, a married woman, so closely with Mary, the Church and salvation itself, Ambrose displayed a remarkable evolution from his earliest treatise on virginity. As he had done in *On Paradise*, Ambrose presented Eve not only as capable of, but in fact necessary for redemption because of her ability to bring children into the world, thereby eventually leading to Mary and Jesus' birth. By bringing Eve into the discussion of salvation, Ambrose addressed the issues brought up by Jovinian's heresy: that married people were not placed in a position of righteousness in Ambrose's theology. Though he maintained

¹⁸⁹ Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy*, 190.

¹⁹⁰ Jerome, *Ep.* II.

the superiority of virgins over married people, by incorporating marriage and child-bearing into the equation for redemption, Ambrose was incorporating his congregation.

Ambrose's concessions to his audience, married congregants and sympathizers with Jovinian's message, are notably large given his staunch support of asceticism as the highest expression of Christian purity. When Augustine finally addressed the troubles with the Jovinian heresy (perhaps because the controversy had yet to reach his backwater post of Hippo Regius, or perhaps he was waiting to see if it would blow over without his input) he does so as a regional authority, although not an interregional one. He approached it from a very moderate position given his severe position on Original Sin and the corruption of sexual intercourse, inherited from Ambrose and Origen, but largely expanded and developed into a full blown doctrine by Augustine in his arguments with the Pelagian heretics, most especially Julian of Eclanum. Rather than condemning lust and marriage as drastically lower than the virginal state of consecrated virgins, Augustine's first foray into the conversation with Jovinian's arguments was in the form of a treatise celebrating marriage as a means of grace, *On the Good of Marriage (De Bono Coniugiali, 400)*. Augustine also wrote a treatise *On Holy Virginitate (De Sancta Virginitate, 401)*, but he reserved it for after his celebration of marriage.

The views on sexuality in marriage that Augustine recorded in *On the Good of Marriage* are not consistent with the rest of his body of work. Augustine ardently argued about the notions of sin and Original Sin stemming from the venial act of sexual intercourse. Even in his earlier writings, he was developing this idea piecemeal, such as in his expositions on Genesis against the Manichaeism in the 380s-390s. In the first years of the fifth century, there was a surge in popularity of the Pelagian heresy, which claimed

that a person could lead a perfect life without sin. Augustine's rebuttal to the primary Pelagian theologian, Julian of Eclanum, saw that his notion of Original Sin had become fully developed and entrenched in his worldview. Human beings could never lead a perfect life, such as the sinless life Jesus of Nazareth is supposed to have led. This was precisely because of human nature and the fact that all humans had been begotten by the inherently sinful sexual act. The ideas about the good of marriage that Augustine expressed in *On the Good of Marriage* are far more sympathetic to marriage and sexual intercourse within the bounds of marriage than much of his other work from the discussions of Genesis, wherein he laid out his argument that lust and sexuality are the most deleterious of desires because of the shame that Adam and Eve felt and their act of covering their genitals, to his later *Handbook on Faith, Hope, and Love (Enchiridion)*, written in 420 in response to question from Laurentius about Christian doctrine, in which Augustine (in sharp contrast to his words in *On the Good of Marriage*) argued that even though Paul made a concession for married people to have non-procreative sexual intercourse, God and his commandments did not. This was a far cry from Augustine's statement that at least conjugal sexuality, no matter its intention, kept one from infidelity and intemperance.¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Augustine, *Handbook on Faith, Hope, and Love*, XXI.lxxviii. “*Quae sint autem levia quae gravia peccata, non humano sed divino sunt pensanda iudicio. Videmus enim quaedam ab ipsis quoque Apostolis ignoscendo fuisse concessa, quale illud est quod venerabilis Paulus coniugibus ait: ‘Nolite fraudare invicem nisi ex consensu ad tempus ut vacetis orationi et iterum ad idipsum estote ne vos temptet satanas propter intemperantiam vestram.’ Quod putari posset non esse peccatum, misceri scilicet coniugi non filiorum procreandorum causa, quod bonum est nuptiale, sed carnalis etiam voluptatis, ut fornicationis sive adulterii sive cuiusquam alterius immunditiae mortiferum malum quod turpe est etiam dicere, quo potest temptante satana libido pertrahere, incontinentium devitet infirmitas. Posset ergo, ut dixi, hoc putari non esse peccatum, nisi addidisset: ‘Hoc autem dico secundum veniam non secundum imperium.’ Quis autem iam neget esse peccatum, cum dari veniam facientibus apostolica auctoritate fateatur?’* What sins are trivial and what are grave, however, is not for human but for divine judgement to determine. For we see that, in respect of some sins, even the apostle, by pardoning them, has conceded this point. Such a case is seen in what the venerable Paul says to married folks, ‘Do not deprive one another, except by consent for a time to give yourselves to prayer, and then return together lest Satan tempt you at the point of self control.’

In *On the good of Marriage*, Augustine argued that marriage is a pardon for the sin of lust.¹⁹² Though rhetorically similar to his argument in the *Handbook on Faith, Hope, and Love*, instead of negatively portraying marital sex for pleasure rather than procreation, Augustine argued that by virtue of the faithful bonds of marriage, even lustful, non-procreative sexual intercourse is pardoned. What would be, to Augustine, a damnable sin elsewhere, within marriage is excusable. There is a slight but incredibly significant difference in the discussion of sexuality in marriage in *On the Good of Marriage* than in Augustine's other works such as the earlier noted *Handbook on Faith, Hope, and Love*. This discrepancy cannot be cast aside as a matter of change or evolution of the author's view, because compositions that both pre-date and post-date *On the Good of Marriage* contain this harsher, more strict view of the sin of sexuality and desire. To account for the difference found within *On the Good of Marriage*, one must look at the circumstances of its composition and the audience which would receive it. Augustine composed *On the good of Marriage* and *On Holy Virginit*y a decade after the Jovinian controversy first developed on the Italian mainland, a decade after his contemporaries, Ambrose and Jerome, addressed the same issue. Augustine had the unique advantage of hindsight that his colleagues did not have in the 390s. Augustine had seen the reactions to the anti-Jovinian works of Ambrose and Jerome, reactions from both their theological opponents and from their Christian lay congregants. Augustine displayed a far more accepting discussion of marriage when he first addressed the heresy of Jovinian and those

One could consider that it is not a sin for a married couple to have intercourse, not only for the sake of procreating children—which is the good of marriage—but also for the sake of the carnal pleasure involved. Thus, those whose self control is weak could avoid fornication, or adultery, or other kinds of of impurity too shameful to name, into which their lust might drag them through Satan's tempting. Therefore, one could, as I said, consider this not a sin, had the apostle not added, 'But I say this as a concession, not a rule.' Who, then, deines that it is a sin when he agrees that apostolic authority for doing it is given only by 'concession?'"

¹⁹² Augustine, *On the Good of Marriage*, I.xi.

sympathetic to his teaching than both Jerome and Ambrose, and his own more representative works. *On the Good of Marriage* is something of a departure, and not necessarily representative of Augustine's typical philosophies regarding marriage and virginity.

The subtlety with which Augustine altered his arguments in favor of marriage, while using similar rhetoric to his later discussions, shows not only that he was a philosophical genius, but that he was responding to a very specific current in popular opinion. Ambrose had been repeatedly criticized for his views on virginity and had to adjust the manner in which he addressed virginity and marriage several times throughout his career. Ambrose was even accused of heresy himself for the direction in which he took those arguments. Jerome was likewise publicly decried and exiled from Rome largely on account of his harsh teachings on asceticism. The unfolding of events and the reactions to Ambrose's and Jerome's still quite staunch support of ascetic virginity over and above marriage very clearly explains why Augustine displayed such a positive view towards the good of marriage, contrary to his general position on the matter, he was responding to a particular issue in the manner that his audience would best accept it.

Augustine added redemptive qualities to marriage because sin had begun in the flesh, through Eve, and so must redemption begin there. Marriage, as a means of keeping one's self and one's spouse in fidelity and chastity works in that vein.¹⁹³

¹⁹³ Paul Ramsey, "Human Sexuality in the History of Redemption," *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Spring 1988) 71. Ramsey also includes multiple quotes from many of Augustine's treatises that touch on the subject, but most especially the two anti-Pelagian works *On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin* (418) and *On Marriage and Concupiscence* (419), to show Augustine's very firm view that sexual intercourse within the bounds of marriage ought only to be in the endeavor to procreate.

It is important to note that at the time of composition of these anti-Jovinian treatises, Augustine had been able to see the reactions to both Ambrose's and Jerome's responses to the Jovinian heresy. In response to some of the criticisms levied against Jerome that he continued to place the virtue of virgins above that of married people, Augustine wrote his *On the Good of Marriage* against Jovinian before his treatise on virginity in order that he might avoid such criticism himself.¹⁹⁴ When considering Augustine's motivation in the order of his compositions against Jovinian, remember that Jovinian had accused Ambrose of Manichaean heresy.¹⁹⁵

Augustine composed his treatises against Jovinian about a decade later than those of Jerome and Ambrose, and had seen the reaction to their treatises and the accusations of Manichaeism, something to which Augustine was especially sensitive given his long history of Manichaeism prior to his conversion to Catholicism. Augustine presented a much more moderate view of marriage and virginity because of the negative reactions Ambrose and Jerome had faced. To be sure, Augustine does note that properly undertaken and enacted virginity with a virtue of spirit is greater than marriage undertaken with the same spirit, but he does so while maintaining the good of marriage. Augustine placed virginity above marriage while emphasizing the "good of marriage" for the general population for whom asceticism and religiously dictated celibacy was not a viable option. In *On the Good of Marriage*, Augustine repeatedly drove home the

¹⁹⁴ Philip Schaff, "Translator's Preface," *Augustine: On the Holy Trinity; Doctrinal Treatises; Moral Treatises, Volume III*, (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans, 1887, reprinted in 1978) 397.

¹⁹⁵ Jovinian had accused Ambrose for seeming to argue that marriage was not a good, and was in fact an evil of this world because of the nature of sexual intercourse implicit in marriage and the corruption that stemmed from that. Manichaeism was often the catch-all heresy with which to charge an opponent if Arianism could not be part of the equation. Remember that Ambrose had been using anti-Arian rhetoric in his invective against Jovinian, so it would have been a more difficult task to accuse and provide proof of Ambrose's being an Arian than a Manichee.

importance of piety and continence of the soul. He argued that a marriage among the faithful was more holy than virginity held for the wrong reasons or by the impious.¹⁹⁶

For Augustine, marriage was the best option for those who could not undertake the vow of chastity faithfully, and marriage offered alternative ways to practice continence. Augustine mentioned that marriage offered friendship and companionship, the ability to beget children, and the option of celibacy, should both partners agree to it.¹⁹⁷ Augustine even goes so far as to accept that sexual intercourse without the intention of procreation was not a sin, because it inhibited adultery.¹⁹⁸ The most prevalent notion that runs through the course of *On the Good of Marriage*, however, is the spiritual aspect of religious continence and piety. For Augustine, “continence is a virtue not of the body, but of the soul.”¹⁹⁹ Whether a person was married or a consecrated virgin, the better of the two was whoever had the more virtuous soul. This was a very different take on the virtues of marriage and continence from Jerome or Ambrose. In response to Jovinian’s criticisms of anti-marriage sentiments among the ecclesiastical elite, especially Ambrose and Jerome, as strict as he may have been about the origins of sin and the human soul, in *On the Good of Marriage* Augustine had developed an idea that could be universally accepted by his audience, married or not. In the physical expression of piety, virginity is better than marriage, but what truly mattered was spiritual purity. This delineation between the spiritual and physical was an idea that Augustine would continue to develop. As noted earlier, in *City of God*, when he addressed the issue of virgins that had been violated by marauders, Augustine’s focus was not on the physical corruption of the body

¹⁹⁶ Augustine, *On the Good of Marriage*, I.viii.

¹⁹⁷ Augustine, *On the Good of Marriage*, I.iv.

¹⁹⁸ Augustine, *On the Good of Marriage*, I.vi.

¹⁹⁹ Augustine, *On the Good of Marriage*, I.xxv. “*Continentia quippe non corporis, sed animi uirtus est.*” “For continence is a virtue of the soul, not of the body.”

but rather whether the virtue of the soul remained. If the virtue of the soul was intact, women could be seen as pure vessels of holiness, tools through which to better understand the Christ-like life of asceticism, and guides down the path to orthodox Christianity that Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine were carving.

And no human soul was more virtuous for the Latin Fathers than the Virgin Mother, the exemplar not only of feminine purity, as wife and mother, but the highest measure ascetic holiness male and female. In his direct responses to the activities of Jovinian, Ambrose took the theology of Mary's virginity to the extreme, portraying her as the example *par excellence* for virgins, but alienating her example from married lay people. This was one of the criticisms Jovinian raised against Ambrose. But perhaps Ambrose only developed his philosophy that far because he was embroiled in a polemical battle against the influence of Jovinian.²⁰⁰ Ambrose's second and fourth treatises seem less pointed at an individual and more focused on addressing the concerns of his congregation. In trying to establish orthodoxy against what he viewed as heresy—Arianism for *On Virgins*, and Jovinianism for *On the Birth of the Virgin*—Ambrose took his finger off the pulse of the people of Milan and later had to adjust his teachings to better suit them.

Where Ambrose may have failed to address the specific needs of his congregation, and perchance to have abandoned his ministerial duties as bishop, Augustine reached out to the members of his congregation directly, assuring them, like Paul before him, that whereas marriage may not be the ideal state of holiness, a good and holy marriage was achievable indeed. By the end of our period, Ambrose, Jerome, and

²⁰⁰ Consider how far Augustine took his doctrine of Original Sin when faced with the criticisms and constant rebuttals of the savvy Julian of Eclanum.

Augustine's discussed virginity in decidedly less harsh and violent terms, with no more mention of martyrdom and privation to the point of death. But, while they had begun to address marriage in more positive terms, ascetic virginity remained the epitome of Christian righteousness. In response to the reactions of their congregations, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine crafted their rhetoric to present virgins as the exempla not only for other virgins and ascetics, but now even for married Christians.

CHAPTER IV

THE “MOTHER” OF AUGUSTINE: WOMEN IN THE *CONFESSIONS*

Augustine's *Confessions* represents for historians a nearly unclassifiable text with links to many genres and yet defying the strict tenets of any individual genre of its time. It can be considered an autobiography, perhaps even an auto-hagiography, a didactic composition intended to aid in the conversion process, a narrative of self, meant to enlighten his friends as to the inner workings of his heart and mind in order that he might not be so closed off and mysterious to them as Ambrose once was to him. The *Confessions*, as all of these things, is a work of such uniqueness that it will be considered here, on its own. The *Confessions* are a classic work and have been read and studied by theologians, scholars and lay readers since Augustine composed them. Augustine himself has long been esteemed as a Christian philosopher and theologian *par excellence*, perhaps *the* Christian philosopher, next in line only to Paul of Tarsus, the biblical author and pioneer of Christianity to whom Augustine often turned for answers on questions of orthodoxy. Not only was Augustine incredibly prolific, but the nature of many of his works, such as *The Happy Life (De Beata Vita)*, *Soliloquies (Soliloquia)*, and the *Retractions (Retractiones)*, but most especially the *Confessions* are introspective and personal accounts of moments in his life. Because of this, we have a far more complete and complex view of Augustine's life, his background, his upbringing, his personal conversion story, and the psychology behind it. This psychological glimpse into the mind of an ancient person is rare in the sources and makes the *Confessions* among the most valuable of all texts relating to the institutional church and its prime movers. The purpose for Augustine writing the *Confessions* has much to tell us about his intended

audience, namely God, Augustine's fellow *servi dei* (servants of God), lesser-educated Catholic Christians, and perhaps, quite importantly, the Manichees whom Augustine was trying to sway in the direction of orthodoxy. His use in the work of women, his mother Monnica, his primary religious influence, and his concubine, the very guide to his path to conversion and continence, gently subverted the intrinsically Manichean notion that material flesh, especially that of the child-bearing sex, is weak, corrupt and evil.

As a young man in North Africa, Augustine's parents Patricius and Monnica had been determined to provide their son with a high-class education. In 369, they sent him to the nearby university town of Madaura to earn a classical education. Within the next two years, Augustine had moved on to the schools in the great city of Carthage. There, he had his first conversion of sorts, to the search for wisdom. Augustine had been educated in the classics and had read Vergil and wept over Dido's fate.²⁰¹ He had been uninterested in Greek and Homer.²⁰² But when he first read Cicero's now-lost *Hortensius*, his heart was lit aflame with the quest for the "deathless qualities of wisdom."²⁰³ Few fragments of the *Hortensius* are extant, but in these excerpts Cicero argued that the path to happiness, which all men seek, was through the eternal and divine soul.²⁰⁴ The natural activity of that soul was a pursuit of knowledge, and if the soul would avoid vice, the journey would be made easier. This ignited in Augustine a desire to answer the *magna quaestio* (the Great Question) about the origin and purpose of evil in the world. To Augustine, who was seeking religion as a means of seeking knowledge,

²⁰¹ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 24.

²⁰² W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, 659.

²⁰³ Augustine, *Confessions*, III.iv

²⁰⁴ Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, 660.

Christianity had been a disappointment at first.²⁰⁵ Augustine had been reading the old Latin translation of the bible, the *Vetus Latina*, riddled with errors and poorly translated. The simple rhetoric of the Gospels left the classically-trained Augustine seeking a more seemingly cultivated religion. He thought he had found that in Manichaeism. The dualism of the Manichees, the supposed answer to the origins of good and evil, and the skilled speakers who promoted the religion won Augustine over.²⁰⁶ To cleanse one of sins, rather than a ritual sacrament, one must perpetually seek knowledge and maintain intellectual inquiry and spiritual enlightenment. Augustine initially fell in with the Manichees because his own search for knowledge was in line with their teachings.

As he began to mature, Augustine was no longer impressed with the Manichaean leaders and followers. He and his friends formed a clique of the Manichaean “intelligentsia.”²⁰⁷ The majority of Manichaean followers had neither the education nor the inclination to seek answers to the *magna quaestio*. He had come into contact with a fundamentalist, uneducated contingent of Manichaean followers, who did not uphold the notion of continually pursuing knowledge, but rather accepted the notion that their evil was not their own doing and that their souls remained good despite the sins of the flesh.²⁰⁸ To combat his concerns and his continuing desire for knowledge Augustine sought out the leaders of Manichaeism. Upon meeting one such leader that he had long admired, Faustus of Milevis (fl. 383), Augustine was greatly disappointed. Rather than seeking to understand the revelations of Mani intellectually, Faustus subscribed to living

²⁰⁵ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 31.

²⁰⁶ Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, 662. Manichaeism seems to be an interesting syncretism between Christianity and Zoroastrianism which was a dualistic religion that had thrived in Mesopotamia for millennia.

²⁰⁷ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 43.

²⁰⁸ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 45.

ascetically, eventually taking lessons from Augustine because he was uneducated.²⁰⁹ The religion to which Augustine had turned for knowledge and wisdom had let him down.

When Augustine left Africa for Italy later in 383, he had stepped away from Manichaeism and was ready for Ambrose's well-developed philosophies and well-written exegetical treatments of the Gospels. And he was ready to be swayed by the influence of the Christian women in his life, his mother and concubine.

Early in his career as bishop of Hippo Regius (395-430), and even just after his conversion to Christianity (386), Augustine battled Manichaeism, seeing it as a direct threat to a still-tenuous Christian orthodoxy. He was also concerned with allaying any fears the orthodox community may have had of him continuing to hold Manichaean beliefs. In his exchanges and diatribes against Manichaeism, Augustine approached his task from his experience as a state *rhetor* (teacher of rhetoric), logically arguing minute details of the Manichaean heresy to discredit both Manichaeism itself and any accusations against him for being a Manichee. Before converting to orthodox Christianity, Augustine had grown weary of Manichaeism. His obsession with the *magna quaestio* was not satisfied by the answers of Manichaean philosophy and Manichaean bishops. By the time Augustine converted to orthodox Christianity, he was ready to address the shortcomings of Manichaeism at length. Augustine had spent nearly a decade as a Manichaean *Auditor* (Hearer) and he maintained connections with the Manichaean community even after he no longer ascribed to their beliefs.

When Augustine first converted to Christianity, he was primarily concerned with combatting the Manichean heresy, with which he felt intimately connected. His writings against the Manichees reflect not only his dissatisfaction with his former religion, but a

²⁰⁹ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 48.

desire to distance himself from them and prove unequivocally that he harbored no lingering Manichean tendencies. One of his earliest writings upon conversion was *On Genesis against the Manichaeans* (*De Genesi contra Manichaeos*), written in 389, and explicitly composed to counter Manichaean claims and questions.²¹⁰ In the *Confessions* (401), there is a similarly strong anti-Manichaean bent. Written from a position of reflection, Augustine's distaste for his youthful fall into Manichaeism is expressed as a hubristic desire for knowledge from those who could not provide such knowledge.²¹¹

This anti-Manichaean content within the *Confessions*, serves to reveal one of the intended audiences Augustine was addressing. Though on its face a prayer to God, the very fact that it was published indicates that Augustine had indeed meant the *Confessions* for a human audience and a didactic tool, a teaching document, a kind of roadmap to orthodox Christianity.²¹² The composition of that audience has been debated among scholars who, by consensus, generally consider Augustine's secondary audience, rather than his overt and primary audience of God, to be the *servi dei*: other members of the ecclesiastical elite whom Augustine considered peers and friends.

A very strong argument, however, can be made for yet another audience of the *Confessions*. Augustine was an adept polemicist and often constructed works to directly address one heresy or the other. Augustine used his own history as a Manichaean Hearer and his experience with Christianity as the answer he sought to what he viewed as universal questions. Augustine was able to reach out not only to advanced and educated Christians, but also those less advanced members of his congregation. These average

²¹⁰ Augustine, *On Genesis against the Manichaeans*.

²¹¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, III.vi.10.

²¹² Annemare Kotze, *Augustine's Confessions: Communicative Purpose and Audience* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2004), 197.

Christians who were less educated than Augustine and his ecclesiastical peers were an important audience for Augustine's orthodox message. Fourth-century Christianity was far from doctrinally cemented and alternate sects of Christianity challenged the orthodox establishment throughout the period of Augustine's episcopate. North Africa, in particular, was rife with sectarian disputes and violent turmoil between conservative orthodox bishops and leaders of heterodox movements.²¹³ The lay Christian congregants of Augustine were constantly witness to these heretical teachings and alternatives to orthodox Christianity. Augustine used his own story to outline the faults of Manichaeism to educate those Christians. But Augustine may have also had yet another audience member in mind: someone much like he himself had once been, a Manichee who was dissatisfied with, or not completely devoted to the philosophies of Manichaeism. Augustine largely used non-offensive rhetoric in his efforts to show the failings of Manichaean philosophy so as not to alienate those potential Manichaean converts who might read his *Confessions*.²¹⁴ By presenting himself as a young Manichee searching for truth, Augustine offered himself as a parallel with which other Manichees could associate themselves and in that way Augustine could lead them to the right path of orthodoxy.

As a didactic tool meant to reinforce and emphasize the virtues of orthodox Christianity for Christians and Manichees alike, women played a significant role in the path that Augustine's life and conversion take throughout the *Confessions*. The nearly ever-present example is Monnica, Augustine's mother, who appeared in episodes throughout Augustine's life as a religious guide. Augustine depicted his mother as the ideal wife, submitting to her husband, Patricius, a short-tempered pagan, even though she

²¹³ Brown, *Augustine*, 32.

²¹⁴ Kotze, *Augustine's Confessions*, 203-207.

knew he was wrong. To Augustine, Monnica's deference to Patricius was a symbol of her obedience to God and her moral superiority to her husband.²¹⁵ Her level head and perseverance paid off in the end because Patricius was eventually converted and baptized.²¹⁶ In the *Confessions*, Augustine styled Monnica as an ideal mother. Augustine considered her the messenger from God, guiding him to orthodoxy to save his soul, but when Augustine related events of his life in which Monnica played a part, she showed herself to be quite manipulative and concerned less with his soul than his place in society. Though Augustine included tales of his fleeing Africa in the middle of the night to avoid Monnica accompanying him, Monnica forcing him to cast out his concubine of fourteen years and the mother of his son, and arranging a marriage to a young Milanese aristocrat (who was possibly only twelve years old at the time), as Augustine depicted his feelings towards her, Monnica was the ideal mother. Her primary virtue was her devout, unyielding piety that led her to urge her children onto the path of Catholic Christianity.²¹⁷

The ability to serve as an example and to influence others towards conversion was the primary hallmark of female sanctity. Through her husband and her children, Monnica proved that she was worthy of such virtue.²¹⁸ In Augustine's account of his mother, he likened her to the Virgin Mary. Not only was Monnica an ideal mother as Mary had been, but, in her silent submission to Patricius, Monnica emulated Mary as well. Augustine paralleled her tacit submission to her husband with Mary's silent acquiescence to the will of God.²¹⁹ This comparison reinforced Monnica's holiness. The Cult of Mary

²¹⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, I.xi.26-29.

²¹⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, IX.ix.19.

²¹⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, III.xii.21.

²¹⁸ Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Nancy Nienhuis, "Battered Women and the Construction of Sanctity," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 42.

²¹⁹ Kienzle and Nienhuis, "Battered Women," 44.

was not widespread at this point in the late-fourth and early-fifth centuries, but the idea of Mary as an exemplar for all women, married and consecrated virgins alike, had been preached to Augustine by Ambrose in his time at Milan.²²⁰ Augustine could have used the exemplum of Mary Magdalene, a woman of the world, ravaged by demons, who was healed by Jesus and became one of his disciples, or Eve, who, by her ability to be a wife and mother, mitigated her sin and was worthy of righteousness. Instead he chose Mary, the mother of Jesus, even though Mary Magdalene and Eve were capable of virtue and righteousness as preached by his mentor, Ambrose, under whom he converted to Christianity and who Augustine esteemed as the arbiter of the highest orthodoxy. In spite of the fact that, to the modern reader, Mary seems to be a less practical or less emulatable model, to Augustine, she was more righteous and her example more broadly applicable than Mary Magdalene or Eve, neither of whom had the distinction of being obedient wives, capable mothers, and servile virgins as Mary had been. The very nature of her unattainable holiness made her the ideal exemplum; no woman could be like Mary in every way, but every woman could be like Mary in some way. Augustine chose this model of female sanctity to compare Monnica to, pointing to her as a contemporary Mary leading the way to orthodoxy. Augustine also used rhetoric similar to that which Ambrose and Jerome had used to describe the birthing of Jesus by the Virgin Mary in his discussion of Monnica. Before he had converted, and upon his leaving Africa for Rome, Augustine described Monnica's pain as worse than birth pangs.²²¹ He described her hurting for the state of his soul, as though she were aching to give birth to his spiritual conversion.

²²⁰ See Chapter 2 of this thesis.

²²¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, V.ix.16.

The manner in which Augustine portrayed Monnica's insistence on his continuing education and her yearning for his conversion tied Augustine's mother to the ideal of the teaching mother. Such examples are found in the proposed curricula from the letters of Jerome. These mothers were meant to teach their children to be proper Christians until such a time that their education needed to be advanced by more intense study under an ascetic tutor. These mothers acted as guardians of a sort, of their children's' young, impressionable minds/souls, until such time as they reached an age at which they were ready for more rigorous instruction. Just as theoretically Mary protected and stewarded Jesus until he found his first mentor in John the Baptist, Monnica guarded and guided Augustine to Ambrose. As a contemporary parallel to the Virgin Mary and an example of the model Christian mother, Augustine infused Monnica's image into the *Confessions* as the ideal woman and exemplar.

Monnica appears in the *Confessions* as an example and guide for Augustine and his audience in more ways than just as a pious wife and mother. In his biography of Augustine, Peter Brown has noted the ever-present influence of Monnica on Augustine, even after her death. In the *Confessions*, Augustine repeatedly referred to Monnica as the "voice of God," calling him to orthodoxy.²²² Through the course of Augustine's life before his conversion, Monnica was present to lead him to the right path. He placed her alongside the Holy Spirit as the very instrument of his call. In the *Confessions*, Augustine showed women as spiritual leaders by his depiction of his mother. Augustine deliberately and meticulously crafted the narrative of the *Confessions*. In so doing, he put forth a woman as more directly connected to God and the path of righteousness. When

²²² Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 18. Brown cites several of the instances in the *Confessions* in which Augustine referred to Monnica this way: II.iii.7; III.xi.19; III.xii.21.

Monnica led Augustine to Christianity in the *Confessions*, Augustine promoted women as leaders not just of other women but of all Christians, even men.

Ostensibly, Monnica was the epitome of a virtuous Christian matron. In Augustine's narrative, however, Monnica's behavior was not always so upright. He portrayed her as once having had a drinking problem.²²³ And at times Augustine betrayed his own feelings of resentment towards his mother, when Monnica had followed him to Carthage and planned to follow him to Rome, Augustine lied to her and fled in the night so she could not follow him from Africa²²⁴ or when she did follow him to Milan anyways, his rhetoric betrayed his obvious sorrow at the removal of his concubine. On the surface, aside from these underlying emotions, Augustine continued to idealize and romanticize the virtue of his mother. That the spirit of God could speak through a woman was something that Augustine not only freely admitted, but he embraced as the very skeleton key to his conversion.

Augustine constructed the virtuous image of Monnica that would appear throughout the *Confessions*, citing her as the impetus for his conversion. Not only was Monnica at times the veritable voice of God, but hers was also the voice most present in the *Confessions* besides Augustine's himself. He inserted "quotes" from his mother into the text more often than from any other person.²²⁵ Augustine's inclusion of Monnica's speech made her an active figure in the *Confessions*. Though he prized Monnica's silence in her interactions with Patricius, Augustine equally lauded her loquaciousness throughout the *Confessions*, as well. Monnica continually spoke, not only as the voice of

²²³ Augustine, *Confessions*, IX.viii. Though Augustine would describe Monnica in her later years as so sober she would barely drink the wine at religious ceremonies, *Confessions*, VI.ii.

²²⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, V.viii.

²²⁵ Matthew G. Condon, "The Unnamed and the Defaced: The Limits of Rhetoric in Augustine's *Confessions*" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69, no. 1 (Mar. 2001): 56.

God, but she also to God, lamenting Augustine's stubbornness. Augustine portrayed her prayers to God as intercessions on his behalf, marking Monnica as in closer communion with God than any other person in the *Confessions*. Her speech was not limited only to areas of life and society that were traditionally "female." Augustine portrayed Monnica speaking about theology, philosophy, and proper Christian conduct in instances traditionally reserved only for males.

Just before his conversion, Augustine retired with a group of like-minded friends to Cassiacum, about 20 miles north of Milan where his fellow teacher and grammarian, Verecundus, owned a villa.²²⁶ He and his friends engaged in many philosophical conversations that served as the basis of Augustine's decision to finally convert. Among these amateur philosophers was only one woman, Monnica. To be sure, Monnica served as something of a house manager, serving each man as her own son, but she also actively engaged in the dialogues with them.²²⁷ Among all of his companions, Augustine named only a few, and credited even fewer with contributing to the conversations. Monnica, a woman and devout mother, held both distinctions. By making her voice so strong, and her influence so prevalent in his conversion story, Augustine crafted his depiction of her to imbue her with the specific importance of leading him to conversion. Augustine constructed his conversion narrative very meticulously. The *Confessions* are not strictly autobiographical; they are a clever construction of rhetoric, reflection and teaching in which Augustine chose the characters he wanted to portray as most significant to his narrative. Though he would mention others, Augustine would downplay their influence in comparison to that of his mother, though the undercurrents of his emotions and the

²²⁶ McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 222.

²²⁷ Brown, *Augustine*, 111.

events from his life betrayed that Monnica was not wholly the idealized voice of God as Augustine would like her to be remembered. Augustine had chosen a woman to “lead” him to conversion. In that, he was subverting the Manichaean notions of women and the flesh as inherently evil and not of the good God. With Monnica as spiritual guide, his contemporary Mary, voice of God, and intercessor between him and God, Augustine placed women in the role of intermediary between the flesh and the spirit.

Augustine consciously presented his mother as the lynchpin to his conversion and the moral center of his early life. Throughout the *Confessions*, and in book IX especially, Augustine provided a balanced portrait of Monnica, as reserved, austere Christian, and dignified in every way. In earlier parts of the *Confessions* Monnica was very clearly more than just the idealized Christian mother Augustine would record for posterity. From Augustine’s childhood, Monnica was present to determine the course of Augustine’s future at nearly every moment. When he was severely ill and begged for baptism, she was distraught until he finally began to recover.²²⁸ At that point, Monnica decided not to have him baptized, an event which Augustine later regretted and would blame for his later wildness and excessive sin.²²⁹ Later, as a teenager in his hometown of Thagaste, Augustine was struck by lust and desired to be married in order that he not fall into fornication. While his father, Patricius, was amenable to the idea, and even desired grandchildren,²³⁰ Monnica forbade Augustine from marrying a young woman from his home for fear that such a tie might prevent his further education and a promising career.²³¹ Augustine had grown up in a rural area outside of Hippo Regius. The town

²²⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, I.xi.

²²⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, II.ii and VIII.ii.

²³⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, II.iii.

²³¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, II.ii.

had traditionally been Donatist after the Great Persecution of 303-311, but unlike the surrounding areas, had reverted to orthodoxy in the wake of Constantine's reign (306-337).²³² Though Augustine's family seems to have been well-connected in the town, they were still middle-class citizens in the larger empire. For it was a small town with few opportunities and surrounded by heretical bishoprics. Monnica refused to let Augustine marry a girl from Thagaste because her ambitions for him were much greater than Thagaste could offer. She did not want him tied to a small town, but preferred that he expand his connections in larger urban centers like Carthage, Rome, and Milan. Monnica seems to have preferred that Augustine would in fact undertake an affair rather than stem his future prospects.²³³

Though Augustine repeatedly tried to portray his mother as the perfect example of a pious mother and widow, her concerns and desires were clearly in the physical realm. Rather than being concerned solely with Augustine's spiritual growth and health, Monnica consistently strove to affect Augustine's growth in a very ambitious and decidedly non-spiritual way. She was always passively guiding him towards conversion, by her example and her tears for his stubbornness, but she was never as active in her conversion efforts as she was in her efforts to raise Augustine's social, professional and political prospects and profile via education and advantageous marriage/alliance. As she had denied him marriage at an early age for fear that ties to his hometown community would prevent him from reaching a greater potential in the larger Roman world, Monnica

²³² Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, 659. Donatism was a sect that had spread like wild-fire across all of Africa. The Donatists were rigorist purists who held that bishops who denied their faith and/or gave up holy documents to persecutors (*traditores* "those who had handed over (holy documents)") were no longer valid bishops and the sacraments they presided over were also invalid. This raised many problems in the wake of the Diocletianic Persecution when the orthodox Church accepted the *traditores* back into the fold.

²³³ Danuta Shanzer, "Avulsa a Latere Meo: Augustine's Spare Rib: Confessions 6.15.25," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 92 (2002): 168.

later would arrange an engagement to a wealthy, aristocratic young woman to improve Augustine's position among the Milanese elite. Monnica had followed Augustine on his appointment as *rhetor* to Milan and forced him to send away the woman with whom he had lived faithfully for fourteen years.²³⁴ Monnica had contracted a marriage for Augustine that would improve his secular standing socially, professionally, and possibly politically. Though, as Augustine recorded it, Monnica's sole motivation in making the match was that the girl and her family were Christians who would demand his conversion as a requisite for marriage.²³⁵ This may be one of Augustine's moments of selective and idealized remembrance regarding his mother.

In fact, Augustine's concubine was also a Christian, and nothing prevented him from marrying her and being baptized, except his mother's insistence that he marry someone of greater wealth and status than himself.²³⁶ For Augustine, though, conversion, sexual continence, and the abandonment of his post as state *rhetor* went hand-in-hand, so Monnica's notion of marrying him into Christianity and secular prosperity could never come to fruition. When he had finally committed to continence and conversion, Augustine admitted the short-comings of his mother and her earthly desires for his future. He called her acceptance of his ensuing chastity as a conversion of her own, turning from earthly interests to divine joy at his spiritual renaissance.²³⁷

But could Monnica, whose primary concerns regarding her son up to that point seem to have been earthly, have been the guide for Augustine's spiritual conversion as it

²³⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, VI.xv.

²³⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, VI.viii.

²³⁶ Shanzer, "Avulsa a Latere Meo," 173.

²³⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII.vii, "*Et couertisti luctum eius in gaudium...et multo carius atque castius, quam de nepotibus carnis meae requirebat.*" "You changed her grief in to joy...far dearer and more chaste than when she looked for grandchildren begotten of me."

occurred? Though she remains unnamed, Augustine's concubine and the mother of his child left an indelible mark on Augustine and has been the focus of scholarly inquiry for centuries. This anonymous woman loved Augustine faithfully for fourteen years and then took up the veil upon being cast off by him. In her faithfulness to him and then to God, she served as the example for the kind of Christian Augustine wanted to become. After explaining that his concubine had returned to Africa with a vow to God, Augustine lamented the fact that he could not follow her example, but was still filled with ambition and lust.²³⁸ We have seen that the kind of Christian Monnica wanted her son to be was a married Christian, fully invested in and working in the secular realm. But when Augustine considered his own conversion, he consistently expressed his idea that true conversion could only come with continence.²³⁹

Though Augustine has represented Monnica as the most decisive factor in his long journey to conversion, his own ideas about the requirements for conversion to Christianity were quite different from hers. The influence of Ambrose and his feelings about asceticism should be certainly credited in part for Augustine's ideas about chastity. After all, he had been living in Milan since 384 and greatly respected the bishop.²⁴⁰ But, as we have seen in Ambrose's treatises about the virtue of chastity, he never declared that in order to convert to Christianity one must live a chaste life. Considering Augustine's insistence on continence, one must also remember Augustine's history in Manichaeism, a movement whose elites prized sexual renunciation.

²³⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, VI.xv "At ego infelix nec feminae imitator, dilationis impatiens." "But I was unhappy, incapable of following a woman's example and impatient of delay." The delay about which Augustine speaks is the two years it would take for his fiancée to reach majority and thus be eligible for him to marry. In his impatience, he would take another, less beloved concubine to fill the time.

²³⁹ F.B.A. Asiedu, "Following the Example of a Woman: Augustine's Conversion to Christianity in 386," *Vigiliae Christianae* 57, no. 3 (Aug. 2003): 278.

²⁴⁰ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 3.

Augustine's views regarding conversion have more to do with his own conjugal relationship, and the actions his concubine took upon being cast off by him. In *On the Good of Marriage*, Augustine discusses the very situation he was in with his concubine, though he carefully never refers to the situation as concubinage nor the woman as a concubine. For Augustine, if a man and a woman were to enter into a conjugal relationship without legally marrying, they would have a de facto marriage provided at least one of them maintained their fidelity. If the man were to cast off his concubine in order to take a wife, Augustine would not consider the concubine to have sinned in her relationship with the man provided she remained faithful to him even after their separation. The man, however, was guilty of the sin of adultery against his concubine, his de facto wife.²⁴¹ Augustine wrote *On the Good of Marriage* very close to when he finished the *Confessions*, around 401. If Augustine had already felt this way about marriage and concubinage in 386, the fact that his cast off "wife" dedicated herself to the church and took on the veil would have made Augustine an adulterer.

Augustine never made explicit his view of his relationship with his concubine. According to the letter of Roman custom, the association between him and the unnamed woman was a form of concubinage. Even though this was socially accepted for a man of his social standing, Augustine never uses the term concubine or concubinage. What he does use is rhetoric and verbiage reminiscent of biblical passages regarding Adam and Eve. As Eve was made to be the wife of Adam, by his rhetoric so was the unnamed concubine Augustine's true "wife" in his own estimation. As Augustine had compared his mother with the mother *par excellence*, the mother of Jesus, Mary, he now compared his concubine with the first wife, Eve. This is made evident from multiple references

²⁴¹ Augustine, *On the Good of Marriage*, V.v.

Augustine made to the relationship of Adam and Eve when discussing his concubine in the *Confessions*. Rather than using the comparison between Eve and his concubine as an admittance of some sin, to Augustine the parallel between his concubine and Eve was a legitimization of their relationship. He and his concubine had never undergone the sacrament of marriage, but strictly speaking, neither had Adam and Eve, yet they are the parents of the human race, and the first husband and wife meant to forsake their families and cleave to each other. From his Milanese ecclesiastical education at the hands of Ambrose, Augustine was also familiar with Eve's great capacity for redemption as mother of the world and by extension Jesus. Augustine's concubine was mother of his own beloved son, Adeodatus whose name means "given by God," and was the guide of his conversion to Christianity and sexual renunciation, in a way helping to give birth to his love for Christ, as Augustine had once depicted Monnica yearning to give birth to his spiritual conversion. Though his discussion of his concubine is brief, it is rife with emotion.

Augustine depicted his separation from his concubine as a very painful event, using the word *auulsa a latere meo* ("torn away from my side"). In the *Confessions*, Augustine used the same root word to describe the place his concubine had occupied *latere* as he used in his discussions of Eve's creation from Adam's side (*latus*). He also used similar rhetoric to describe his bond to her as to describe the very first marital bond, that of Adam and Eve. In his discussions of Genesis, Augustine wrote that Eve was made from Adam's *latus* rather than the traditional Biblical term *costa* (rib), just as he used *latere* in the *Confessions*.²⁴² For Augustine, just as Eve had been made as Adam's

²⁴² Augustine, *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis*, IX.xvi.30, IX.xvii.31, IX.xviii.34, and X.i.1. *City of God*, XXII.xvii.

helpmate and a part of him from his side, so too was his own concubine.²⁴³ Augustine also, as noted earlier, never refers to the situation as concubinage, a common and acceptable arrangement for an unmarried man.²⁴⁴ If Augustine had never cast her aside, in fact, according to Roman tradition, their relationship would have been regarded as *matrimonium* (marriage) and she would have been considered a *matrona* (married woman), provided *affectio maritalis* (marital affection/intention) the attitude of regarding one another as spouses, existed between the two.²⁴⁵ It is clear from Augustine's works that he felt very deeply for his concubine, though ostensibly his only tie to her was carnal lust, when she was forced to leave him he was hurt so deeply the wound never healed. In her fidelity to him even after he cast her aside for a younger bride, she revealed that she held *affectio maritalis* for Augustine as well.

At the time of their uncoupling, however, Augustine was unable to follow his concubine's example. He did not then dedicate himself to chastity, but instead remained engaged to his young fiancée and took another, temporary concubine. This temporary concubinage was very different from that he had with his first partner as he was still pining for his former lover and was engaged to be married in two years. Augustine referred to losing his first concubine with the same language that he used at the death of a dear friend.²⁴⁶ Though this friend remains unnamed, as does his concubine, Augustine

²⁴³ Shanzer, "Avulsa a Latere Meo," 160.

²⁴⁴ Beryl Rawson, "Roman Concubinage and Other De Facto Marriages," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 104 (1974): 279. Roman concubinage occurred when two people engaged in a long-term sexual relationship without the desire for children or legal marriage. These relationships would sometimes result in children, and if carried on long enough and both partners had *connubium* (the legal right to marry, meaning they were both freepersons) would be considered like modern common law marriage.

²⁴⁵ Shanzer, "Avulsa a Latere Meo," 176.

²⁴⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, IV.iv. "*Quo dolore contenebratum est cor meum.*" "Grief darkened my heart." IV.vii, "*portabam enim concisam et cruentam animam meam impatientem partari a me.*" "I carried my lacerated and bleeding soul when it was unwilling to be carried by me."

first experienced the severe pain of loss at his death. Patricius, Augustine's father, had died years earlier, but when Augustine's friend died he was hit by hard philosophical, theological and moral questions of his own mortality and loss. Again, when Monnica died, Augustine's pain bore a striking similarity to that he felt upon being separated from his beloved concubine.²⁴⁷

The core of his suffering (*dolor*) was in his heart (*cor*) when he thought of the loss of either woman. *Dolor* is a very common Latin word most often used to denote pain, mental anguish or grief. Augustine used derivatives of *dolor* as the most common characterization of his emotional state after the loss of both his mother and concubine. Beyond his repetitive use of words from the stem *dolor*, Augustine's depiction of his pain at both losses was severe. Though *dolor* was the word he most frequently used in his discussion of each woman, beyond *dolor* Augustine did not use identical syntax. The meaning and ideas evoked by his language in each section was remarkably similar. In both losing his concubine and losing his mother, Augustine employed visceral language of cutting, piercing, tearing away or rending apart to describe his loss.²⁴⁸

The only difference when Monnica died was that the wounds death left upon his heart healed, but Augustine still felt the sting of the loss of his concubine fifteen years later while writing the *Confessions*. When Augustine had finished his lamentation for

²⁴⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, IX.xii. "*Sauciatur anima quasi dilaniabatur vita quae una facta erat ex mea et illius.*" "My soul was wounded as if my life was being torn apart, for it had been one life—made of hers and mine together."

²⁴⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, VI.xv. In reference to his concubine, Augustine used many powerful words of suffering: "*concisum*" -having been destroyed or cut to pieces; "*cor...trahebat sanguinem*" -my heart was trailing blood; "*post feruorem doloremque acerrimum putrescebat*" -after inflammation and piercing pain, it (the wound) festered. Augustine's mourning for his mother took up a significantly longer chapter than that of his concubine. *Confessions*, IX.xii. "*Dilaniabatur*" -being torn apart; "*cruciatum*" -torture, torment. See also, note 36.

Monnica he wrote, “My heart was healed of that wound.”²⁴⁹ When his concubine returned to Africa, Augustine used nearly identical language regarding his wound (*uulnus*) and the verb of healing (*sano*). Unlike when his mother dies, however, when he lost his mistress, Augustine concluded, “But that wound of mine was not healing since the earlier cutting had been done.”²⁵⁰ The depth of feeling Augustine had for his *de facto* wife explains the language of adultery Augustine used in *On the Good of Marriage*. It also helps to explain why for Augustine the price of conversion was chastity. In order to be a true Christian, he could not be married and daily commit the sin of adultery against his first “wife.”

By her example, Augustine’s beloved concubine showed him the path to his continence-cum-conversion. Even with her clear influence on his conversion, Augustine never named her. Rather the only woman discussed in regards to his religion, Monnica, was not the one whom he followed the example of. He often bowed to her wishes as his mother, but he did not undertake his conversion in the way she desired. Even with her emphasis on earthly matters, it is Monnica’s image that infuses the *Confessions* as the ideal woman and the guide to Augustine’s conversion, but the true example he followed, was that of another. Why did Augustine leave her unnamed and only emphasize the influence of his mother?

Throughout the *Confessions*, Augustine left out the names of many people who were important in his life: the friend whose death was so painful, his own sister, and he only uses Monnica’s name once in the entire text. He instead repeatedly used the names of important and inspiring men to elevate himself and his own story, such as Ambrose,

²⁴⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, IX.xiii. “*Ego autem iam sanato corde ab illo uulnere.*”

²⁵⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, VI.xv. “*Nec sanabatur uulnus illud meum, quod prioris praecisione factum erat.*”

Alypius, and Antony. By obfuscating the influence of his concubine and leaving her unnamed, he ameliorated the guilt with which he wrestled over the wrong done to her in casting her aside. By leaving her anonymous and using passive language, that the separation was forced upon him, Augustine leaves for himself the pain of the uncoupling and denied his concubine active hurt.²⁵¹ Rather than merely castigating Augustine with completely selfish motives in failing to name his concubine, remember that his concubine had returned to Africa and taken up the veil. If she still lived in North Africa, Augustine may have saved her the ignominy of being a former concubine.²⁵² By not exposing her name, Augustine was not exposing the past of any individual except himself, and after all, the *Confessions* reveal little about any person's psyche than Augustine's own. By leaving one of his dearest loves unnamed and only mentioning her for a short time though she lived with him for fourteen years, perhaps he was seeking to conceal her importance to him in order that he might emphasize the importance of another.

The fact that the once-named Monnica is so prevalent throughout the narrative shows Augustine's careful revision of his own history and memory. His concubine, to whom he was basically wed, had led him to a chaste Christianity by her own example. In so doing, she served more as the "mother" of his Christianity than Monnica. Augustine's concubine, in true fact, was the prime impetus for his conversion to a chaste Christianity, for all that entailed in his preaching and teaching moving forward, as opposed to the married Christianity exemplified by his mother, Monnica. But Augustine highlighted Monnica almost to the exclusion of his concubine in terms of religious influence. As his biological mother, Monnica served for Augustine as a natural comparison to the Virgin

²⁵¹ Shanzer, "Avulsa a Latere Meo," 170.

²⁵² Condon, "The Unnamed," 58.

Mary. In Augustine's emphasis on Monnica's virtue as mother, wife, and later chaste widow, Augustine frequently used the same rhetoric that was traditionally used for the Virgin Mary, especially by his mentor, Ambrose. Even though Augustine followed the example of the concubine he had cast aside, who took on the veil and remained chaste once removed from Augustine's life, it was to his mother Monnica that he later looked as his spiritual mother. And she represented for him not only the ideal mother in human terms, she approximated, in holiness, the supreme example that was the Virgin Mary. By making Monnica the arbiter of spiritual wisdom and religious guidance in his conversion story, Augustine was advocating the religious superiority women could achieve as conduits of virtue and exemplars of righteousness.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

By the early fifth century, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine had chiseled out the foundations of a Christian orthodoxy that would govern the western world henceforward. They had done this by using the examples of women as rhetorical foils to heterodoxy and paganism. Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine crafted their compositions to present virtuous women not only as vessels of the highest potential human righteousness, but as role models for ideal Christian behavior. This fact has often been minimized or neglected outright in scholarship, but close examination of the works and lives of these three men show them to have embraced feminine piety with a far greater degree of enthusiasm and didactic purpose than that of men.

Ascetic women in particular loomed large, especially in epistolary correspondences directed either to male or female recipients, often containing admonitions and examples of feminine holiness as the Latin Fathers sought to provide advice and a path to ideal Christian righteousness. I have emphasized the fact that Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine used women as teachers and guides as they sought to craft a holy ideal that could apply ubiquitously to both sexes, but especially for the education and training of young virgins who would become the exemplars of generations to come.

As Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine sought to establish Christian virgins as the epitome of righteousness, they were met with opposition, not only from developing heresies that emphasized the virtue of marriage but also from their married, lay congregants. In response, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine tailored their discussions of

virginity and marriage to make ascetic, virginal exemplars available for emulation not just by other ascetics, but also by married laypeople, while admitting the potential for virtue in a Christian marriage. The Virgin Mary was an important figure in the rhetorical machinations of Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine. All members of the Christian community could identify with some part of Mary's identity as a wife, mother, or virgin. The virginity of Mary, and the expansion of her cult allowed the ideals of ascetic virginity to become more mainstream and acceptable to all Christians.

The ideal of the Virgin Mary as holy mother was also utilized by the Latin Church Fathers to a great extent. Augustine even proposed parallels between his own mother, Monnica, and the mother of Jesus. Monnica was a kind of mouthpiece of the divine for Augustine, gently and sometimes not so gently nudging him toward the path of orthodox Christianity. In the *Confessions*, Monnica figures most prominently as Augustine's ostensible spiritual guide. There is also no doubt that Augustine's concubine, the mother of Adeodatus, in leading him to a chaste Christianity that he continued to promote across the balance of his career.

Women were important tools in the ongoing struggle to establish orthodoxy and to marginalize, with the ultimate hope of snuffing out completely, the heresies of Arianism, Manichaeism and others. Issues relating to female piety and virginity were a common battleground in the rhetorical fight against heterodoxy. Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine used the examples of women in many ways and across many genres. The Christian establishment has been accused of misogyny and the marginalization of women since the time of Paul. But closer inspection reveals that while, after the first century women may not have served in leadership positions regularly in the Church hierarchy,

they remained vital and influential in a number of ways, first and foremost in the somewhat strange by ancient Mediterranean standards belief that women had the ability to be intrinsically more holy and pious than men. In essence this represented complete overturning of typical Greco-Roman and Jewish notions of the feminine, which took a far dimmer view of the female as a corruptive, carnal instrument of potential destruction, a rhetorical and social construction that went all the way back to the days of the mythical Pandora. Unlike with Pandora, for Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine, hope was the very thing that could be found in the feminine, in these female exemplars of Christ-like piety, children and adherents of a Virgin Mother, who had born the very savior of the world and who now provided the supreme example of how to emulate his sublime life.

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