Antifamilial Tendencies in Ancient Christianity

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EARLY IN THE FIFTH CENTURY, the church father Jerome wrote to a highborn Christian widow named Geruchia, exhorting her not to remarry. Although earlier in his letter Jerome had tried to shame her presumed indecision by pointing to the chastity of various pagan religious officiants, from the *flamen Dialis* to the Vestal Virgins, he suddenly seized upon an example whose function it was to impress upon Geruchia the immorality of pagan marital customs.[1] While working in Rome as a papal secretary some twenty-five years earlier, Jerome reports, he had witnessed an event that had stirred all the city: the marriage of a couple in which "the man had already buried twenty wives and the woman had had twenty-two husbands." Jerome's disgust at this display of excessive nuptiality is palpable.[2] Yet the incoherence of Jerome's rhetoric—Are pagans more or less maritally upright than Christians?—betrays its ideological function. If pagan marriage was to suffer such a crisis of representation (or misrepresentation) at the hands of Christian authors, did the depiction of Christian marriage and family devotion receive more "realistic" expression from its advocates?

Was, for example, the claim of the soon-to-be martyred Phileas, in the presence of his despondent wife and children, that not they, but the apostles and martyrs, were his "parentes et propinquos" less ideologi-

[1] Jerome *Ep.* 123.7.1 (*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* [hereafter, *CSEL*] 56.80); Jerome borrows here from Tertullian's *De exhortatio castitatis* 13. (Throughout these footnotes, numberings of Greek and Latin texts follow that in the editions used, which sometimes differ from the numberings found in translations.)

[2] Jerome *Ep.* 123.9.1–2 (*CSEL* 56.82–83).

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cally constructed?[3] Or the report that when Melania the Elder lost her husband and two of her three children in rapid succession, she thanked God for relieving her of such a great burden?[4] Or the tale recounted by John Cassian of a would-be monk who, upon leaving his wife, told her that if Moses allowed wives to be divorced for the hardness of their hearts, why should not Christ allow this for the desire of chastity?[5] These stories do not, I think, typify the behavior of most early Christians, any more than Jerome's tale of the much-married couple exemplified customary pagan practice. Yet there is an important difference in the two instances: Jerome's report of the pagan couple who had seen forty-three marriages ran up against a nostalgic ideology of Roman marriage, while the words of the Christian renunciants here cited encapsulate the dominant ascetic ideology of late ancient Christian authors.[6]

As classicist Suzanne Dixon has emphasized, the "sentimental ideal" of the once-married Roman matron emerged as a topos at the very moment that its basis in an operative system of property had crumbled; nonetheless, it persisted throughout the Imperial era to fire the moral and religious imagination of Romans.[7] The ideal of the *univira,* Dixon writes, "assumed a static property system in which women moved only once in a lifetime, taking with them their intestate portion, which remained with their conjugal family whether they died in the marriage or

[3] *Acta Phileae* 6, in *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs,* ed. Herbert Musurillo (Oxford, 1972), pp. 348, 350. On the ideological construction of gender issues in early Christianity, see my "Ideology, History, and the Construction of 'Woman' in Late Ancient Christianity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2 (1994): 155–84.

[4] Jerome *Ep.* 39.5.4 (*CSEL* 54.305).

[5] John Cassian *Conlationes* 21.9 (*Sources Chrétiennes* [hereafter, *SC*] 64.83); although the biblical reference cited is Matt. 19:29, only the Lucan version of the pericope (Luke 14:26) contains the word *wife;* see Matt. 19:8 on "hardness of heart."

[6] Whereas Brent Shaw contrasts the "seeming discontinuity" between the traditional Roman ideology of the family and the "experience" of Augustine's (somewhat Christian) family, I propose to note the discontinuity between both traditional pagan and Christian familial ideas, on the one hand, and Christian ascetic ideals, on the other, with what little we can glimpse of social and legal "realities." See Brent D. Shaw, "The Family in Late Antiquity: The Experience of Augustine," *Past and Present,* no. 115 (1987), pp. 3–51. For an anthropologist's caution against overreliance on law for an understanding of marriage in other, or past, societies, see Pierre Bourdieu, "Marriage Strategies as Strategies of Social Reproduction," trans. E. Forster, in *Family and Society: Selections from the Annales, Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations,* ed. Robert Forster and Orest Ranum (1972; Baltimore, 1976), pp. 117–44. Given the well-known principle that Roman law often dragged behind current social reality (e.g., Richard Saller, "Roman Heirship Strategies in Principle and Practice," in *The Family in Italy from Antiquity to the Present,* ed. David I. Kertzer and Richard P. Saller [New Haven, CT, 1991], p. 29), the fact that, regarding laws pertaining to married women, the church fathers were often more conservative than even the law is worth noting.

[7] Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Family* (Baltimore, 1992), pp. 77, 88–89.

not."[8] The reality of Roman marital life, she notes, was quite different from this "sentimental ideal": "the exposure of children, the failure to mourn many young children, arranged marriages, violence and coldness within the family, casual divorce, and remarriage on divorce or widowhood."[9] The shift from a "merged to a separate regime" of property is, according to Dixon, "the most significant historical development in Roman marriage"—which probably can be correlated with the changed expectation that a woman might well marry more than once and hence needed to have relative control over her own property.[10]

For Christians, the "reality" of marriage was not necessarily different. Letters, sermons, and ecclesiastical decrees constitute an unhappy record of Christian men sleeping with slaves, raping nuns, frequenting brothels, and going to "sex shows" at which girls swam naked; of Christian women divorcing their husbands; of Christian parents "leasing" their children into slavery.[11] Nonetheless, the Roman "sentimental ideal" of matronhood—even faithful, devoted matronhood—was demoted by Christian authors in favor of the virgin's exaltation. The prize of the "one-hundred-fold harvest" now went to the virgin, while the married woman was relegated to "thirtyfold" status.[12] It was not just that classical ideas of *pietas* and marital loyalty often failed in practice (pagans themselves knew this) but that the theory of filial and parental devotion had received a crushing blow. This essay, then, does not so much concern the "real" family of Christian antiquity, nor the family as praised in sentimental rhetoric, but the ideology of antifamilialism, by which I mean a propagandistic attack on the family whose effect (whatever its intention) is to bolster the power of ecclesiastical leaders and their values. That this ideology of antifamilialism was advanced through a variety of argumentative and interpretive techniques shall be detailed in what follows. That it also gives us little access to "reality" should also become apparent—an acknowledgment that calls for a reconsideration of the historian's task when she works on documents such as these: to this point I shall return at the end of this article.

The blow to "family values" that attended the advent of Christianity

[8] Ibid., p. 77.

[9] Suzanne Dixon, "The Sentimental Ideal of the Roman Family," in *Marriage, Divorce and Children in Ancient Rome,* ed. Beryl Rawson (Oxford, 1991), p. 113.

[10] Dixon, *The Roman Family,* p. 74.

[11] For examples, see Augustine *Epp.* 9*, 10*, 15* (*CSEL* 88.43–51, 84–85); *Serm.* 9.3.3 (*Patrologia Latina* [hereafter, *PL*] 38.76–77); *Serm.* 392.3.2 (*PL* 39.1710); Jerome *Ep.* 77.3 (*CSEL* 55.38–40); John Chrysostom *Hom. 7 Matt. 6* (*Patrologia Graeca* [hereafter, *PG*] 57.80), cf. *Hom. 6 Matt.* 8 (*PG* 57.72); *Martyrion tōn Hagiōn Ptolemaiou kai Loukiou* 1–5 (Musurillo, ed., p. 38).

[12] Jerome's famous image, in *Epp.* 22.15, 49 (48).3, 66.2, 123.8.

is evident in the New Testament itself. The Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—themselves present Jesus' teaching in ways that his followers could easily interpret as antifamilial. To Jesus are ascribed the words that he has come to bring a "sword" that will divide families (Matt. 10:34–39). A follower of Jesus is told that he must "hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters" (Luke 14:26). When informed that his mother and brothers were waiting outside to see him, Jesus rejects their privilege as members of his "natural" family, claiming instead that those who do the word of God are his family (Matt. 12:46–49; Luke 8:19–21; Mark 3:31–35). The woman who calls out to Jesus, "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that you sucked!" is corrected by Jesus' reply: "Blessed rather (*menoun*) are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:27–28). Most important of all were two passages in the Gospels: the verses praising followers of Jesus who become "eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 19:10–12), usually interpreted to refer to those who adopted lives of sexual renunciation, and the verses claiming that "in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven" (Matt. 22:30; Mark 12:25; Luke 20:35). Early Christians understood the latter to mean that even here and now we might participate in this "angelic" state—to be ours more fully later on—by adopting lives of celibacy.

Such sayings attributed to Jesus may well have been prompted by the expectation of the Kingdom of God. The followers of Jesus believed that God was once more about to break into human history, to destroy the present era and create a new one in which the poor, the hungry, and the weeping would receive the rewards so frequently denied them (Luke 6:20–26; Matt. 5:3–12). In this eschatological context—the context about the "last age"—Christians understood that Jesus had called them to lives in which traditional values (including those pertaining to the family) were displaced by an ethic of radical allegiance to God alone. When the Kingdom would come "like a thief in the night" (Matt. 24:42; Luke 12:30), all must be ready to greet Christ the Bridegroom—not to linger with earthly husbands.

An eschatological motivation similarly informs Paul's advocacy of celibacy in 1 Corinthians 7, the single chapter of the New Testament most important for the development of Christian asceticism in the era of the church fathers. Paul there praises the unmarried state "because of the impending distress" (1 Cor. 7:26), because "the appointed time has grown very short" (1 Cor. 7:29), because "the form of this world is passing away" (1 Cor. 7:31). For those who cannot control their desires, marriage stands as an acceptable remedy (1 Cor. 7:2): note that to forestall the temptation to sexual straying is the only reason Paul here gives

for marriage. He claims that the married are full of anxieties about "worldly affairs," about how to please their spouses; those who remain celibate, by contrast, worry only about "pleasing the Lord," about being "holy in body and spirit" (1 Cor. 7:32–34). Rather than advocate divorce, however, Paul advised those who were already married to live "as though they were not" (1 Cor. 7:29).

Although Paul here sets a "practical" argument about freedom from worldly cares in the context of expectation about the imminent end of the world, it needed to be separated from its eschatological grounding by ascetically inclined patristic writers of the fourth and fifth centuries, who no longer believed that the "end" would come any time soon. Paul's rather casual warning against the anxieties occasioned by marriage and "pleasing a spouse" is now hardened and tightened in the next few Christian centuries into the topos of the "woes of marriage," a catalog developed by earlier pagan philosophers and satirists that was now lifted from their antimarital diatribes by Christian polemicists.[13] For example, the pagan theme of the despotism of the wealthy wife shows up with some regularity in the treatises of the church fathers.[14] Thus John Chrysostom, writing at the turn to the fifth century, can intone, "If you take a rich wife, it is not a woman you take but a despot. If women are already full of pride and are greedy for honors, what will happen if she is rich as well?"[15] Elsewhere, he answers his question: "She will not allow him to keep his place of dominance, but with an insane arrogance banishes him from that rank and relegates him to the station that is properly hers, that is to say, one of subordination: *she* becomes the head and chief."[16] According to Chrysostom, the rich woman is, in effect, a "wild beast" rather than a wife.[17]

Despite the familiarity of such complaints from pagan literature, an important reversal occurs between pagan and Christian arguments re-

[13]See, e.g., Jerome's appropriation of "Theophrastus's" work on marriage in *Adversus Jovinianum* 1.47; for discussions of Jerome's borrowings from pagan treatises in this section of the work, see Pierre Courcelle, *Les lettres grecques en occident de Macrobe à Cassiodore* (Paris, 1948), pp. 60–62; and Harald Hagendahl, *Latin Fathers and the Classics: A Study on the Apologists, Jerome and Other Christian Writers* (Göteborg, 1958), pp. 146–53.

[14]See examples and discussion in Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 89, 184, 198, 199, 210, 330, 340. Note Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller's comment (*The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture* [London, 1987], p. 135) that a woman's freedom to use her money in marriage, and to divorce, taking much of her dowry with her, should be "set against the paternalism inherent in the age difference and the ideology of the husband's superiority."

[15]John Chrysostom *Quales ducendae sint uxores* 4 (*PG* 51.231).

[16]John Chrysostom *De virginitate* 53 (*SC* 125.300).

[17]John Chrysostom *Hom. 49 in Acta* 4 (*PG* 60.344).

garding the "woes of marriage": *which* sex is the most disadvantaged. For ancient pagan authors (males, needless to say), it was men who were imagined to bear the greatest burdens of marriage. Thus the wise man might benefit from remaining celibate, for a wife's mundane services could just as well be supplied by others. As one diatribe against marriage attributed to an ancient pagan philosopher put it, a wife is the only commodity a man acquires which he cannot "try out" first: hence marrying a wife is more precarious than (say) buying a pot or an animal.[18]

For Christian writers of an ascetic stripe, however, the more disadvantaged party in marriage was thought to be the wife—or so we infer from the large number of letters and treatises they direct to women that outline the "woes of marriage." The theme of female servitude and subjection in marriage is scored hard. Should a Christian woman be married to a pagan, they argue, he will try to prevent her churchly activities and will want her to participate in pagan rituals. Such husbands should not be jollied, the church father Tertullian warns; he compares them to pigs, quoting to his Christian female audience the biblical injunction (now rich with sexual innuendo), "Cast not your pearls before swine" (Matt. 7:6).[19] For all women, pregnancy is depicted in ways calculated to cool their ardor for childbearing: why, Jerome asks a young and childless widow, would she wish to imitate the dog of Prov. 26:11 and "return to her own vomit"?[20] Next, the difficulties of bearing and raising children are given high rhetorical profile,[21] with the special troubles attending the presence of stepchildren at the forefront (a sure clue that remarriage was practiced by Christians).[22] Likewise, the very real worry of the deaths of spouse and children become grist for the mill of Christian ascetic propa-

[18] "Theophrastus," in Jerome *Adversus Jovinianum* 1.47 (*PL* 23.289); another Christian rendition of the same argument is given by John Chrysostom in *Quales ducendae sint uxores* 1 (*PG* 51.226).

[19] Tertullian *Ad uxorem* 2.4–6 (*Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* [hereafter, *CCL*] 1.388–91). Tertullian writes in the opening years of the third century.

[20] Jerome *Ep.* 54.4.1 (*CSEL* 54.468–69).

[21] For example, Gregory of Nyssa *De virginitate* 3.5–6 (*SC* 119.284–90); [Anonymous] *De castitate* 17 (*PLS* 1.1501); John Chrysostom *Mulier alligata* 4 (*PG* 51.223).

[22] Ambrose *De viduis* 15.88 (*PL* 16.275); John Chrysostom *Vidua eligatur* 6 (*PG* 51.326); Jerome *Ep.* 54.15.2–3 (*CSEL* 54.482). Since in cases of divorce children generally stayed in their father's family, a woman might well encounter stepchildren. Nonetheless, given the Christian campaign against divorce and remarriage (even if not entirely effective), there may have been fewer Christian women marrying divorced men than was common in earlier periods of Roman history—although, to be sure, they still would be marrying widowers. For the frequency of divorce and remarriage, with stepchildren as an issue, see Keith R. Bradley, "Dislocation in the Roman Family," and "Remarriage and the Structure of the Upper-Class Family at Rome," both in his *Discovering the Roman Family: Studies in Roman Social History* (New York, 1991), pp. 125–55, 156–76.

ganda.[23] Above all, the church fathers stress to women audiences the "slavery" of marriage.[24] In feigned amazement, Ambrose (bishop of Milan in the late fourth century) marvels that Christian families eagerly pay for their daughters to enter this servitude, alluding to dowry arrangements in which (as he pointedly puts it) sons-in-law are "bought."[25]

Still other marital themes familiar to pagans were given a novel twist by Christian writers. Take the topic of death in relation to reproduction: the replication of the next generation was, for many pagans, imagined both as a civic duty and as the means to purchase a small bit of immortality for oneself through the ongoing lives of one's descendants.[26] Christian authors, however, scorned such mundane concerns. In addition to mocking their fellow Christians who imagined that death was an evil[27] or who worried about heirs (inappropriate for those who had allegedly "disinherited" themselves from the world),[28] ascetically inclined patristic writers linked death to marriage in a way that might have seemed bizarre to pagan audiences: marriage, they claimed, derived from the first sin that brought death to the world. "Where death is, there is marriage," John Chrysostom intoned.[29] More sinister still is Gregory of Nyssa's thesis that parents bring forth children only to embark them on the road that leads to death. Virginity, he argues, prevents the constant production of new beings doomed to die; it stays the advance of death by refusing to participate in the process of procreation that marches resolutely toward the grave. Gregory concludes, "The power of death will not function if marriage does not furnish it with fuel and provide it with

[23]For discussions of mortality rates, see Keith Hopkins, "On the Probable Age Structure of the Roman Population," *Population Studies* 20 (1966): 245–64; Bruce Frier, "Roman Life Expectancy: The Pannonian Evidence," *Phoenix* 37 (1983):328–44; and see n. 77 below. For how mortality rates affected politics, see Keith Hopkins with Keith Burton, "Political Succession in the Late Republic (249–50 B.C.)," in Keith Hopkins, *Death and Renewal,* Sociological Studies in Roman History 2 (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 31–119.

[24]Jerome *Comm. in Eph.* 3 (on Eph. 5:22–23) (*PL* 26.564, 570), *Comm. in Titum* (on Titus 2:3–5) (*PL* 26.581–82), *Epp.* 49 (48).6.1; 14.13 (*CSEL* 54.358.375), 145 (*CSEL* 56.306); Augustine *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae* 1.30.63 (*PL* 33.1336); *Tractatus Iohannem* 2.14.3 (*PL* 35.1395); Ambrose *Exhortatio virginitatis* 4.20–22 (*PL* 16.357–58); *De virginitate* 6.33 (*PL* 16.288); *De viduis* 11.69, 13.81 (*PL* 16.268.273).

[25]Ambrose *Exhortatio virginitatis* 4.23 (*PL* 16.358); *De virginibus* 1.7.33 (*PL* 16.209).

[26]Borrowed by some Christian writers, e.g., John Chrysostom *Propter fornicationes* 3 (*PG* 51.213), *Hom. 18 in Gen.* 4 (*PG* 53.154), *Hom. 20 Gen.* 1 (*PG* 53.167).

[27]For example, John Chrysostom *Vidua eligatur* 1 (*PG* 51.322).

[28]Tertullian *De monogamia* 16.4 (*CCL* 2.1251); [Anonymous] *De castitate* 17 (*Patrologia Latina Supplementum* [hereafter, *PLS*] 1.1499–1500).

[29]John Chrysostom *De virginitate* 14.6 (*SC* 125.142); cf. Tertullian *Adversus Marcionem* 4.38.

victims who are like condemned prisoners": children are here the "tinder" that fuels the fires of death.[30]

Other ascetic devaluations of marriage rest not in reinterpretations of pagan motifs but on interpretations of biblical verses that harden and tighten their ascetic import. For example, the fact that Paul lists "the temptation to fornication" as the only reason for conceding marriage (1 Cor. 7:2)—it being "better to marry than to burn" (1 Cor. 7:9)—could prompt later Christian writers to compare Paul to a good physician, who does not require his "patient" to endure more than he is able.[31] But in a clever argument against "overdosing," the interpreter further claims that if Christians are not sick, they do not need someone else's medicine.[32] Marriage is here a drug that stays (but does not cure) the "illness" of sexual desire—and that should be prescribed only for the "ailing."

The Hebrew Bible, for its part, both lent assistance to, and posed problems for, the ascetic campaign. Take, for example, the codes on priestly purity found in the book of Leviticus. In the hands of later ascetic interpreters, the limited sexual restrictions placed on ancient Hebrew priests were widened and adopted for the ethical discipline of Christian laypeople. Thus ascetic writers concluded that since all Christians are "priests" (Rev. 1:6), and must always be praying (1 Thess. 5:17), not only should married Christian priests abandon sexual relations with their wives during their time of office,[33] but all Christian couples might relinquish sexual relation—and not just for the brief periods that enable prayer, as suggested by Paul's words in 1 Cor. 7:5.[34] The fear of temporary priestly "uncleanness" derived from Hebrew ritual law is here transposed onto Christian marriage and is bolstered by appeals to such biblical passages as the description of animals who entered Noah's ark: it was the unclean ones who entered "two by two."[35] The purest of all Christian couples would be those who never

[30] Gregory of Nyssa *De virginitate* 14.1 (*SC* 199.432–36), a treatise written in the third quarter of the fourth century.

[31] [Anonymous] *De castitate* 9.2 (*PLS* 1.1478); cf. Jerome's phrase, that marriage is a "plank after shipwreck" (of "the Fall") (*Ep.* 117.3.2 [*CSEL* 55.425]).

[32] [Anonymous] *De castitate* 10.3 (*PLS* 1.1480).

[33] Ambrose *De officiis ministrorum* 1.50.248 (*PL* 16.104–5). In Jerome's view, reproduction is analogous to those priestly regulations that Christians no longer keep: *Ep.* 52.10 (*CSEL* 54.431–33).

[34] [Anonymous] *De castitate* 10.4, 3.3, cf. 5.2–3 (*PLS* 1.1480–81, 1466–67, 1473); Jerome *Adversus Jovinianum* 1.7, 1.20, 1.34 (*PL* 23.230, 249, 268–69); Ambrose *Exhortatio virginitatis* 10.62 (*PL* 16.370: one's garments cannot be "white" all the time in marriage).

[35] Jerome *Adversus Jovinianum* 1.16 (*PL* 23.246); *Epp.* 22.19.6 (*CSEL* 54.169–70), 123.8.2 (*CSEL* 56.81–82).

engaged in sexual relations, such as some patristic authors believed of Joseph and Mary.[36]

If the Levitical codes could provide a positive impetus for Christian speculation on marital "uncleanness," other texts from Hebrew Scripture proved far more problematic for ascetic commentators. What to do with passages that represented the Israelite heroes of yore disporting themselves in a decidedly nonascetic fashion? Why had God allowed the forebears of Jesus to conduct themselves in such unbecoming fashion? Since the foibles of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been noted in penetrating detail by opponents of orthodox Christianity (such as Marcionites and Manichaeans) who cited the low level of sexual morality displayed in the Old Testament as ample reason to reject its sacred authority, it was imperative for ascetic propagandists to address these tales of incest, polygamy, and rape head-on.[37]

Certainly, the church fathers agreed, no contemporary Christian should copy such behavior.[38] But could it be defended at all? The major argument developed by early Christian writers to address this embarrassing dilemma appealed to "the difference in times" between the era of the Old Testament patriarchs and that of present-day Christians. Thus Methodius in his treatise, *The Banquet,* has one of his female symposiasts describe how God had allowed incest in the early days of the human race, which later was prohibited by Mosaic law; next polygamy, formerly tolerated, was forbidden. Eventually came an attack on the previously tolerated adultery—and finally, the Christian era bloomed, in which continence and virginity reigned supreme. According to Methodius, God like a skillful teacher had educated the human race in morality by stages, from the time that humans were allowed to "frolic like calves," through their "student days," to full maturity.[39] Thus various patristic writers argued that God had then permitted sexual behavior no longer acceptable for Christians so that the earth might be filled. God tolerated such practices in the past—but he certainly would not tolerate them now. As some ascetic writers rudely jeered, if Christians wish to indulge

[36]Jerome *Adversus Helvidium* passim (*PL* 23.193–216); Ambrose *De institutione virginis* 7.47, 8.53 (*PL* 16.332, 334); Augustine *Serm.* 191.2.2 (*PL* 38.1010).

[37]See esp. bk. 22 of Augustine's *Contra Faustum,* which exhaustively details the examples cited against the "worthiness" of the Hebrew Bible by Faustus the Manichaean.

[38]Tertullian *Exhortatio castitatis* 6 (*CCL* 2.1023–24).

[39]Methodius *Symposium* 1.2.16–18 (Die Griechische Christliche Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte [hereafter, GCS] 27.9), a treatise probably composed in the early years of the fourth century. For other uses of the "difference in times" argument, see, e.g., Pelagius *Comm. in 1 Corinthios* (on 1 Cor. 7:1–3), in Alexander Souter, ed., *Pelagius's Expositions of Thirteen Epistles of Paul,* Texts and Studies 9, 1 (Cambridge, 1922), 1:159–60; [Anonymous] *De castitate* 12.5 (*PLS* 1.1491).

in plural marriages as did Abraham, they might as well get circumcised and offer animal sacrifice along with him.[40]

The New Testament could indeed be set against Old Testament mores in a way that provided patristic writers with a pointed assault upon the family, an assault that set aside both Roman notions of *pietas* and the Old Testament command to "honor thy father and thy mother." Here, the antifamilial strain in Jesus' teaching was appealed to in order to sanction the ascetic decision to renounce family. Thus for Tertullian, when Jesus asked, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" (Matt. 12:48; Luke 8:20–21), he was denying his own parents in the same way that he taught Christians to deny theirs, "for God's work."[41] Likewise, the stories of the first disciples who abandoned their work and families to follow Jesus provided powerful ammunition for the ascetic cause. According to Jerome, they were embarked on a path to perfection that the rich young man of Matthew 19, who would not renounce his goods, could never achieve.[42] Indeed, Jerome argues on the basis of Luke 18:29–30 that Jesus promised a reward to his devotees for leaving their children and wives to follow him.[43] And in the literature of the desert fathers, an antifamilial strain runs so deep that these ascetic heroes are represented as refusing to see relatives who come to visit,[44] or even to read the letters sent to them by their parents.[45]

One of the most dramatic stories of the early Christian ascetic rejection of family is recounted in John Cassian's *Institutes.* He tells the tale of a certain Patermutus, who wished to join a monastery in the company of his young son. To test Patermutus's ascetic resolve, the child was struck, abused, and left to wallow in his own dirt, tears smudging his grimy face. Yet the abbot of the monastery had a harder test in store: he

[40] [Anonymous] *De castitate* 15.4 (*PLS* 1.1498); Jerome *Adversus Jovinianum* 1.19 (*PL* 23.248); cf. the argument by Faustus the Manichaean in Augustine *Contra Faustum* 1.2–3 (*CSEL* 25.251–52).

[41] Tertullian *De carne Christi* 7.13 (*CCL* 2.889).

[42] Jerome *Adversus Vigilantium* 14 (*PL* 23.366); cf. *Ep.* 38.5.1 (*CSEL* 54.292–93).

[43] Jerome (*Adversus Jovinianum* 2.19 [*PL* 23.327]) elides this with his discussion of the Parable of the Sower and the rewards promised for those in each "category" of harvest.

[44] For example, *Vita Pachomii* 37 (Bohairic; in *Pachomian Koinonia,* trans. Armand Veilleux, Cistercian Studies Series 45 [Kalamazoo, MI, 1988], 1:60–61) and John Cassian, *Conlationes* 24.9 (*SC* 64.179–80).

[45] John Cassian *Institutiones* 5.32 (*SC* 109.240.242). On the phenomenon of the "disappearance" of the saint's family after the first paragraphs of hagiographic *vitae,* see Laurent Theis, "Saints sans famille? Quelques remarques sur la famille dans le monde franc à travers les sources hagiographiques," *Revue Historique* 255 (1976): 3–20. For an interesting study of the "antifamilial" direction of early Christian asceticism, see Philip Rousseau, "Blood-Relationships among Early Eastern Ascetics," *Journal of Theological Studies,* n.s., 23 (1972): 135–44.

ordered Patermutus to throw his son into the fast-flowing river—and Patermutus did. Unknown to the father, the abbot had stationed two monks by the shore to rescue the child from drowning. The point of the story, however, centers not on the fate of the child but on Patermutus's obedience: he was proved such a worthy renunciant that he later assumed the abbot's place as head of the monastery.[46] To us, the tale signals child abuse; to ascetic listeners of yore, Patermutus was a hero copying "the deed of Abraham."

Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac, it is worth noting, provided a biblical model for ascetics' renunciation of their families. In Ambrose's reflection on the story, Abraham knew that Isaac "would be more acceptable to God when sacrificed than when whole"; the commands of God, he concludes, are to be loved more than any pledges of human love (i.e., children).[47] Against such comments, the report furnished by such a "balanced" writer as Gregory Nazianzen that his own mother was given to saying that she would gladly sell herself and her children into slavery if by doing so she could acquire more money for helping the poor seems less startling.[48]

Characters from Christian popular literature of the second and third centuries joined Abraham in the roster of models for renunciation of family—and in this case, the models were female.[49] Throughout the various Apocryphal Acts, women's abandonment of marital and family life is deemed a "good" that should be valued in and for itself, apart from the "practical" advantages attending such renunciation: asceticism is here construed as the "good news," the "gospel," of Christianity.[50] The ascetics' struggle against societal norms is graphically displayed in the Apocryphal Acts, as crowds seek to imprison or kill preachers of asceticism[51] and mothers clamor to have their daughters, converts to the life of sexual renunciation, put to death by burning.[52] In the Apocryphal Acts, biblical

[46]John Cassian *Institutiones* 4.27–28 (*SC* 109.160.162). The *Institutes* were composed around 420.

[47]Ambrose *De excessu fratris* 2.97 (*PL* 16.1401).

[48]Gregory Nazianzen *Oratio* 18.21 (*PG* 35.1009).

[49]See esp. the stories of Thecla in the Acts of Paul and Thecla; of Drusiana in the Acts of John; of Mygdonia in the Acts of Thomas; of Xanthippe in the Acts of Peter; of Maximilla in the Acts of Andrew.

[50]For example, see the Acts of John 37, 63 ff.; the Acts of Peter 33–34; the Acts of Andrew 4–5; the Acts of Thomas 1, 9, 10.

[51]For example, Acts of Paul and Thecla 15; Acts of Thomas 9, 101; Martyrdom of Thomas 159, 169; Acts of Peter 34.

[52]Acts of Paul and Thecla 20. It is interesting to see John Chrysostom (? *dubia*) attempt to lower the antifamilial heat by claiming in a *Homily on Thecla* (*PG* 50.746) that Thecla's parents had urged her to marry because they did not know that she had vowed herself to virginity.

passages could be rewritten to emphasize the ascetic import of the Christian message. Thus the author of the Acts of Paul and Thecla "improves" upon the Gospels' Beatitudes to dramatize the exhortation to asceticism. Thus Paul here sermonizes to his audience:

> Blessed are those who keep the flesh pure, for they shall become the temple of God.
> Blessed are the continent, for to them shall God speak . . .
> Blessed are those who have wives as if they had them not, for they shall inherit God . . .
> Blessed are the bodies of virgins, for they shall be well-pleasing to God and shall not lose the reward of their purity.[53]

The popularity of such stories from the Apocryphal Acts among Christian audiences suggests that readers and hearers had come to enjoy a new, feminized version of the heroic epic, in which the battle cry had been transferred from the plains of Troy to the bosom of the family, now construed as the camp of the enemy.[54] Ambrose's advice to young female virgins echoes the theme of the Apocryphal Acts: "If you can conquer your home, you can conquer the world."[55]

Ascetic authors, however, hastened to assure their audiences that they would receive a new and improved, indeed a heavenly, family to replace the one they were abandoning here on earth.[56] The language of familialism as applied to the new "household" of the Christian faithful is, of course, found in the New Testament itself, often in the salutations and endings of various letters, where followers of Jesus are called "brother," "sister," and "mother"; and in 1 Pet. 4:17, Christians are referred to "the household [*oikos*] of God."

In the centuries beyond, this metaphorical family devolved largely on Jesus the Bridegroom, who symbolically replaced the fiancé or husband that the female ascetic renounces here on earth. Thus Jerome exhorts the teenage ascetic Eustochium in the words of Psalm 45, "Forget thy people and thy father's house, and the king shall desire thy beauty," promising her the heavenly Bridegroom as a more-than-satisfactory recompense for her renunciation here and now.[57] In such

[53]Acts of Paul and Thecla 5–6 (trans. from E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha* [Philadelphia, 1965], 2:354–55).

[54]On the popularity and wide diffusion of the Apocryphal Acts, especially the Acts of Paul and Thecla, see Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* (Utrecht, 1950), 1:131; Dennis Ronald MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle: The Battle for Paul in Story and Canon* (Philadelphia, 1983), pp. 90–96.

[55]Ambrose *De virginibus* 1.11.63 (*PL* 16.217): "Si vincis domum, vincis saeculum."

[56]For example, *Admonitio Augiensis* (*PLS* 1.1702).

[57]Jerome *Ep.* 22.1.1; 25–26 (*CSEL* 54.143–44, 178–82).

literature—literature especially directed to young girls making the commitment to asceticism, it appears—the words describing the male lover in the Song of Songs were borrowed to depict Jesus as the one who will come to their chambers at night to embrace them.[58] John Chrysostom, however, goes the Latin authors one better, promising the faithful virgin that the bridegroom Jesus will be "hotter" (*sphodroteros*) than any human husband she might have fancied.[59] Erotic fantasy, far from being anathema to ascetic discourse, lent it some of its driving force.

That the above exhortations represent propaganda of the most blatant sort is evident—which is not to say that it did not enjoy at least limited success in the late ancient Christian world. Its ideological import is especially manifest when we compare the view of marriage that is set forth in this ascetic literature to the legal situation of "real" women in later antiquity: the Fathers do not reflect the social and legal norms of "civil society," but appeal to a bygone era and ancient customs, long since discarded in both law and "real life" (such as we can grasp them) in order to paint a highly repressive portrait of marriage for women. Roman law, by later antiquity, came closer to affording parity between men and women on such issues as property and divorce than most Western legal systems up to the modern era; the restrictive views the Fathers set forth on married women thus cannot be "blamed" on the social norms of the day but is their special, religiously oriented contribution. One would rarely infer from the church fathers' writings that in their own era, women usually retained their property separate from their husband's, could serve as legal guardians to their children, or could initiate divorce.[60] Nor would

[58]It is striking how often this imagery appears in letters or treatises directed to young girls such as Eustochium or Demetrias (the recipient of Jerome's *Ep.* 130; see esp. chap. 7 of that letter). For an interesting discussion, see Patricia Cox Miller, "The Blazing Body: Ascetic Desire in Jerome's Letter to Eustochium," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1 (1993): 21–45.

[59]John Chrysostom *Quod regulares feminae viris cohabitare non debeant* 9 (*PG* 47.532).

[60]On changes in Roman law regarding such issues since the Republic, see Percy Ellwood Corbett, *The Roman Law of Marriage* (Oxford, 1930); Jane F. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society* (Bloomington, IN, 1986); Treggiari, *Roman Marriage* (n. 14 above); Jean Gaudemet, "Tendances nouvelles de la legislation familiale au IV^e^ siècle," in *Transformations et conflits au IV^e^ siècle ap. J.-C.,* Colloque organisé par la Fédération Internationale des Etudes Classiques, Bordeaux, 7. an 12. septembre 1970, Antiquitas 1, 29 (Bonn, 1978), pp. 187–207; Richard P. Saller, "*Familia, Domus,* and the Roman Conception of the Family," *Phoenix* 38 (1984): 336–55, esp. 338–40; Yan Thomas, "The Division of the Sexes in Roman Law," in *A History of Women: From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints,* ed. P. S. Pantel, trans. A. Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA, 1992), pp. 83–137; Jill Harries, "'Treasure in Heaven': Property and Influence among Senators of Late Rome," in *Marriage and Property,* ed. Elizabeth M. Craik (Aberdeen, 1991), pp. 54–70; Suzanne Dixon, "The

we gather that, due to limited life expectancy, many men at the age of marriage would no longer be in *patria potestas* (under the legal control of the male head of the family), due to the early demise of their own fathers, or that both male and female adult children might be sui juris (under their own legal recognizance).[61] We would not readily guess that a father's inheritance (if no will were made to the contrary and if the father died intestate) would be apportioned to his legitimate children without regard to age or sex.[62]

Quite the contrary: married Christian women are enjoined by the church fathers to "submit their heads" to their husbands, to spin, and to "keep their feet at home."[63] Some authors seem to yearn for "the good old days" when a man could supposedly kill his wife with impunity if she merely tasted some drops of wine. They extol nostalgically the early days of the Roman Republic when (so they claim) not one divorce occurred in a six-hundred-year period.[64] Lucretia and Dido are held up as exemplars of Christian chastity and monogamy—although their sui-

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Marriage Alliance in the Roman Elite," *Journal of Family History* 10 (1985): 353–78; Beryl Rawson, "The Roman Family," pp. 1–57; J. A. Crook, "Women in Roman Succession," pp. 58–82, both in *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives,* ed. Beryl Rawson (Ithaca, NY, 1986); Philippe Antoine, *Le mariage: Droit canonique et coutumes africaines,* Théologique Historique 90 (Paris, 1992), chaps. 1–2 (on engagements). The various essays of Jean Gaudemet on marriage are collected in his *Sociétés et mariage,* Recherches institutionnelles 4 (Strasbourg, 1980), esp. pp. 46–103, 116–39. Also see the forthcoming book by Antti Arjava, *Women and Law in Late Antiquity.* Although Arjava reads Jerome *Ep.* 147.11; and John Chrysostom *De virginitate* 52.3, to mean that husbands in their time may have been reclaiming the ancient legal right summarily to kill a wife and her lover caught in the sex act (*Women and Law in Late Antiquity*, chap. 2), it seems to me that such expressions (in the absence of any legal evidence to support Arjava's claim) betoken these church fathers' rhetorical appeal to a past in which husbands had more power over their wives. For a discussion of the ideological nature of texts pertaining to adultery, see Amy Richlin, "Approaches to the Sources on Adultery at Rome," in *Reflections of Women in Antiquity,* ed. Helene P. Foley (New York, 1981), pp. 379–404. For a summary of developments as they affect the notion of "consent" to marriage, see my "'Adam's Only Companion': Augustine and the Early Christian Debate on Marriage," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 21 (1986): 138–62, esp. 158–61, with numerous references on Roman marriage law.

[61] See Richard P. Saller, "Men's Age at Marriage and Its Consequences in the Roman Family," *Classical Philology* 82 (1987): esp. 322–34; on cautions about not overinterpreting *patria potestas,* in any event, see John A. Crook, "*Patria Potestas,*" *Classical Quarterly* 17 (1967): 113–22.

[62] Treggiari, *Roman Marriage,* pp. 361, 381; Crook, "Women in Roman Succession."

[63] Tertullian *De cultu feminarum* 2.13.7 (*CCL* 1.370). For a summary, with copious references, of Tertullian's views on marriage, see Claude Rambaux, *Tertullien face aux morales des trois premiers siècles* (Paris, 1979), pp. 204–58.

[64] Tertullian *Apologeticum* 6.4 (*CCL* 1.97).

cides are not recommended, given the reevaluation of that deed in early Christian ethical writings.[65] The church fathers' depiction of married life is thus (in Brian Stock's term) "traditionalistic": they self-consciously affirmed the norms (or ideals) of the past in order to regulate present behavior.[66]

Thus the patristic authors chastise women who dispose of their own money or property without the permission of their husbands[67]—yet when a husband sold his wife's property against her will, the best that Augustine could recommend to her is that she "not be litigious."[68] He can also quote with approval his mother's alleged words to her friends, victims of wife battering, that they should not be surprised at their fates, since the marriage tables put a woman in subjection to her husband.[69] In a most telling merger of the financial with the sexual, John Chrysostom interprets the "becoming one (flesh)" text of Ephesians 5 to mean that brides should deposit their money in their husband's coffers—a striking example of social conservatism.[70] Basil of Caesarea's rules for his church include such items as that a wife is not to leave her husband even if he beats her and is an adulterer[71]—whereas if she were to stray sexually, she is to be repudiated immediately.[72] (Basil at least has the good grace to admit that he is uneasy with this distinction between the fates of sexes, but, he concedes, this is "custom.")[73]

Even the language of these texts makes marriage look as undesirable

[65]Tertullian *De monogamia* 17.2 (*CCL* 2.1252); *De exhortatione castitatis* 13.3 (*CCL* 2.1034–35); Jerome *Adversus Jovinianum* 1.43; 46; 49 (*PL* 23.286. 287–88. 294); *Ep.* 79.7 (*CSEL* 55.96). On Augustine's nervousness about the exaltation of Lucretia's suicide, see *De civitate Dei* 1.19. For an interesting discussion of this material, see Dennis Trout, "Re-textualizing Lucretia: Cultural Subversion in the *City of God*," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2 (1994): 53–70. The appeal to the good old days is a stock rhetorical device of pagan satirists and moralists (see Dixon, "The Marriage Alliance in the Roman Elite," p. 358); nonetheless, it accords but poorly with the Christian argument from "the difference in times," namely, that the morality of the Christian era is "higher" than that of either the ancient pagans or the ancient Israelites. Such argumentative incoherence provides a clue to the ideological construction of the Christian texts.

[66]Brian Stock, *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past* (Baltimore, 1990), p. 164.

[67]Augustine *Ep.* 262.4–8 passim (*CSEL* 57.624–27).

[68]Augustine *Serm.* 392.4.4 (*PL* 39.1712).

[69]Augustine *Confessiones* 9.9.19 (*CCL* 27.145). Although I suspect that Brent Shaw gives an overly harsh picture of matrons' situations on the basis of Augustine's discussion ("The Family in Late Antiquity" [n. 6 above], esp. pp. 28–32), Augustine doubtless had trouble with women's questions: see my "Theory and Practice in Late Ancient Asceticism: Jerome, Chrysostom, and Augustine," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5 (1989): esp. pp. 37–46.

[70]John Chrysostom *Hom. 20 Eph.* 9 (*PG* 62.148).

[71]Basil of Caesarea *Ep.* 188.9 (*PG* 32.677.680).

[72]Basil of Caesarea *Ep.* 199.21 (*PG* 32.721).

[73]Basil of Caesarea *Ep.* 199.21 (*PG* 32.721).

as possible. Thus the fathers sometimes refer to marriage as a "sale,"[74] or remind widows that in their first marriages, they had been "sold" as an *ancilla,* a servant, to a man.[75] Quite pointedly, Ambrose uses the word *contubernium*—which designated the informal, quasi-marital arrangements of slaves, who were not permitted legal marriage under Roman law—to describe the marriages of freeborn women.[76] His class-based demeaning of marriage, encapsulated in this one word, would not have been lost on his aristocratic audience.

There were, to be sure, many who did not warm to this antifamilial campaign. The profoundly antisocial implications of the ascetic message were registered with less ascetically inclined audiences: refusal to contribute one's body to the upbuilding of civic life might not be viewed so much as an individual's choice of an unusual "lifestyle" as a genuine threat to the reproduction of society.[77] In an era in which (so demographic studies suggest) every girl who lived to childbearing age would have had to produce about five children simply to keep the population constant, ascetic propaganda might sound decidedly threatening. In Peter Brown's words, the debate over virginity could be construed as a "debate about the nature of human solidarity."[78]

And it was not only non-Christians who stood against the antifamilial campaign: opposition to the ascetic's fervor could also come from within the Christian camp. Even within the New Testament period, some Christian writers, such as the author of the Pastoral Epistles, had urged a traditional ideal of marriage and wifely submission, perhaps to convince pagan "outsiders" that Christians were highly "respectable" folk. But the social landscape had changed by the later fourth century, when Christianity was the established religion and young people of the most "respectable"—indeed, aristocratic—families were those who rejected the domestic ideals of their elders.

[74]Ambrose *De virginibus* 1.9.56 (*PL* 16.215).

[75][Anonymous] *De viduitate servanda* (*PL* 67.1097).

[76]Ambrose *Exhortatio virginitatis* 6.35 (*PL* 16.361). Brent Shaw's translation: "shacking up"; Shaw notes that slaves and freed persons probably did not think of their relationships in this pejorative fashion. See Brent D. Shaw, "The Cultural Meaning of Death: Age and Gender in the Roman Family," in *The Family in Italy from Antiquity to the Present,* ed. David I. Kertzer and Richard P. Saller (n. 6 above), p. 88.

[77]See Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, 1988), pp. 6–7, citing the work of Bruce Frier, "Roman Life Expectancy: Ulpian's Evidence," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 86 (1982): 248. On the struggle for reproduction, also see Peter Garnsey, "Child Rearing in Ancient Italy," in *The Family in Italy from Antiquity to the Present,* ed. David I. Kertzer and Richard P. Saller, pp. 48–65.

[78]Peter Brown, "The Notion of Virginity in the Early Church," in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century,* ed. B. McGinn and J. Meyendorff (New York, 1986), p. 436.

Many Christian authors of this era who champion renunciation testify to the fierce opposition that the ascetic's resolve met from fellow Christians. Ambrose thus declares, rather rhetorically, that he would give his life to defend a girl's choice of perpetual virginity against the violence of her relatives who would seek to tear her away from her "altar." Against the familial "attackers," he argues that if virgins "have free choice of a life-partner, may they not choose God?"[79] Jerome insists to a young female correspondent, recently widowed and without children, that she does not owe her allegiance to her "natural" father, in this case a Roman aristocrat who was pressing his daughter to remarry. "You are not his to whom you have been born, but His to whom you have been born again," Jerome informs her. He goes on to mock her presumed desire (and her father's wish) for children: does her father crave a small grandson to "crawl upon his chest and drool down his neck"?[80] Jerome also reports that his friend and patroness Paula's relatives argued against her lavish—in their eyes, excessive—Christian charities; when she resolved to leave Rome and adopt the monastic life in earnest, her brother, children, and other relatives are all said to have tried to argue her out of her decision.[81] From the *Life of Malchus* to the *Life of Melania the Younger,* from the *Life of Theodore* to the *Life of Matrona,* parents and relatives—Christian ones, at that—are consistently represented as attempting to thwart the young ascetic's resolution.[82] In part, some of the opposition may have been motivated by the fact that the would-be ascetic was the only surviving offspring—or one of possibly two surviving children—of her family: thus the decision for asceticism might well signal the end of the family line.[83] But a second, and related, factor is perhaps even more important: the fate of the family's patrimony.

[79]Ambrose *De virginitate* 3.13, 5.26 (*PL* 16.283.286).

[80]Jerome *Ep.* 54.4 (*CSEL* 54.466–70).

[81]Jerome *Ep.* 108.5–6 (*CSEL* 55.310–12).

[82]Jerome *Vita Malchi* 3; Gerontius, *Vita Melaniae Iunioris* 1, 6, 10–12, 19; *Vita Pachomii* 37 (for the *Life of Theodore*); *Vita Matronae* 11 (*PG* 116.929–32). On the probable ages of these young women at marriage, see M. K. Hopkins, "The Age of Roman Girls at Marriage," *Population Studies* 18 (1965): 309–27; for an "upping" of the age, possibly a "lower-class" pattern, see Brent D. Shaw, "The Age of Roman Girls at Marriage: Some Reconsiderations," *Journal of Roman Studies* 77 (1987): 30–46. For a lively discussion of Matrona, see Eva Catafyglotu Topping, "St. Matrona and Her Friends: Sisterhood in Byzantium," in *Kathēgētria: Essays Presented to Joan Hussey* (Camberley, 1988), pp. 211–24.

[83]Olympias, e.g., was an only child; Melania the Younger may or may not have had a brother (if so, he is totally ignored in her *Vita*); the Anician heiress Demetrias had one brother. For an interesting study of the decline in natality among the senatorial aristocracy and the imperial families of the fourth century, see Robert Etienne, "La démographie des familles impériales et sénatoriales au IV[e] siècle après J.-C.," in *Transformation et conflits*

Familial opposition to the would-be ascetic's resolve becomes highly understandable when we consider the vast sums of money that stood to devolve upon ecclesiastical and charitable projects rather than entering the family's coffers.[84] Here was one arena—a woman's ability to will her property to whom she chose—in which the less restrictive norms of later Roman law manifestly benefited the church: in this case, not surprisingly, we find no nostalgic appeal by the fathers to the "good old days" in which women would have been less able to disperse their funds as they saw fit. The examples of Olympias, of Melania the Younger, and of Demetrias suggest that once the female ascetic could counter the laws forbidding the "under-aged" (i.e., those under twenty-five) to disperse family property without a special exemption, or laws allowing relatives to declare them prodigal or demented,[85] they were free to dispense vast amounts of money and property as they chose—in these cases, to the church, to Christian charities, and to ascetic programs.

To "translate" the sums mentioned in ancient texts into any modern equivalent is notoriously difficult (some might think futile). One method of calculating ancient fortunes rests on an estimation of how many people could have been supported at subsistence level, given what we know of ancient food prices.[86] Take Olympias's donations to the church

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au IV^e siècle ap. J.-C. (n. 60 above), pp. 133–67. Etienne concludes, "The upper classes assassinated themselves" (p. 142).

[84]Property could be bequeathed to the church from A.D. 321 on (*Codex Theodosianus* [hereafter, *CT*] 16.2.4).

[85]See *CT* 2.17.1; *Codex Justinianus* 2.44 (45). 1–2. Men could apply for the exemption regarding age—the *venia aetatis*—at twenty and women, at eighteen; people of senatorial rank had to apply through the city prefect (*CT* 2.17.1–2). On prodigality and dementia, see *Justiniani Digesta* 27.10.1.3. In the case of Melania the Younger, Honorius himself is said finally to have intervened to block her relatives' attempt to keep all the property in the family (*Vita Melaniae Iunioris* 12 [*SC* 90.150]). In the case of Olympias, Theodosius I ordered that the young widow's property be placed under guardianship of the city prefect (of Constantinople) until she was thirty (*Vita Olympiadis* 4 [*SC* 13 bis.412]). Various evidence suggests that Olympias must have been about twenty when this occurred. Olympias's marriage probably reflects the aristocratic pattern of marriage of a young girl to a considerably older man: her husband of short duration, Nebridius, was appointed prefect of Constantinople in 386 (A. H. M. Jones, J. R. Martindale, and J. Morris, eds., *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* [hereafter, *PLRE*], vol. 1 [Cambridge, 1971], 1.620). Thus the marriage probably conformed to the aristocratic mode sketched by Brent Shaw, "The Age of Roman Girls at Marriage," p. 44: "The upper-class marriage, therefore, would have been characterized by a wider age-gap between husband and wife, with all the implications that hiatus would have for reproduction, conjugal relations, widowhood and remarriage, and the devolution of property."

[86]See Roger S. Bagnall, *Currency and Inflation in Fourth Century Egypt,* Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists, suppl. 5 (Chico, CA, 1985), esp. the prices and salaries listed on pp. 61–72; Richard Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire: Quantitative Studies* (Cambridge, 1974), pp. 4–5, and his "Costs, Outlays and Summae

of Constantinople: her biographer mentions ten thousand pounds of gold and twenty thousand pounds of silver—an amount that would have sustained around 211,000 poor people—and these donations do not include her extensive real estate, which she also gave.[87] Even allowing for hagiographic excess, as we must, we can better understand why in the late fourth century the emperor Theodosius I tried to force her into a second marriage with one of his relatives after she was widowed at about age twenty. Among her many contributions to the church at Constantinople was the monastery she built which housed 250 nuns.[88]

Melania the Younger furnishes another example of a woman whose contributions to Christian causes startle the modern reader. According to her *Vita,* her annual income was 120,000 "pieces of gold"; assuming that these were gold *solidi* (1,666 pounds of gold), her income would have taken care of around twenty-nine thousand people a year.[89] The gifts that she and her ascetic husband Pinianus gave to the church and to monasteries are likewise mind-boggling: gifts of money that would have supported over thirty-eight thousand people for a year,[90] plus monasteries that they built and endowed.[91]

A third example—even more risky, since it rests on historical guesswork rather than on direct textual evidence—concerns the dowry of the Anician heiress Demetrias that her grandmother and mother allowed her to use for Christian purposes when she rejected marriage.[92] Since the Anicii were arguably the wealthiest family of the late Roman Empire, it is probably safe to assume that they enjoyed the annual

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Honoriae from Roman Africa," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 30 (1962): 75, in which Duncan-Jones emphasizes the difficulties of calculating purchasing power that corresponds to modern price structures. For a survey, see A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284–602: A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey* (Norman, OK, 1964), 1:438–48; on prices of clothing, 2:848–50. Labor costs in relation to the price of food are calculated by Colin Clark and Margaret Haswell in *Economics and Subsistence Agriculture,* 4th ed. (London, 1970), esp. chaps. 1, 4, 11. I thank Keith Hopkins for assistance with these details.

[87] *Vita Olympiadis* 5 (*SC* 13 bis.416).

[88] *Vita Olympiadis* 3, 13, 6 (*SC* 13 bis.410.412.434.418.420).

[89] The Latin *Vita* (15) ascribes the income to Melania; the Greek *Vita* (15), to Pinianus her husband: *chrousou myriadas dōdeka.*

[90] Gerontius *Vita Melaniae Iunioris* 22 (*SC* 90.156.158): 1,388 and 625 pounds of gold, respectively.

[91] Gerontius *Vita Melaniae Iunioris* 22, 41, 29 (*SC* 90, 172.204.206.220.222). A nice contrast with Melania's donation to private religious building is provided by her ancestor Publius Caeionius Caecina Albinus, who as *consularis Numidiae* in the mid-360s engaged in so much public building (basilicas, theaters, etc.) that he was honored in eighteen different inscriptions: see *PLRE,* 1:34–35, for a list.

[92] Jerome *Ep.* 130.7 (*CSEL* 56.182).

income Olympiodorus ascribes to the highest level of senatorial families: four thousand pounds of gold—enough to care for more than seventy thousand people.[93] If we accept Richard Saller's estimate that approximately one year's income was an acceptable dowry for an aristocratic Roman woman,[94] we get an entirely new perspective on why Jerome exclaimed upon the occasion of Demetrias's renunciation, "Every church in Africa danced for joy. . . . Every island between Africa and Italy was full of it. . . . Then Italy put off her mourning and the ruined walls of Rome resumed in part their ancient splendor."[95]

Even ascetically inclined writers, however, refrained from taking their denigration of marriage and the family too far. Thus they were eager to assert that virtue can exist within marriage—although it is easier to devote oneself to Christian perfection outside its bonds, they nonetheless add.[96] They note that the Bible furnished numerous examples of the married who were praised: Priscilla in the New Testament, who led the male teacher Apollos on the road to Christian truth; Enoch, who was said to please God even after he fathered a child; Noah, who, according to John Chrysostom, repressed the fires of lust in begetting three sons; Jacob, loved by his wives and slaves—and "nothing is more precious than such love," Chrysostom proclaims: thus the marriage bed is not in itself blameworthy.[97] Such biblical support for marriage was noted in detail by Jerome's Christian opponent Jovinian in the closing years of the fourth century: it is rather Jerome who must strain for Old Testament examples of the virgin or the celibate to argue his case.[98] Earlier, Clement of Alexandria, writing at the turn of the third century in praise of marriage against its denigration by some Gnostics, characterizes marriage as a school for virtue: the man who bears the burdens of wife and children is witnessing to his Christian conviction.[99] The church father Augustine especially is known for his defense of marriage: he describes the "goods" of marriage—offspring, fidelity, and the "sacramental bond"—in glow-

[93] Olympiodorus frag. 44, in Photius *Bibliotheca* 80 (*PG* 103.280).

[94] Richard Saller, "Roman Dowry and the Devolution of Property in the Principate," *Classical Quarterly* 34 (1984): 101–2.

[95] Jerome *Ep.* 130.6 (*CSEL* 56.181). Jerome writes after the Goths' sack of Rome in 410.

[96] For example, John Chrysostom *Adversus oppugnatores eorum qui vitam monasticam inducunt* 3.15 (*PG* 47.375–76); [Anonymous] *Virginitate laus* 10 (*PL* 30.176).

[97] Concerning Priscilla, see John Chrysostom *De virginitate* 47.2 (*SC* 125.264–66); cf. *Salutate Priscillam et Aquilam* (*PG* 51.195–208). See John Chrysostom *Hom. 21 Gen.* 4 (*PG* 53.180–81) for Enoch, *Hom. 24 Gen.* 1–2 (*PG* 53.207) for Noah, *Hom. 49 Acta* 4 (*PG* 60.353) for Jacob, and *Hom. 51 Matt.* 5 (*PG* 58.516) about the marriage bed.

[98] For example, Jerome *Adversus Jovinianum* 1.25 (*PL* 23.255).

[99] Clement of Alexandria *Stromateis* 3.12.79.5 (*GCS* 15.231).

ing terms,[100] and warns virgins not to presume that they are better than Sarah and Abraham. Indeed, the patriarchs were more virtuous than many Christians of his own time, Augustine alleges, since their procreative activities were undertaken only in obedience to God's command and they fulfilled them "without lust."[101]

Moreover, several patristic writers give us pleasing portraits of the marriages of their own parents, or of the parents of friends, in which the matches are described as "a union of virtue rather than bodies," or as a "community of virtue no less than one of cohabitation."[102] Yet even in such praises of marriage we detect an ascetic note: marriage is always to be used "with moderation," but if so used, will not prevent the married person from winning a front place in the Kingdom of Heaven.[103] As John Chrysostom puts it, husbands are to live more or less like ascetic practitioners: the only point of difference is that they have wives, albeit (in Paul's phrase from 1 Cor. 7:29) "as if they had them not."[104] Ascetic Christians such as Paulinus of Nola might even write *epithalamia,* poems celebrating marriage, for their fellow Christians—although after 231 lines of praising the couple, Paulinus apparently could not resist suggesting (albeit delicately) that they not sleep together, but take vows of sexual renunciation then and there.[105] Here it is important to recall that moderation and sexual restraint, even within marriage, was a common theme among philosophically minded pagan writers of late antiquity, so its presence in Christian works—in sharpened form—comes as no surprise.[106]

[100] Augustine *De bono coniugali* 3.3–7.7 (*CSEL* 41.190–97); *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* 1.10.11, 17.19 (*CSEL* 42.222.231).

[101] Augustine *De bono coniugali* 22.27, 13.15, 23.31 (*CSEL* 41.221–23.207–8.226). That the patriarchs engaged in sexual relations without lust runs up against Augustine's later theme, developed during the Pelagian controversy, that lust attends all sexual intercourse since the time of Adam and Eve's sin. The argument that virgins should not deem themselves better than the patriarchs appears to have arisen with Helvidius (see Jerome *Adversus Helvidium* 20).

[102] Gregory Nazianzen *Oratio* 18.7 (*PG* 35.993), *Oratio* 43.9 (*PG* 36.504).

[103] John Chrysostom *Hom. 7 Heb.* 4 (*PG* 63.68).

[104] John Chrysostom *Hom. 7 Heb.* 4 (*PG* 63.68).

[105] Paulinus of Nola *Carmen* 25 (*CSEL* 30.245).

[106] See Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self,* trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1986), esp. pts. 2, 5. In general, the early Fathers stand resolutely against such accepted pagan practices as abortion and child exposure, representing themselves as far more caring for both the unborn and the newly born than their pagan counterparts. For example, Tertullian *Ad nationes* 1.16.10–12 (*CCL* 1.35); *Apologeticum* 9, 6–8 (*CCL* 1.102–30); Justin *Apologia prima* 27 (*PG* 6.369.373); Athenagoras, *Libellus pro Christianis* 35 (*Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur* 4.2, 45–46). See Emiel Eyben, "Family Planning in Graeco-Roman Antiquity," *Ancient Society* 11/12 (1980/1981): 5–82,

In addition, Christian critics of excessive ascetic enthusiasm developed other arguments to further their cause. One such played upon the pagan theme that childbearing was a social duty, necessary for the upbuilding of the civic order: in this argument, the failure to reproduce would lead to the decline of the human race and to the collapse of the world.[107] It could also be asked why God had created humans in two sexes if he had not intended them to reproduce.[108] Moreover, did not the numerous marriages mentioned in the Bible suggest that God approved of the married state—and not just at the beginning of the world, when the population needed building up?[109] Last, if the Pastoral Epistles assume that even priests and bishops will be married, how much more the author of those books must have expected Christians not in the clergy to be.[110]

Christian champions of marriage also could critique the claim that the sin in the Garden of Eden led to, and cast a pall over, marriage. One writer who argued against the enduring effects of the first sin for married life was Julian of Eclanum, the last and probably the sharpest opponent that Augustine ever faced. Over against Augustine's position that the original sin which brought lust into the world forever left a negative mark on the sexual relations of even Christian couples and transferred that guilt to every fetus conceived, Julian took quite a different line. He stressed the disastrous implications for marriage that Augustine's claim entailed: that the inevitability of sin's transfer through the sex act implied

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esp. 62 ff.; Keith Hopkins, "Contraception in the Roman Empire," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 8 (1965–66): 124–51; Evelyne Patlagean, "Sur la limitation de la fecondité dans la haute époque byzantine," *Annales E. S. C.* 24 (1969): 1353–70; Ruth Oldenziel, "The Historiography of Infanticide in Antiquity," in *Sexual Asymmetry: Studies in Ancient Society,* ed. Josine Blok and Peter Mason (Amsterdam, 1987), pp. 87–107; Donald Engels, "The Problem of Female Infanticide in the Greco-Roman World," *Classical Philology* 75 (1980): 112–20; William V. Harris, "The Theoretical Possibility of Extensive Infanticide in the Graeco-Roman World," *Classical Quarterly* 32 (1982): 114–16. One wonders if this concern for newborn children relates to Brent Shaw's finding that Christian funerary inscriptions place great emphasis on descent, rather than ascent, within the nuclear family: parents dedicate inscriptions to their dead children with some frequency; see his "Latin Funerary Epigraphy and Family Life in the Later Roman Empire," *Historia* 33 (1984): esp. 472, 475–78, and also "The Cultural Meaning of Death," in *The Family in Italy from Antiquity to the Present,* ed. David I. Kertzer and Richard P. Saller, p. 76.

[107] Ambrose *De virginitate* 7.35 (*PL* 16.288); [Anonymous] *De castitate* 10.12, 13.1 (*PLS* 1.1487.1491–92); Jerome *Adversus Jovinianum* 1.36 (*PL* 23.271).

[108] [Anonymous] *De castitate* 14.2 (*PLS* 1.1495).

[109] [Anonymous] *De castitate* 11.1 (*PLS* 1.1489); Jovinian, in Jerome *Adversus Jovinianum* 1.5 (*PL* 23.225–28).

[110] Jovinian, in Jerome *Adversus Jovinianum* 1.34 (*PL* 23.268).

that marriage and childbearing were under the power of the devil.[111] Thus some voices from late ancient Christianity upheld the priority of marriage over against the ascetic onslaught; although they were "voices crying in the wilderness" amid the burgeoning production of proascetic texts in this period, the sentiments they uttered may well have reflected the views of the majority of "ordinary" Christians, who continued to marry and reproduce.

Indeed, some recent scholars have called our attention to the limitations on the success that ascetic propaganda enjoyed in late antiquity and have warned us not to magnify its influence. Michelle Salzman, writing about the Christianization of the Roman aristocracy, argues that the ascetic movement contributed very little to the process of Christianization: "asceticism was a dead-end in terms of conversion. By turning away from this world and denying the importance of creating or maintaining family ties, these women apparently minimized their impact on the conversion of their families."[112] David Hunter, in a series of articles and a forthcoming book on Jovinian, has collected important evidence regarding various Christian writers in late antiquity who were less than enthusiastic for the ascetic cause.[113] Nonetheless, we should not underestimate the impact of ascetic ideals among the higher aristocracy and the imperial families of the fourth century: fecundity rates, affected in part by the sexual renunciations of some of its members, were not high enough to sustain many of these families.[114]

What are we to make of the sharpness of the church fathers' ascetic rhetoric? I think that it stems in part from their ineffectiveness in bringing about swift societal change, from their inability to shift Roman law in the direction of a rigorous sexual morality. In their attempt to enforce a "single standard" of sexual morality for both men and women, or to prohibit divorce, they simply failed—at least for the time being.[115] The

[111] Julian of Eclanum *Ad Florum,* in Augustine *Opus imperfectum* 1.62, 2.24 (*CSEL* 85[1].58.177–79). For discussions of Julian's position, see Brown, *The Body and Society* (n. 77 above), pp. 408–19; Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York, 1988), chap. 6; and my "Vitiated Seeds and Holy Vessels: Augustine's Manichean Past," in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism,* ed. Karen L. King (Philadelphia, 1988), pp. 367–401.

[112] Michelle Renee Salzman, "Aristocratic Women: Conductors of Christianity in the Fourth Century," *Helios* 16 (1989): 217.

[113] David Hunter, "On the Sin of Adam and Eve: A Little-Known Defense of Marriage and Childbearing by Ambrosiaster," *Harvard Theological Review* 82 (1989): 283–99; and his forthcoming book on Jovinian.

[114] Etienne, "La demographie des familles impériales et sénatoriales au IV[e] siècle après J.-C." (n. 83 above), pp. 133–67, esp. pp. 138–42.

[115] For a good overview of the Christian attempt to change the law, and its limited success, see Gaudemet, "Tendances nouvelles de la legislation familiale au IV[e] siècle" (n. 60 above), pp. 187–207; and n. 118 below.

most they could do was to hold over their Christian audiences the threat that even if Roman law did not punish a man's sexual relation with any woman but his wife, God would.[116] "The laws of Caesar are different from those of Christ; Papinianus commands one thing, our own Paul another," Jerome intones.[117] Likewise, the ease of divorce under civil law was deeply disturbing to these writers,[118] as was the allowance of closer-kin marriage by secular authorities than some church fathers thought proper.[119] Given their failure to make either social norms or the law more rigorously ascetic, the best they could hope for was that young people who were not going to embrace the ascetic life would marry young and stay faithful to each other all their days.[120]

Yet this legal failure must be balanced with a fair assessment of the

[116] John Chrysostom *Hom. 5 1 Thess.* 2 (*PG* 62.425); Augustine *De adulterinis coniugis* 2.8.7 (*CSEL* 41.389–90); *Serm.* 392.3.3 (*PL* 39.1711). For an interesting argument that such strictures harmed Christian women by putting them at greater risk of multiple pregnancies, see Aline Rousselle, "Body Politics in Ancient Rome," in *A History of Women,* ed. P. S. Pantel (n. 60 above), p. 333.

[117] Jerome *Ep.* 77.2.3 (*CSEL* 55.39). For a running debate on whether any early church fathers countenanced remarriage for either party after divorce, see Pierre Nautin, "Divorce et remariage dans la tradition de l'église latine," *Recherches de Sciences Religieuses* 62 (1974): 7–54; and Henri Crouzel, "Les Pères de l'Eglise ont-ils permis le remariage après séparation?" "Remarriage after Divorce in the Primitive Church: A propos of a Recent Book," "Le remariage après séparation pour adultère selon les Pères latins," "Divorce et remariage dans l'Eglise primitive: Quelques réflexions de méthodologie historique," and "Un nouvel essai pour prouver l'acceptation des secondes noces après divorce dans l'Eglise primitive," all in Crouzel's *Mariage et divorce, célibat et caractère sacerdotaux dans l'église ancienne,* Etudes d'histoire du culte et des institutions chrétiennes 2 (Torino, 1982).

[118] Augustine *De bono conjugali* 7.7, 8.7 (*CSEL* 41.196–97); Jerome *Ep.* 54.3 (*CSEL* 54.39). On the Fathers' lack of success in influencing Imperial laws on divorce, see Antti Arjava, "Divorce in Later Roman Law," *Arctos: Acta Philologica Fennica* 22 (1988): 5–21; and Hans Julius Wolff, "Doctrinal Trends in Post-Classical Roman Marriage Law," *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte,* Romanistische Abteilung 67 (1950): esp. 268, 276, 278–79, 296–98, 311, 318–19; Dixon, *The Roman Family* (n. 7 above), p. 81; Mireille Corbier, "Divorce and Adoption as Roman Familial Strategies," in *Marriage, Divorce and Children in Ancient Rome,* ed. Beryl Rawson (n. 9 above), pp. 47–78; Treggiari, *Roman Marriage* (n. 14 above), pp. 319, 463–64; see also Roger S. Bagnall, "Church, State and Divorce in Late Roman Egypt," in *Florilegium Columbianum: Essays in Honor of P. O. Kristeller,* ed. K.-L. Selig and R. Somerville (New York, 1987), pp. 41–61. For a comprehensive view of the church fathers' opposition to divorce, see Henri Crouzel, *L'église primitive face au divorce du premier au cinquième siècle,* Théologie historique 13 (Paris, 1970); see also Jean Gaudemet, "L'interpretation du principe d'indissolubilité du mariage chrétien au cours du premier millénaire," in his *Sociétés et mariage* (n. 60 above), esp. pp. 230–56.

[119] Ambrose *Ep.* 59 (to Paternus) (*PL* 16.1234–37). On the subject, see Brent D. Shaw and Richard P. Saller, "Close-Kin Marriage in Roman Society," *Man* 19 (1984): 432–43.

[120] John Chrysostom *Hom. 59 Matt.* 7 (*PG* 58.583), *Hom. 5 1 Thess.* 3 (*PG* 62.426), *Hom. 1 Anna* 6 (*PG* 54.642), *De inani gloria et de educandis liberis* 81 (in Basileios K. Exarchos, ed., *Uber Hoffart und Kindererziehung* [Munich, 1955], pp. 82–83). Recall Au-

ascetic ideology's "success": thousands of Christians adopted the ascetic regime, diverting their energies and fortunes from families and secular pursuits to religious institutions and charities. Moreover, through the ascetic program, women were offered a mode of life other than that of domesticity and childbearing: they now had an option that carried with it benefits in the form of education, travel, and leadership. Older generations of historians tended to overlook both the contributions of ascetically minded women and the benefits that ascetic women might receive from their renunications. From a feminist perspective, the new opportunities for women that asceticism provided might prompt us to proclaim its "success": somewhat paradoxically, the propagandistic campaign waged by the church fathers that stood to benefit them also produced benefits for women willing to make the commitment to asceticism.

But are terms such as "success" and "failure" actually very helpful in assessing such evidence as provided by the texts I have been discussing, for do not "success" and "failure" suggest that there is some "reality" lying behind these texts that, given a few more archaeological or documentary discoveries, we might be able to measure without ambiguity? Rather, we have to admit that for the kinds of texts I have been discussing, even more than for other sorts of historical evidence, the literary remains are not a copy of some extraliterary domain of "the real."

On the most obvious level, the documents I have been citing were composed by males whose educational achievements allowed them to move in an extremely small circle of elites. Moreover, they were bishops and monastic leaders who stood to benefit from the renunciations of their "sheep": these writings, in other words, are not entirely disinterested. But more: the documents that constitute my evidence are ideological and rhetorical through and through. As a historian whose primary materials are constituted by texts such as these, I do not imagine that I am uncovering the "reality" of late ancient Christianity. My task, as I conceive it, is to push and jab at these documents to make them yield up their ideological content, to make manifest the ways in which their authors seek to present their highly constructed arguments as "natural" interpretations, obvious to all "rational" people. Although many patristics scholars still write as if they believed that they were getting at "the thing itself," I am more disposed to register Michel de Certeau's claim that historical reasoning lies not in the province of "science" but of "ethics."[121]

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gustine's regret that he had not been encouraged to marry and raise children, rather than taking a concubine (*Confessiones* 2.2.3 [*CCL* 27.18]).

[121] Michel de Certeau, "History: Science and Fiction," in his *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, 1986), p. 220.