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3 (x. 155) Deservedly, surely, [Mary Magdalene] is forbidden to touch the Lord, since we touch Christ not with bodily contact but with faith. 'For I have not yet ascended to my Father,'³⁵ He says; that is, 'I have not yet ascended for you, who seek the living among the dead.' Therefore she is sent to those who are stronger (by whose example let her learn to believe), in order that *they* may preach the Resurrection.

4 (156) Just as woman was the author of man's sin in the beginning, and he the follower in error, so now she who had previously tasted death had first sight of the Resurrection, and in turn was first in the remedy for sin. So as not to endure the opprobrium of man's perpetual blame, she transmitted grace too, and compensated for the misery of the original fall by her disclosure of the Resurrection. Through woman's mouth death had proceeded; through woman's mouth life was restored. (157) But since she is too inferior in steadfastness for preaching, and her sex is weaker in carrying things through, the evangelical role is assigned to men. . . .

Ambrose now compares Mary unfavourably with Stephen, who experienced a vision of Christ.

5 (160) Neither over the earth nor on the earth nor in a physical way should we look for You if we want to find You, for 'Henceforth we do not know Christ in a physical way.'³⁶ Accordingly, Stephen did not look for You on the earth when he saw You standing at the right hand of God,³⁷ whereas Mary, who sought on earth, could not touch. Stephen touched, who looked in heaven: in the very midst of the Jews he saw You when You were absent, whereas Mary in the midst of angels did not see You though You were present. The evangelist himself teaches us why she could not touch: it was because, when she saw You, she did not know who You were. . . .³⁸

6 (161) Then we have this: 'Jesus said to her, "Woman".' She is 'woman' to the extent that she does not believe, because a woman who believes hastens 'unto perfect manhood, unto the measure of the age of the fulness of Christ',³⁹ lacking then her temporal name, her bodily sex, the wantonness of youth, the garrulity of old age.

³⁵ John 20: 17.

³⁶ 2 Cor. 5: 16.

³⁷ Acts 7: 55.

³⁸ John 20: 14.

³⁹ Eph. 4: 13; discussed in the Introduction.

Hence Jesus says: 'Woman, what are you weeping about?'—as if He were saying, 'God does not require tears alone, but faith. The tears would be good, if you recognized Christ.' . . .

7 (165) So, what is the point of 'Do not touch me?'—'Do not apply your hand to great things beyond you, but go to my brothers' (that is, to those who are more perfect: 'For whosoever shall do the will of my Father, that is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother'⁴⁰), because the Resurrection cannot easily be grasped except by the more perfect. The prerogative is reserved for those who are more the foundation of this faith; but 'women I do not permit to teach' in church, 'let them ask their husbands at home'.⁴¹ Thus she is sent to those who are Christ's family, and she accepts the instructions given.

St JEROME (c. 342–420)

The Inferiority of Marriage; and the Distraction of Women

FROM *AGAINST JOVINIAN** (*ADVERSUS JOVINIANUM*:
C. 393)

Jerome was a figure of great authority in the Middle Ages, revered for having produced the Vulgate or 'standard' translation of the Bible from Hebrew into Latin. In his lifetime, however, he was a controversial figure, a champion of radical asceticism at Rome who inevitably provoked resentment with his sarcastic polemic. In particular, he alarmed fellow-Christians by his vigorous extension of arguments current in Ambrose and other Fathers, propounding the superiority of virginity over marriage. The backbone of this position was already laid out in Chapters 22–3 of a treatise *Against Helvidius* (AD 383).

Although Jerome had to leave Rome for the East under a cloud of censure in 385, his friend Pammachius contacted him some eight years later on behalf of ascetic sympathizers in the capital when they were disturbed by the teachings of a monk named Jovinian. The four points which incensed Jerome in the 'nauseating trash' of this 'Epicurus of Christianity'⁴² were: (i) that baptized Christians can attain equal spiritual merit whether married, single, or widowed; (ii) that sincere, baptized Christians cannot be overcome by the devil; (iii) that a life of fasting is not more deserving than the grateful acceptance of food and drink; and (iv) that the baptized faithful will receive undifferentiated reward in heaven. Jovinian's appears to have been a serious position based on 'a high estimate of baptismal regeneration', but it resulted

⁴⁰ Matt. 12: 50.

⁴¹ 1 Tim. 2: 12, and 1 Cor. 14: 35.

* Tr. W. H. Fremantle, *The Principal Works of St Jerome*, Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vi (Oxford: James Parker & Co.; and New York: Christian Literature Co., 1893), 346–416; rev. by C. W. Marx. Latin text in *PL* 23.221–352.

⁴² *Ag. Jov.* i. 4, i. 1

in his excommunication.⁴³ Meanwhile Jerome was scandalized by the notion of putting sexual abstinence spiritually on a par with marriage, and relished an opportunity to pulverize all his opponent's propositions, especially the first, in his *Against Jovinian*. The treatise went too far and was counter-productive, prompting Augustine to write pointedly on *The Good of Marriage*, while Pammachius even tried to stop copies circulating.

As it turned out, Jerome had the last laugh. Thanks to the eye-catching witticisms his treatise incorporated from classical sources, and above all thanks to the inclusion of a memorably vehement antifeminist passage arguing that the wise man must not marry, which he attributed to Theophrastus, his piece was endlessly quarried by subsequent writers.⁴⁴ Theophrastus (c.372–288) was an important pagan philosopher who took on the mantle of Aristotle. The *Book on Marriage* (*Liber de nuptiis*) from which Jerome says he is quoting is otherwise unknown, so the attribution remains uncertain, as does Jerome's immediate source for the passage—which could have been a lost work by Seneca or Tertullian. Anyway it seemed valuable evidence that celibacy was not a modern Christian invention, and the Theophrastan excerpt later exerted a phenomenal influence on the evolution of misogyny once it was put into circulation by writers such as Abelard (in *Theologia Christiana* II. 94–106, c.1124), and John of Salisbury (*Policraticus* VIII. II, c.1159).

In the first six chapters of *Against Jovinian* Jerome identifies the relative status of marriage and virginity as a key issue, and, while carefully denying that he discredits marriage, ranks it third after virginity and widowhood in its spiritual 'yield'. Finding that his opponent resorts to 1 Corinthians 7 among other scriptural evidence, he grounds his counter-attack on interpretation of the same text.

I (I. 7) . . . Let us turn to the main point of the evidence: 'It is good', St Paul says, 'for a man not to touch a woman.'⁴⁵ If it is good not to touch a woman, it is bad to touch one: for there is no opposite to goodness but badness. If however it is bad and the evil is pardoned, it is for this reason that the allowance is made, namely to prevent a worse evil. But surely, a thing which is only allowed because there may be something worse has only a slight degree of goodness. He would never have added 'let each man have his own wife', unless he had previously used the words 'to avoid fornication'. Do away with fornication, and he will not say 'let each man have his own wife'. Just as though one were to lay it down: 'It is good to feed on wheaten bread, and to eat the finest wheat flour' and yet, to prevent a person pressed by hunger from devouring cow-dung, I may allow him to eat barley. Does it follow that the wheat will not have its peculiar purity, if barley is preferred to excrement? That is naturally good which does

⁴³ Kelly 1975, 181–2.

⁴⁴ Delhay 1951; Schmitt 1971.

⁴⁵ 1 Cor. 7: 1

not admit of comparison with what is bad, and is not eclipsed because something else is preferred.⁴⁶

2 At the same time, we must take note of the Apostle's good sense. He did not say, 'it is good not to have a wife', but, 'it is good not to touch a woman': as though there were danger even in the touch; as though he who touched her would not escape from her who 'hunts for the precious life,' who causes the young man's judgement to fly away.⁴⁷ 'Who can hold fire firmly to his chest and not be burnt or can walk upon burning coals and not be scorched?'⁴⁸ Just as he who touches fire is instantly burned, so by mere touch the peculiar nature of man and woman is perceived, and the difference of sex is understood. Heathen fables relate how Mithras and Erichthonius were begotten of the soil, in stone or earth, by raging lust.⁴⁹ Hence it was that our Joseph, because the Egyptian woman wished to touch him, fled from her hands, and, as if he had been bitten by a mad dog and feared the spreading poison, threw away the cloak which she had touched.⁵⁰

3 'Do not refuse each other except by consent for a period of time so that you may devote yourselves to prayer.'⁵¹ I ask you, what kind of good thing is that which impedes prayer? Which does not allow the body of Christ to be received? So long as I do the husband's part, I fail in continency. The same Apostle in another place commands us to pray always. If we are to pray always, it follows that we must never be in the bondage of wedlock, for as often as I render my wife her due, I cannot pray.⁵²

Jerome goes on to underline Paul's representation of marriage as an optional concession.

⁴⁶ Jerome draws on Tertullian (e.g. *De exhortatione castitatis* 3–4) and on Ambrose (*On Widows* 13), with lurid addition of cow-dung.

⁴⁷ Prov. 6: 26.

⁴⁸ Prov. 6: 27–8.

⁴⁹ Mithras was a Persian sun-god adopted by Romans, Erichthonius a mythical king of Athens supposedly conceived when Hephaestus' semen fell on the earth as he struggled to rape Athena.

⁵⁰ Joseph repulsed the advances of Potiphar's wife, pulling himself from her grasp so that she tore his clothes; later she alleged attempted rape (Gen. 39: 7 ff.).

⁵¹ i.e. refuse the reciprocal 'debt' of sexual gratification (1 Cor. 7: 4, and cf. Ch. 3, Gratian 2; and Ch. 7, *WoB* 9).

⁵² Jerome expected that husbands would 'swell with rage' at this view of marriage and sex as an impediment to prayer (Letter 48: 15; Fremantle 1893, 75), but he was committed to it.

4 (I. 9) Then come the words, 'But I say to the unmarried and to widows, it is good for them if they so continue even as I. But if they do not contain themselves, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to be burnt.'⁵³ Having conceded to married persons the enjoyment of wedlock and pointed out his own wishes or what he might allow, he passes on to the unmarried and to widows, sets before them his own practice for imitation, and calls them happy if they so continue. 'But if they do not contain themselves, let them marry', just as he said before, 'to avoid fornication', and 'Lest Satan tempt you, because of your incontinency'. And he gives a reason for saying 'If they do not contain themselves, let them marry', namely, 'It is better to marry than to be burnt.' The reason why it is better to marry is that it is worse to burn. Destroy burning lust and he will not say it is better to marry. The word *better* always implies a comparison with something worse, not a thing absolutely good and incapable of comparison. It is as though he said, 'it is better to have one eye than neither, it is better to stand on one foot and to support the rest of the body with a stick, than to crawl with broken legs'.

Jerome elaborates his interpretation with reference to 1 Corinthians 7: 10–24, then qualifies Paul's admission that virginity lacks the prescriptive backing of Christ.

5 (I. 12) Christ loves virgins more than others, because they willingly give what was not commanded them. And it indicates greater grace to offer what you are not bound to give, than to render what is exacted of you. The Apostles, contemplating the burden of a wife, exclaimed, 'If such is the condition of a man with a wife, it is not advantageous to marry.'⁵⁴ Our Lord thought well of their view. 'You rightly think', He said, 'that it may not be advantageous for a man who is striving for the kingdom of heaven to take a wife: but it is a hard matter, and all men do not receive the saying, but only they to whom it has been given. Some are eunuchs by nature, others by the violence of men. Those eunuchs please me who are such not of necessity, but of free choice. Willingly do I take them into my bosom who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake, and in order to worship me have renounced the condition of their birth.'

⁵³ 1 Cor. 7: 8–9, translating the passive verb (*uri*) in the Vulgate.

⁵⁴ Matt. 19: 10 ff.

Jovinian's Old Testament exemplars of marriage are critically scrutinized. Then his observation that some of the Apostles had wives is answered in the claim that they seem to have left them to follow Christ. As for women being 'saved through childbearing' (1 Timothy 2: 10), this means that she can make up for the loss of her own virginity if she produces children who then remain virgins. Jerome now returns to an Old Testament witness; Solomon, author of Proverbs.

6 (I. 28) Let us show what this Solomon with his many wives and concubines thought of marriage. For no one can know better than he, who suffered through them, what a wife or woman is. Well, then, he says in the Proverbs: 'The foolish and bold woman comes to want bread.'⁵⁵ What bread? Surely, that bread which comes down from heaven: and he immediately adds: 'The earth-born perish in her house, rush into the depths of hell.'⁵⁶ Who are the earth-born that perish in her house? They of course who follow the first Adam, who is of the earth, and not the second, who is from heaven. And again in another place: 'Like a worm in wood, so a wicked woman destroys her husband.'⁵⁷ But if you assert that this was spoken of bad wives, I shall briefly answer: Why should I be obliged to run the risk of the wife I marry proving good or bad? 'It is better', he says, 'to dwell in a desert land, than with a contentious and irritable woman.'⁵⁸ How seldom we find a wife without these faults, he knows who is married. Hence that nobly sublime orator, Varius Geminus, says well 'The man who does not quarrel is a bachelor.'⁵⁹

7 'It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than with a contentious woman in a shared house.'⁶⁰ If a house common to husband and wife makes a wife proud and breeds contempt for the husband, how much more if the wife is the richer of the two, and the husband only a lodger in her house! She begins to be not a wife, but mistress of the house; and if she offends her husband, they must part. 'A continual dripping of water on a wintry day'⁶¹ turns a man out of doors, and so will a contentious woman drive a man from his own house. She floods his house with her constant nagging and daily chatter, and ousts him from his own home, that is the Church. Hence the same Solomon earlier commands: 'My son, may you not drift

⁵⁵ Prov. 9: 13 (minus the reference to bread).

⁵⁶ Prov. 9: 18.

⁵⁷ Prov. 25: 20 (but Jerome has switched the gender).

⁵⁸ Prov. 21: 19.

⁵⁹ Epigrammatist often quoted by Seneca.

⁶⁰ Prov. 21: 9, 25: 24.

⁶¹ Prov. 27: 15.

away [from the Church].'⁶² And the Apostle, writing to the Hebrews, says: 'Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things spoken, lest perhaps we drift away.'⁶³

8 Who may resist explaining what is expressed allegorically? 'The leech had three daughters, dearly loved, but they could not be satisfied, and a fourth is not satisfied to say "it is enough"; hell, the love of a woman, the earth which is not satisfied with water, and fire do not say "it is enough".'⁶⁴ The leech is the devil; the daughters of the devil are dearly loved, and they cannot be satisfied with the blood of their slain—hell, and woman's love, and the parched earth and the glowing fire. It is not the whore, or the adulteress, who is spoken of; but woman's love in general is accused of ever being insatiable—put it out, it bursts into flame; give it plenty, it is again in need; it deprives a man's mind of its vigour, and engrosses all thought except for the passion which it feeds. What we read in the parable which follows is to the same effect: 'For three things the earth trembles; indeed, there are four things which it cannot bear: if a servant becomes king; if a fool is filled with bread; if a hateful woman has a good husband; and if a female servant supplants her mistress.'⁶⁵ See how a wife is classed with the greatest evils. But if you reply that it is a *hateful* wife, I will give you the same answer as before—the mere possibility of such danger is in itself no light matter. For he who marries a wife is uncertain whether he is marrying a hateful woman or one worthy of his love. If she be hateful, she is intolerable. If worthy of love, her love is compared to the grave, to the parched earth, and to fire.

After citing Ecclesiastes, Jerome expounds the Song of Songs as a hymn to virginity; surveys the prophets of the virgin birth; protests that baptism cannot level virgins with prostitutes; argues that priestly office is not properly compatible with marriage and its sexual functions; asserts that continence is not an unnatural curb on the sex drive and is unlikely to halt generation; and collects scriptural texts elevating the spiritual over the fleshly. Then, in refutation of Jovinian's allegation that virginity is a Christian novelty, he catalogues examples testifying to pre-Christian respect for virginity, then for monogamy.

9 (I. 43) I will proceed to married women who were reluctant to survive the decease or violent death of their husbands for fear they might be forced into a second marriage, and who entertained a

⁶² Prov. 3: 21. ⁶³ Heb. 2: 1. ⁶⁴ Prov. 30: 15–16. ⁶⁵ Prov. 30: 21–3.

marvellous affection for the only husbands they had. This may teach us that second marriage was repudiated among the heathen. Dido, the sister of Pygmalion, having collected a vast amount of gold and silver, sailed to Africa, and there built Carthage. And when her hand was sought in marriage by Iarbas, king of Libya, she deferred the marriage for a while until she might complete the city. Not long after, having raised a funeral pyre to the memory of her former husband Sichaeus, she preferred to 'burn rather than to marry'.⁶⁶

10 (I. 44) What need to tell of the wife of Niceratus, who unable to bear any wrong to her husband, inflicted death upon herself rather than subject herself to the lust of the thirty tyrants whom Lysander had set over conquered Athens?⁶⁷ Artemisia also, wife of Mausolus, is related to have been distinguished for chastity. Though she was queen of Caria, and is extolled by great poets and historians, no higher praise is bestowed upon her than that when her husband was dead she loved him as much as when he was alive, and built a tomb so great that even to the present day all costly sepulchres are called after his name, *mausoleums*.⁶⁸

Next Jerome turns to Roman examples, Lucretia and others.

11 (I. 46) . . . Marcia, Cato's younger daughter, when asked after the loss of her husband why she did not marry again, replied that she could not find a man who wanted her more than her money. Her words teach us that men in choosing their wives look for wealth rather than chastity, and that many in marrying use not their eyes but their fingers. That *must* be an excellent thing which is won by avarice! When the same lady was mourning the loss of her husband, and the matrons asked what day would see the end of her grief, she replied, 'The same that sees the end of my life.' I think that the one who continued to desire her husband after his death had no thought of marrying again. Porcia, whom Brutus took as wife, was a virgin; . . . Porcia could not live without Brutus, for women attach themselves closely to particular men, and to keep to one is a strong link in the chain of affection. When a relative urged Annia to marry again

⁶⁶ Jerome borrows from Tert., *De exhortatione castitatis*, 13, this pre-Virgilian narrative of Dido, as well as the witty inversion of 1 Cor. 7: 9.

⁶⁷ Niceratus was son of an Athenian leader who had died before the Spartan, Lysander, supported the rule of the Thirty Tyrants after defeating Athens, 404 BC.

⁶⁸ The celebrated tomb of King Mausolus (d. 353 BC), built by Pythius, not by his widow (who was also his sister) Artemisia.

(she was mature and a goodly person), she answered: 'I shall certainly not do so. For if I find a good man I have no wish to be in fear of losing him: if a bad one, why must I put up with a bad husband after having had a good one?'

Theophrastus on Marriage

Jerome admits that his catalogue of chaste women has been protracted, but, introducing the 'Theophrastus' excerpt, protests:

12 (I. 47) What am I to do when the women of our time press me with apostolic authority, and before the first husband is buried, repeat over and over again from memory the precepts which allow a second marriage? May those who despise the faithfulness of Christian purity at least learn chastity from the heathen. The Book of Theophrastus on marriage is said to be worth its weight in gold.⁶⁹ In it the author asks whether the wise man marries. And after laying down the conditions—that the wife must be fair, of good character, and honest parentage, the husband in good health and of ample means—and after saying that under these circumstances a wise man sometimes enters the state of matrimony, he immediately proceeds thus: 'But all these conditions are seldom satisfied in marriage. A wise man therefore must not take a wife. For in the first place his study of philosophy will be hindered, and it is impossible for anyone to attend to his books and his wife at the same time. Married women want many things, costly dresses, gold, jewels, expensive items, maidservants, all kinds of furniture, litters and gilded coaches. Then come prattling complaints all the night:⁷⁰ that one lady goes out better dressed than she; that another is looked up to by all. "I am a poor despised nobody at women's gatherings." "Why did you ogle that creature next door?" "Why were you talking to the maid?" "What did you bring from the market?" We are not allowed to have a single friend or companion; her husband's friendship going elsewhere would entail his hate for her, she suspects. There may be in some neighbouring city the wisest of teachers; but if we have a wife we can neither leave her behind, nor take the burden with us.

13 "To support a poor wife is hard: to put up with a rich one is torture. Notice too that in the case of a wife you cannot pick and

⁶⁹ Or, 'the brilliant book', or, *The Golden Book*: the status of the adjective *aureolus* is unclear.

⁷⁰ Cf. Ch. I, Juv. 6.

choose: you must take her as you find her. If she has a bad temper or is a fool, if she has a blemish or is proud, or has bad breath, whatever her fault may be—all this we learn after marriage. Horses, asses, cattle, dogs, even slaves of the smallest worth, clothes, kettles, wooden seats, cups, and earthenware pitchers, are first tried and then bought: a wife is the only thing that is not shown before she is married, for fear she may not give satisfaction.

14 'Our gaze must always be directed to her face, and we must always praise her beauty: if you look at another woman, she thinks that she is out of favour. She must be called "My lady", her birthday must be kept, we must swear by her health and wish that she may survive us; respect must be paid to the nurse, to the gossip, to the father's slave, to the foster-child, to the handsome hanger-on, to the effeminate steward who manages her affairs, and to the eunuch who ministers to the safe indulgence of her lust; names which are only a cloak for adultery.⁷¹ Whatever people she sets her heart on, you must love too whether you like it or not.⁷²

15 'If you give her the management of the whole house, you are reduced to being her servant. If you reserve some control for yourself, she will not think you are loyal to her; but she will turn to strife and hatred, and unless you quickly take care, she will have the poison ready. If you admit to the house old women, and soothsayers, and prophets, and vendors of jewels and silk clothing, you "imperil her chastity"; if you shut the door on them, she is injured and fancies you suspect her. But what is the good of even a careful guardian, when an unchaste wife cannot be watched, and a chaste one ought not to be?⁷³ For compulsion is an unreliable keeper of chastity, and a woman only deserves to be called "chaste" who is free to sin if she chooses. If a woman is beautiful, she is soon desired; if she is ugly, she is soon stirred to lust. It is difficult to guard what many long for; it is annoying to have what no one thinks worth possessing. But the misery of having an ugly wife is less than that of watching over a beautiful one. Nothing is safe, for which a whole population sighs and longs. One man entices with his figure, another with his mind, another with his wit, another with his presents. Somehow, or sometime, a fortress is captured which is attacked on all sides.

⁷¹ Cf. Juv. *Satire* VI, 014-029, for suspicions about attendant 'eunuchs'.

⁷² Cf. Ovid, *Art of Love* II. 198-202.

⁷³ On the futility of 'guarding' cf. Ch. I, Ovid 4.

16 'Men marry so as to get someone to run the household, to comfort them when they are low, and to banish loneliness; but a faithful servant makes a far better manager, more obedient to the master, more observant of his ways, than a wife who thinks she proves herself mistress if she acts in opposition to her husband, that is, if she does what pleases her, not what she is told. But friends, and servants who are under the obligation of favours received, are better able to wait upon us in sickness than a wife, who makes us liable for her tears (and will shed a flood in anticipation of being the heir); and whose ostentatious anxiety drives her sick husband to the distraction of despair. But if she herself is poorly, we must fall sick with her and never leave her bedside. Or, if she be a good and agreeable wife (how rare a bird she is!⁷⁴), we have to share her groans in childbirth, and suffer torture when she is in danger.

17 'The truly wise man can never be alone. He has with him the good men of all time, and turns his mind freely wherever he chooses. What is inaccessible to him in person he can embrace in thought. And, if men are scarce, he converses with God. He is never less alone than when alone.

18 'Then again, to marry for the sake of having children, so that our name may not perish, or that we may have support in old age, and leave our property without dispute, is the height of stupidity.⁷⁵ For what is it to us when we are leaving the world if another bears our name, when even a son does not necessarily take his father's title, and there are countless others who are called by the same name? Or what support in old age is he whom you bring up, and who may die before you, or turn out to be a lout? Or at all events, when he reaches mature age, you may seem to him to die too slowly. Friends and relatives whom you can judiciously love are better and safer heirs than those whom you must make your heirs whether you like it or not. Indeed, the surest way of having a good heir is to ruin your fortune in a good cause while you live, not to leave the fruit of your labour to be used you know not how.'

19 (1. 48) When Theophrastus speaks like this, are there any of us Christians, whose inclination is for heaven and who daily say 'I long to be dissolved, and to be with Christ',⁷⁶ whom he does not

⁷⁴ Cf. Ch. I, Juv. 4.

⁷⁵ Continuing from 16 the conventional ancient catalogue of 'reasons for marrying'.

⁷⁶ Phil. 1: 23.

embarrass? Shall a co-heir of Christ really long for human heirs? And shall he desire children and delight himself in a long line of descendants, who will perhaps fall into the clutches of Antichrist, when we read that Moses and Samuel preferred others to their own sons, and did not count as their children those whom they saw displeasing God?

20 When Cicero after divorcing Terentia was requested by Hirtius to marry his sister, he put the matter altogether aside, and said that he could not possibly devote himself to a wife and to philosophy.⁷⁷ . . . Socrates had two wives, Xanthippe and Myron, granddaughter of Aristides. They frequently quarrelled, and he used to mock them for disagreeing over a man so ugly as himself, with snub nose, bald forehead, rough-haired, and bandy-legged. At last they planned an attack upon him, and having punished him severely and put him to flight, plagued him for a long time. On one occasion when he opposed Xanthippe, who was heaping abuse upon him from above; she doused him with dirty water, but he only wiped his head and said, 'I knew thunder like that was bound to be followed by a shower.'

From this flows a succession of criticisms of wives in Roman culture, of which the following are examples.

21 We read of a certain Roman noble who, when his friends found fault with him for having divorced a beautiful, chaste, and rich wife, stretched out his foot and said to them, 'And the shoe before you looks new and elegant, yet no one but myself knows where it pinches.' Herodotus tells us that a woman takes off her modesty with her clothes;⁷⁸ and our own comic poet [Terence] thinks the man fortunate who has never been married.⁷⁹ Do I need to refer to Pasiphaë, Clytemnestra, and Eriphyle, the first of whom—the wife of a king and ruining herself in pleasure—is said to have lusted for a bull, the second to have killed her husband for the sake of an adulterer, the third to have betrayed Amphiaras, and to have preferred a gold necklace to the well-being of her husband?⁸⁰ In all

⁷⁷ Despite Cicero's witty reply to his neighbour, he did remarry.

⁷⁸ This is the answer given in Herodotus, *Histories* 1. 8, when a king suggests to his subject that he should judge the incomparable beauty of the queen by seeing her naked.

⁷⁹ Terence, *Hecyra* II. 1.4.

⁸⁰ Ancient epitomes of womanly vice: see Ch. 1, Ovid 1 (Pasiphaë and Clytemnestra) and 7 (Eriphyle).

the bombast of tragedy and the overthrow of houses, cities, and kingdoms, it is the wives and mistresses who stir up trouble. Parents take up arms against their children; unspeakable banquets are served; and on account of the rape of one foolish woman Europe and Asia are involved in a ten years' war.⁸¹

22 (I. 49) Aristotle and Plutarch and our Seneca have written treatises on marriage, from which we have already given some extracts and now add a few more. The love of beauty buries reason and is close neighbour of madness; a foul blot little in keeping with a sound mind.⁸² It confuses counsel, breaks high and generous spirits, drags men away from great thoughts to mean ones; it makes men peevish, angry, foolhardy, cruelly overbearing, servile flatterers, good for nothing, at last not even for love itself. For, although in the intensity of passion it burns like a raging fire, it wastes much time through suspicions, tears, and complaints: it begets hatred of oneself, and at last hates itself.

Woman and Sexual Temptation; and the Era of Female Virginity

FROM LETTER 22, TO EUSTOCHIUM* (384)

Jerome is writing a letter of advice to his friend Paula's daughter, Eustochium, who has committed herself to a life of virginity. Reflections on the need for unremitting vigilance against desire prompt a disclosure of the way his own contemplations in the desert have been threatened by fantasies of nubile girls.

23 (VII) When I was living in the desert, that vast solitude which is parched by the burning sun and affords a savage home for hermits, how often I fantasized that I was among the pleasures of Rome! I used to sit alone because I was filled with bitterness. Sackcloth disfigured my unshapely limbs and through long neglect my skin had become as black as an Ethiopian's. Tears and groans were my daily routine; and whenever drowsiness overcame my struggles against it, I bruised my bare bones, which hardly held together, against the ground. . . . Now, although in my fear of hell I had consigned myself to this prison, where I had no companions but scorpions and wild beasts, I often found myself surrounded by

⁸¹ Alluding to the abduction of Helen by Paris, source of the Trojan War.

⁸² In *Ag. Jov.* II. 8-9 Jerome returns to the 'insanity' of sexual desire and the philosopher's need to avoid it through seclusion.

* Tr. W. H. Fremantle, *Principal Writings of Jerome*, 22-41 (24-5, 26, 30), revised by Alcuin Blamires. Latin text in Jerome 1933.

dancing girls! My face was pale from fasting, my body was ice-cold: yet my mind was burning with desire, and the fires of lust kept boiling up within me when my flesh (before its tenant) was as good as dead.

Citing Job's characterization of the devil—'His strength is in his loins, and his power in his navel'⁸³—Jerome demonstrates the devil's power through 'the loins' in what was to be a classic sequence of scriptural examples.

24 (XII) Do you wish for proof of my assertions? Samson was braver than a lion and tougher than rock. Alone and unprotected he pursued a thousand armed men; and yet, in Delilah's embrace, his resolution melted away.⁸⁴ David was a man after God's own heart,⁸⁵ and his lips had often sung of the holy one, the future Christ, yet as he walked upon the roof of his house he was fascinated by Bathsheba's naked beauty, and added murder to adultery.⁸⁶ Notice here how, even in his own house, a man cannot use his eyes without danger. Then, repenting, he says to the Lord: 'Against thee, thee only, have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight.'⁸⁷ Being a king he feared no one else. So, too, with Solomon. Through him Wisdom spoke, discoursing on plants 'from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even to the hyssop that springeth out of the wall'.⁸⁸ Yet he went back from God because he was a lover of women.⁸⁹ And, as if to show that near relationship is no safeguard, Amnon burned with illicit passion for his sister Tamar.⁹⁰

Jerome argues that, whereas under the Old Law celibacy was confined to 'sons of prophets', the transition from Eve to Mary has inaugurated a glorious new era of female virginity.

⁸³ Job 40: II.

⁸⁴ Judg. 15-16. Among other exploits, Samson slew a thousand Philistines with an ass's jaw-bone and escaped an ambush in the city of Gaza by hoisting the city gates from their mountings. But when he fell in love with Delilah, the Philistines bribed her to wheedle out of him the key to his strength—his uncut hair. It was shaved while he was asleep 'in her bosom', so Samson was finally imprisoned and blinded, only to wreak destruction upon his enemies when his hair grew again, by convulsing the pillars of the building where he was brought to entertain them.

⁸⁵ 1 Kgs. 13: 14.

⁸⁶ 2 Kgs. 11: 2-27. See Ch. I, Scripture 4.

⁸⁷ Psalm 51: 4.

⁸⁸ 3 Kgs 4: 33.

⁸⁹ 3 Kgs. 11: 1-10 gives an account of Solomon's love of foreign women, who turned him towards the worship of 'strange Gods', angering the God of Israel.

⁹⁰ 2 Kgs. 13.

25 (xxi) The virtue of continence used to be found only in men, and Eve went on sustaining the labour-pains of childbirth. But now that a virgin has conceived in the womb and borne for us a child of which the prophet says that 'Government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called the mighty God, and everlasting Father',⁹¹ the chain of the curse is broken. Death came through Eve, but life has come through Mary. And thus the gift of virginity has been bestowed most richly upon women, seeing that it has had its beginning from a woman. As soon as the Son of God set foot upon earth, He formed a new household for Himself there, so that, just as He was adored by angels in heaven, angels might also serve Him on earth.

Objection to the Sexual Double Standard

FROM LETTER 77, TO OCEANUS* (399)

In this eulogy of his protégé Fabiola, Jerome had to confront the harshness of the doctrine that a woman must not remarry if separated from her first husband, whether on grounds of adultery, sodomy, or worse.⁹² While upholding the doctrine (transgressed by Fabiola, who later enacted public penance in order to be received back into the Church), Jerome protests against society for condoning in husbands what it censures in wives.

26 (III) Because at the very outset there is a rock in the path and she is overwhelmed by a storm of censure for having abandoned her first husband and taken a second, I will not praise her for her conversion till I have first cleared her of this charge. So terrible were the vices imputed to her former husband that not even a prostitute or a common slave could have put up with them. If I were to recount them, I should spoil the heroism of a wife who chose to bear the blame of a separation rather than to blacken the character and expose the stains of the man who was one body with her. I will only urge this one plea which is sufficient to exonerate a chaste matron and a Christian woman. The Lord has given a commandment that a wife must not be put away 'except it be for fornication, and that, if put away, she must remain unmarried'.⁹³ Now a commandment which is given to men logically applies to women also. For it cannot be that, while an adulterous wife is to be put away, an unfaithful

⁹¹ Isa. 9: 6.

* Tr. W. H. Fremantle, *Principal Works of Jerome*, 157-63 (158). Latin text in Jerome 1933.

⁹² Further discussed in Letter 55.3.

⁹³ Matt. 19: 9; 1 Cor. 7: 11.

husband is to be retained. The Apostle says: 'he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her'.⁹⁴ Therefore she who is joined to a filthy fornicator is one body with him, too. It is true, the laws of Caesar are different from the laws of Christ: Papinianus⁹⁵ commands one thing, our own St Paul another. Earthly laws give a free rein to the promiscuity of men, merely condemning seduction and adultery; lust is allowed to range unrestrained among brothels and slave girls, as if the guilt were constituted by the rank of the person assailed and not by the purpose of the assailant. But with us Christians what is unlawful for women is equally unlawful for men, and as both serve the same God, both are bound by the same obligations.⁹⁶

St AUGUSTINE (354-430)

The influence of St Augustine's teaching in western Christendom was enormous for well over a thousand years. He was by no means a fanatical ascetic, since he wrote constructively on marriage and strongly defended the inherent good of the physical human body against the Manichaeans. Nevertheless, he was appalled by the uncontrollability, or 'insubordination', of sexual arousal, something visited upon humanity with a kind of poetic justice immediately after the Fall, he thought.⁹⁷ Before his own conversion Augustine had a common-law wife for years, though she had to be sent away when his mother planned (futilely, it turned out) a marriage for him. After his conversion he claimed that the recollection of sexual desire now horrified him, and that he had ruled out marriage because a man's mind is 'cast out of its citadel' by 'female blandishments and intimate contact'.⁹⁸ Possibly his ideas on sexuality were coloured by his own life as one 'who never married and whose experience of sexual pleasure was illicit and guilt-provoking'.⁹⁹

Augustine's specific doctrines on women were relatively more neutral and sophisticated than those of some of the Fathers, even though he envisaged for her a secondary ranking in the simple hierarchy, the 'natural order observed among men, that women should serve men, and children their parents, because it is just that the weaker mind should serve the stronger'.¹⁰⁰ Among other aspects, he was concerned with fine-tuning the debate as to whether woman was or wasn't 'in God's image'—both at once, in his

⁹⁴ 1 Cor. 6: 16.

⁹⁵ A reputable Roman jurist.

⁹⁶ Resistance to the 'double standard' can also be found in Chrysostom, *Homily 5 on 1 Thessalonians* and *Homily 19 on 1 Corinthians* (Clark 1983, 73-6); in Augustine's *On Adulterous Marriages* (Huegelmeier 1955, 108-9) and in his sermon *De decem cordis*, recapitulated in *Dives and Pauper* (see Ch. 8). Further discussion in Ch. 4, Andreas 1; Ch. 8, S. *Passion* 2; and Ch. 9, *City* 14.

⁹⁷ Pagels 1990, 110-12, 140-1; and Brown 1988, 406-8, 416-19.

⁹⁸ *Soliloquies* i. 10.17, in Augustine 1953, 33-4.

⁹⁹ Pagels 1990, 141. Such views are challenged in Truax 1990.

¹⁰⁰ See Ch. 3 below, Gratian 3.

opinion, thanks to a subtle conception of her as, under her physical aspect, symbolizing (without quite *constituting*) an inferior, sense-oriented dimension of humankind.¹⁰¹ His attitude to Eve was not shrill, but insidiously condescending nevertheless in the underlying opinion that Adam cannot seriously have shared her credulity in the face of the serpent's claims. On the other hand, he staunchly affirmed the bodily resurrection of woman as woman. Moreover, he strongly endorsed the objections of predecessors such as Chrysostom and Jerome to the 'double standard' whereby husbands claimed a sexual licence which they would not dream of allowing to their wives.¹⁰² The catch was that he based his objection on the 'superior' male's obligation to set a good example to the 'weaker' sex. Nevertheless, his strictures against male hypocrisy made him a useful ally in the defence of women throughout the Middle Ages, as is demonstrated by the full report of his argument in *Dives and Pauper* (Chapter 8).

Hierarchy of Man and Woman in Creation

FROM *CONFESSIONS** (*CONFESSIONES*: AD 398)

Near the end of the book comes a hymn of thanks for the created world.

1 (XIII. 32) And finally we see man, made in your image and likeness, ruling over all the irrational animals for the very reason that he was made in your image and resembles you, that is, because he has the power of reason and understanding. And just as in man's soul there are two forces, one which is dominant because it deliberates and one which obeys because it is subject to such guidance, in the same way, in the physical sense, woman has been made for man. In her mind and in her rational intelligence she has a nature the equal of man's, but in sex she is physically subject to him in the same way as our natural impulses need to be subjected to the reasoning power of the mind, in order that the actions to which they lead may be inspired by the principles of good conduct.

¹⁰¹ See Borresen 1981, 21–30; and Augustine, *De Trinitate* XII.

¹⁰² See Jerome 26 and n. above.

* Tr. R. S. Pine-Coffin, *Saint Augustine: Confessions* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), 344. © R. S. Pine-Coffin, 1961. Reprinted by permission of Penguin Books Ltd. Latin text in *PL* 32.659–868.

Eve as 'Helper'; Her Role in the Fall

FROM *THE LITERAL MEANING OF GENESIS** (*DE GENESI AD LITTERAM*: 401–16)

2 (IX. 5) Now, if the woman was not made for the man to be his helper in begetting children, in what was she to help him? She was not to till the earth with him, for there was not yet any toil to make help necessary. If there were any such need, a male helper would be better, and the same could be said of the comfort of another's presence if Adam were perhaps weary of solitude. How much more agreeably could two male friends, rather than a man and woman, enjoy companionship and conversation in a life shared together. And if they had to make an arrangement in their common life for one to command and the other to obey in order to make sure that opposing wills would not disrupt the peace of the household, there would have been proper rank to assure this, since one would be created first and the other second, and this would be further reinforced if the second were made from the first, as was the case with the woman. Surely no one will say that God was able to make from the rib of the man only a woman and not also a man if He had wished to do so. Consequently, I do not see in what sense the woman was made as a helper for the man if not for the sake of bearing children.

In subsequent discussion of the Fall, Augustine suggests that Eve's explicit consciousness of the prohibition made her transgression the more inexcusable. He also argues that she would not have been swayed by the serpent's temptation had there not already been some streak of presumption in her. Her punishment prompts Augustine to ponder the nature of her 'servitude'.

3 (XI. 37) We must give consideration to the statement, 'And you shall be subject to your husband, and he shall rule over you',¹⁰³ to see how it can be understood in the proper sense. For we must believe that even before her sin woman had been made to be ruled by her husband and to be submissive and subject to him. But we can with reason understand that the servitude meant in these words is that in which there is a condition similar to that of slavery rather than a bond of love (so that the servitude by which men later began to be

* Tr. John Hammond Taylor, SJ, *St Augustine: The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 2 vols., *Ancient Christian Writers*, no. 42 (New York and Ramsey, NJ: Newman Press, 1982), ii, 75, 170–1, 175–6. © 1982 by Revd. Johannes Quasten, Revd. Walter J. Burghardt, SJ, and Thomas C. Lawler. Latin text in *PL* 34.245–486.

¹⁰³ Gen. 3: 16.

slaves to other men obviously has its origin in punishment for sin). St Paul says, 'Through love serve one another.'¹⁰⁴ But by no means would he say, 'Have dominion over one another.' Hence married persons through love can serve one another, but St Paul does not permit a woman to rule over a man.¹⁰⁵ The sentence pronounced by God gave this power rather to man; and it is not by her nature but rather by her sin that woman deserved to have her husband for a master.¹⁰⁶ But if this order is not maintained, nature will be corrupted still more, and sin will be increased.

Augustine offers a final reflection on the Fall.

4 (XI. 42) ... If Adam was a spiritual man, in mind though not in body, how could he have believed what was said through the serpent, namely, that God forbade them to eat of the fruit of that one tree because He knew that if they did they would be gods in their knowledge of good and evil? As if the Creator would grudge so great a good to His creatures! It is surely strange if a man endowed with a spiritual mind could have believed this. Was it because the man would not have been able to believe this that the woman was employed on the supposition that she had limited understanding, and also perhaps that she was living according to the spirit of the flesh and not according to the spirit of the mind?

5 Is this the reason that St Paul does not attribute the image of God to her? For he says, 'A man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man.'¹⁰⁷ This is not to say that the mind of woman is unable to receive that same image, for in that grace St Paul says we are neither male nor female.¹⁰⁸ But perhaps the woman had not yet received the gift of the knowledge of God, but under the direction and tutelage of her husband she was to acquire it gradually. It is not without reason that St Paul said, 'For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not seduced but the woman was seduced and fell into sin.'¹⁰⁹ In other words, it was through her that man sinned. For Paul calls him a sinner also when he says, 'in the likeness of the sin of Adam, who is a type of the One to come'.¹¹⁰ But he says that Adam was not seduced.

¹⁰⁴ Gal. 5: 13.

¹⁰⁵ 1 Tim. 2: 12.

¹⁰⁶ The sense appears to be that woman's subjection symbolizes the beginning of human domination generally and that the Fall rendered more extreme the submission wherein she already—but in a 'bond of love'—served man: cf. Ch. 3, Aquinas 2.

¹⁰⁷ 1 Cor. 11: 7.

¹⁰⁸ Gal. 3: 28.

¹⁰⁹ 1 Tim. 2: 13–14.

¹¹⁰ Rom. 5: 14.

In fact, Adam under interrogation did not say, 'The woman whom Thou gavest to be my companion seduced me and I ate'; but, 'She gave me fruit of the tree and I ate.' On the other hand, the woman said, 'The Serpent seduced me.'

6 Can we imagine that Solomon, a man of incredible wisdom, believed that there was any advantage in the worship of idols? But he was unable to resist the love of women drawing him into this evil. ...¹¹¹ So it was in the case of Adam. After the woman had been seduced and had eaten of the forbidden fruit and had given Adam some to eat with her, he did not wish to make her unhappy, fearing she would waste away without his support, alienated from his affections, and that this dissension would be her death. He was not overcome by the concupiscence of the flesh ... but by the sort of attachment and affection by which it often happens that we offend God while we try to keep the friendship of men. ... I do not think that the wiles of the serpent by which the woman was seduced could have been in any way the means of his seduction.

Women at the Resurrection of the Body

FROM *CITY OF GOD** (*DE CIVITATE DEI*: 4 I 2–27)

7 (xxii. 17) Because of these sayings, 'Until we reach the perfection of manhood, the stature of the full maturity of Christ',¹¹² and 'Being shaped into the likeness of God's Son',¹¹³ some people suppose that women will not keep their sex at the resurrection; but, they say, they will all rise again as men, since God made man out of clay, and woman out of man. For my part, I feel that theirs is the more sensible opinion who have no doubt that there will be both sexes in the resurrection. For in that life there will be no sexual lust, which is the cause of shame. For the first human beings, before their sin, 'were naked, the man and the woman, and they were not ashamed'.¹¹⁴

8 Thus, while all defects will be removed from those bodies, their essential nature will be preserved. Now a woman's sex is not a defect: it is natural. And in the resurrection it will be free of the necessity of

¹¹¹ 3 Kgs. 11: 1–11.

* Tr. Henry Bettenson, *St Augustine: City of God* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1972), 1057–8. © Henry Bettenson 1972. Reprinted by permission of Penguin Books Ltd. Latin text in CCSL 47–8 or PL 41.13–804.

¹¹² Eph. 4: 13; cf. the use of this in Ambrose 6 above.

¹¹³ Rom. 8: 29.

¹¹⁴ Gen. 2: 21.

intercourse and childbirth. However, the female organs will not subserve their former use; they will be part of a new beauty, which will not excite the lust of the beholder—there will be no lust in that life—but will arouse the praises of God for His wisdom and compassion, in that He not only created out of nothing but freed from corruption that which He had created.

9 He who established the two sexes will restore them both. And indeed, Jesus was questioned by the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection; and they asked to which of seven brothers a wife would belong, to whom they had all been married . . . ; and Jesus replied . . . 'in the resurrected life men and women do not marry; they are like the angels of God in heaven'.¹¹⁵ That is, 'they are like them in immortality and felicity, not in body. . . .' Thus Christ denies the existence of marriage in the resurrected life; He does not deny the existence of women in heaven.

¹¹⁵ Matt. 22: 29 ff.