

*God and Man in Early Christianity:  
Sons in the Son*

CHRISTIANITY WAS THE FULFILLMENT OF JUDAISM. The masculinity and the patriarchy that Judaism cultivated were fulfilled in the revelation of a tri-personal God who was both Father and Son. All human beings, male and female, were invited to share in the inner life of God, to receive the Spirit and to be conformed to the Son. The early Church knew that the vocation of the Christian was essentially masculine. Later, the white martyrdom of the monk replaced the red martyrdom of the early Church. Femininity also received a new appraisal, as the godhead itself was shown to be a communion of persons. The unity and communion of all men, and indeed of all creation, is accomplished by the divine Spirit himself. Only a few warning signs in the early Church, especially in the West, gave any indication that masculinity would one day find itself at odds with Christianity.

MASCULINITY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The God and Father of Jesus Christ is the same God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Although gnosticism has enjoyed a rebirth in the attempts to oppose an androgynous Jesus to the patriarchal Jehovah, such an interpretation must be ruled out at the start.

From the very beginning, Christianity distinguished itself from Gnosticism: the God of the Old Testament is not the devil of the New Testament. The Jesus who walked the roads of Galilee is the same person as the risen Lord and Christ. His male body is risen from the dead; the masculinity of the Son reveals the Father.

The revelation of the trinitarian life of God maintains the masculinity of each divine person in relation to creation. That is, in relation to creation, each person is creator, redeemer, and sanctifier. In relationship to creation, therefore, each person is masculine, as Yahweh was in the Hebrew Scriptures. Only God's self-revelation in the Scriptures gives us access to an understanding of his inner life, and the Scriptures constantly characterize the intra-Trinitarian relationship of God as masculine. The generation of the Son by the Father has the created analogue of parenthood. Although the mother is more obviously a parent than the father, the First Person nonetheless is called Father by the only one who truly knows him, Jesus. The First Person is Father, indeed Father specifies what he is, because he eternally begets the Son. Paul rejects the idea that the Father is a religious projection of patriarchal social structures. The reverse is true. The Father is, in terms reminiscent of Platonic archetypes, the model, and created fatherhood is the image: "Blessed be the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom all fatherhood on earth takes its name." Human masculinity, whose purpose is the protection and provision of the community, finds its fulfillment in the one who is Lord because he is sacrifice and savior. In their conformity to the Son, all Christians, male and female, become sons of God, and are therefore called to be masculine. In his relationship to the creation, the Third Person is also consistently characterized as masculine, and in the new creation he is the Spirit of sonship, as he is within the Trinity. Yet his intra-trinitarian function of uniting the Father and Son explains the Spirit's association with femininity as reflected in the Church's unity. Mary stands as a sign of that unity.

### *The Masculinity of the Father and the Son*

Thomas Aquinas touches on the question of why the First Person is

called *Father* rather than simply a gender-free *Begetter*. Rather than focusing on the paternal authority of the Father, Aquinas seems to imply that begetting, the proper action of a father, is a single act, while the role of the mother is a process.<sup>1</sup> The Father is eternally not the Son, the Son is eternally not the Father. There was never a time when the Son was not; therefore there was never a time when the Son was part of the Father. This eternal and real distinction of the persons creates, as it were, a space in the Trinity. The Son became incarnate because creation is analogous to begetting. The incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, is an icon of the Father, his perfect image. The image does not consist in a corporeal resemblance, since God does not have a body, but rather in the resemblance of their modes of action. The Son does only what he sees the Father doing; he does nothing of himself, but imitates his Father in all things. Jesus is therefore the perfect Son, differing in no way from his Father, although not the same as his Father. The Son, having become incarnate, can take the sinful creation and return it to the Father. Sin is an emptiness and a separation from God; since there is already a separation within God, the separation of sin can be inserted into the already existent separation of the Father and the Son, a space which is filled with the Holy Spirit. In the return of the creation to the Father, when God will become all in all, the emptiness of sin is replaced by fullness, the *pleroma*.

Since the characteristic actions of God in the Old Testament involve separation, we should expect to see the same mode of action in Jesus. Jesus enjoys a unique freedom, for unlike all other human beings, he freely chose to enter life, as he freely chose to leave it. He was born not of the will of man, but of God; that is, he was virginally conceived. Born of a woman, from childhood he knew he must leave her to follow his Father. When he is lost in the temple, and Mary expresses her distress, he answers that he must be about his Father's business. At the beginning of his public life, he leaves his family, insisting that those who do the will of his Father are his brother and sister and mother.

Jesus, too, works by separating. He introduces a new principle of separation: no longer observance of the Law, but faith in him. Thus,

Jesus exercises the divine prerogative of election. He chooses the twelve from all those he knows and teaches them, although they do not understand his mission until after Pentecost. By his own account, Jesus comes not to bring peace, but a sword. His presence provokes conflict, even when he is an infant: Herod destroys all the male children of Bethlehem in an attempt to destroy the rival king. Jesus does nothing to avert a growing conflict with the Jewish authorities and the Pharisees and Sadducees and often speaks harshly to them: "Brood of vipers, fit for hell." They accuse him of being possessed by demons, and of being a Samaritan, an apostate who mixes Judaism and paganism.

It is a misunderstanding to see Jesus and the God he manifests as masculine simply because they are powerful and authoritative. While God and Jesus have the right to exercise naked authority and demand obedience from creatures, they do not. In the Old Testament, God is shown as a lover and husband, stung by the infidelities of Israel. The prophet Hosea takes a whore as a wife, symbolically enacting the relationship of Yahweh and Israel. God's heart is somehow wounded by the failure of Israel to respond to his love. In the New Testament, Jesus has no wife because his spouse is the Church, redeemed humanity.<sup>2</sup> His authority over the Church is like that of a husband over his wife. Paul assumes the sacrificial nature of masculinity in the passage (Eph. 5:21-31) that has so troubled feminists. He commands husbands to love their wives, as Christ loved the Church, *laying down his life for her*. The husband has an obligation to imitate the divine Bridegroom, who sacrifices his life for his Spouse. The divine Bridegroom fulfills and perfects the created reality of masculinity, which is characterized by self-sacrifice unto death for the sake of others.<sup>3</sup> The wife's obedience to her husband has the same basis as the Church's obedience to her Savior. The Church obeys Christ, not from slavish fear or a sense of duty, but from overwhelming gratitude for what he has done for her. The Bridegroom has given his utmost for his Bride, and she in turn obeys him and seeks, from a grateful love that knows no bounds, to imitate his boundless self-giving. As Karl Barth correctly observes, the husband who is only human cannot be his wife's savior in this full sense.<sup>4</sup> But what Barth does not

see is that the husband, by reason of his masculinity, is also called to be a savior in the realm of created realities. He is to be ready to sacrifice his life, whether in work or in death in battle, for his wife. Her obedience to him is not that of a slave, but that of a grateful equal. Yet she has no corresponding obligation to sacrifice herself for him: Her sacrifice is for her children. She obeys her husband because she knows that he always has her best interests at heart, that he is willing, without drama, as part of the normal course of life, to die for her at any moment.

Of course, human sinfulness obscures this pattern, but in general it is present to a surprising degree. As we have seen, men fill the dangerous occupations of American society and have fought in numerous wars to protect their families. As Gilmore explains the essence of masculinity, “men nurture their societies by shedding their blood, their sweat, and their semen, by bringing home food for both child and mother, by producing children, and by dying if necessary in far-away places to provide a safe haven for their people.”<sup>5</sup> As savior, Jesus both follows the pattern of masculinity and surpasses it by fulfilling it.

Feminists have been troubled by Jesus’s choice of men as his closest friends, especially in light of his disregard for the Jewish restrictions on contact with women. He spoke to the Samaritan woman, who was triply despised, being a woman, a Samaritan, and a sinner. He praised the faith of the woman with the flow of blood who touched him in the belief he would make her well. She was ritually unclean, and made him unclean by touching him, but he likewise disregarded the laws of uncleanness. He spoke intimately with Mary, sister of the famously busy Martha. Nevertheless, he chose men as his closest companions, the twelve, for two reasons. First, they were to be sent as he was sent by the Father and would meet similar fates. To be called to be an apostle, “one sent,” was to be called to be a martyr, as Jesus made clear to Peter. His injunction (John 21:15-19) to feed his lambs (and the authority that flows from it) was closely joined to the prophecy that Peter would be martyred. The apostolic office, and the presbyterial office that flows from it, is closely allied to martyrdom. The man who offers the sacrifice on the

altar in an unbloody manner must also be ready to sacrifice his life in a bloody fashion. Indeed, early bishops were usually martyrs. Jesus wished to spare women that burden and show men the true nature of the sacrificial vocation of masculinity.

But within the inner life of Jesus there is a second reason that he chose male companions, fishermen with hot tempers, zealots ready to fight with the Roman army. While his universal motives in his passion and death are stressed by theologians, his immediate human motives are not well explored. There is a medieval poem that portrays a dialogue between Jesus on the cross and Mary, in which he tells her that he dies to save her from everlasting death and hell. Hence, his love for those he knew in his earthly life was also a motive for his obedience to his Father, to save all humanity, and especially those he loved, from death. The apostles are the comrades of Jesus; they were the small group for whom he was prepared to die. When Peter tries to dissuade him from the passion, Jesus turns and looks at his disciples before rebuking Peter. The evangelists recount this glance because it is the fate of the disciples, their own spiritual doom, from which Jesus must rescue them, that was a principal human motivation for his decision to die as savior.

Jesus's death overshadows the Last Supper. Before his death, he wished to leave his closest friends with a memorial of him. During the words of institution of the Eucharist, his glance first falls on the twelve—*for you*—before it goes out to all humanity, the many. His human love for his disciples, a love that finds its closest analogue in military comradeship, was the immediate motivation for the Eucharist and passion. In the Eucharist, if Jesus had simply wished to give his body to them, a single consecration of the bread would have sufficed. It is in this way that women give their bodies to their children. But instead, Jesus consecrated the bread and wine separately, suggesting that they would soon be separated in his sacrifice. The body is specified as the body “given for you,” the blood as the blood “poured out for you.”

Jesus nurtures his disciples by his death, in the fashion in which Gilmore describes men nurturing, achieving what women attain through pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, incipiently

in Scripture and in a full-blown way in medieval devotion, Jesus was described as Mother. He achieves in a masculine way what women achieve in their feminine way. The Church Fathers saw the Church as born from the side of Jesus, as Eve was born from the side of Adam. Later devotions presented the nurturing that Jesus provided in the Eucharist as the equivalent of nursing. Jesus, because he is a man, can achieve the self-giving that women achieve in pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation only in a masculine fashion, that is, through a bloody death.

This dimension of Jesus's work of redemption has led to claims that he is androgynous, embodying both masculine and feminine characteristics. But nurturing is not opposed to masculinity. One can confront pain in two ways: by desensitizing oneself to it, or by courageously accepting the fullness of pain. Although many men understandably seek to limit their pain by desensitizing themselves, their attitude is a distortion of masculinity, not an intrinsic part of it. Jesus was willing to accept pain without any attempt to desensitize himself. He chose the twelve, knowing that one was to betray him, and felt the pain of the betrayal—*Do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?* He loved the people to whom he had been sent, weeping over the Jerusalem that rejected him, because he knew that this rejection would call down God's wrath on the city and lead to a destruction and exile more final than that of the Babylonian captivity. He blessed the children and felt deep anguish at Lazarus's death. Even as he was led to his death, he told the women of Jerusalem who wept for him to weep instead for themselves and their children. On the cross, he refused the drug that was traditionally offered to criminals to dull their pain. He wanted to taste the pain of human life and death to the full; he chose freely to taste it, in an exercise of the highest courage.

His tenderness and compassion were not a grafting of feminine characteristics onto a masculine personality, but rather a profound expression of masculinity. Masculinity entails initiation; initiation involves pain—the greater the pain, the more profound the initiation. Jesus called his passion his baptism, which initiated him into the mystery of suffering. This is one aspect of Christ's life that theo-

logians have always had trouble grasping. Christ's passion is often seen more or less as play-acting; that is, he acted out something but did not really achieve anything that he could not have achieved otherwise. In one sense, this seems true: how can anything be added to God? But Scripture explicitly says that son though he was, he learned obedience through suffering. He was never disobedient, for his sonship consisted in his perfect obedience. Thus, he learned the price of obedience, what it cost man to repent and to obey, through experiencing the suffering that obedience brings.

Jesus's suffering involved not only physical pain, but a sense of guilt, of abandonment by God, and a descent into hell. The Holy Saturday theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar attempts to convey the meaning of this experience. The descent into hell is a familiar motif, even in pagan literature, because it is a part of the initiation into suffering and death that all heroes, and indeed all men who wish to be truly men, must undergo. Only by defeating Satan and death can Jesus receive the name that is above every other name, *kyrios*, *Lord*, and be honored as king of the universe, absolute sovereign and judge, who has the right to separate the sheep from the goats, to make the ultimate distinctions of salvation and damnation for all beings, human and angelic.

In the Gospels, the ultimate conflict is not between Jesus and certain Jewish leaders, or between Jesus and an ambitious Roman governor. These men are but unwitting tools of spiritual powers: *Father, forgive them for they know not what they do*. The real enemy is Satan, who is behind all the machinations of Jesus's mortal enemies. Jesus came to confront and defeat the strong one, the prince of this world. At the beginning of his public ministry, he fasted like a shaman and confronted the spiritual force of evil, a real being who tried to turn him from his mission.

The Gospels were written with an apologetic motive, to try to show the Roman world that Jesus was not a revolutionary and was crucified unjustly. Therefore the Jews, for whom the Romans felt no special affection, were the enemies given most prominence. But the Apocalypse, written to comfort persecuted Christians by revealing to them the spiritual battle that was going on invisibly behind the

events of history, identified the true conflict between the Word of God and his enemy, the dragon. The Lamb of God, who stands forever in heaven bearing the marks of his wounds, is scarred from his celestial conflict like a man who has gone through initiation. Jesus then, in his earthly mission, in his role as Son in the Trinity, and in his hidden role as lord of the universe, follows the pattern of the masculine personality.

### *The Masculinity of the Spirit*

The Holy Spirit is often associated with the feminine in the work of redemption.<sup>7</sup> He comes upon Mary so that she conceives. When she visits her cousin Elizabeth, the Word is dwelling in her womb. But the Word also dwells in Mary's words, and at the sound of her voice the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaps for joy and is filled with the Holy Spirit. In the Apocalypse the Spirit and the Bride both say "Come." Mary, like Eve, is more sensitive than men (Zacharias and Adam) to the Spirit, but Mary listens to the Holy Spirit rather than the evil one. Yet is this association with the feminine enough to justify Maximilian Kolbe's description of the "quasi-hypostatic union" of Mary and the Spirit,<sup>8</sup> or of Leonardo Boff's claim that Mary "is to be hypostatically united to the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity"?<sup>9</sup> The Spirit is God, and as such bears a relationship to creation which can only be described as masculine. Nevertheless, there is a valid reason that he is associated with the feminine. But we must be clear about the Spirit's masculinity. He is masculine for three reasons: he separates (a characteristic masculine action), he works with power, and most importantly, he is the spirit of sonship.

The Spirit is a spirit of holiness. To be holy means to be set apart. Therefore, like the spirit of Yahweh, the Spirit is at work in the process of election, of setting apart. The Spirit sets apart Mary from the normal course of human life, telling her that she had been chosen to bear the Messiah outside the course of nature. The Spirit descends upon Jesus at his baptism, separating him from the life of a carpenter that he had led. The first action of the Spirit is to lead Jesus out into the wilderness, to separate him from society and bring

him into confrontation with Satan. The Spirit anoints Jesus as the Messiah, and leads him to play his role as sacrifice. Jesus is set apart from humanity by his enemies, the unwitting agents of God, as a criminal, but paradoxically this separation is the greatest holiness. Having fulfilled his mission on earth, Jesus sends the Holy Spirit upon the earth, who descends on the disciples, separating them and marking them out from the rest of Israel. The Spirit is at work in the early Church, bringing it into confrontation with the Jews and the pagans.

Power is such an attribute of the Spirit that it is almost, like joy, a synonym for him. Energy is an aspect of the holy; it is the wrath of God, but it is also “vitality, passion, emotional temper, will, force, movement, excitement, activity, impetus.”<sup>10</sup> The Spirit, *pneuma*, is like the spirit, *thymos*. Christ baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire; fieriness and power are characteristic of the spiritedness of youthful masculinity. A young man expresses his spirit through his combativeness, his desire for fame and glory through displays of his power and excellence, especially in contests and combats.<sup>11</sup> The Spirit is jealous, one must be careful not to offend him, but he also gives true glory. Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, becomes combative, and denounces his audience, who stone him. Yet, echoing Jesus, Stephen with his last breath forgives his murderers.

The Spirit is not simply a spirit of holiness and power, but a spirit of love and a spirit of sonship. He is the love of the Father for the Son, and the Son for the Father. The Son goes forth from the Father in the Spirit, and returns to the Father in the Spirit. Thomas Weinandy, in his presentation of the doctrine of the Trinity, states that “the Holy Spirit, in proceeding from the Father as the one in whom the Father begets the Son, conforms the Father to be Father for the Son and the Son to be Son for (of) the Father.”<sup>12</sup> Weinandy reached his conclusion from the premise that the economic Trinity, the Trinity as revealed in the history of salvation, accurately reflects the internal, immanent Trinity and indeed is the only path we have to knowledge of the immanent Trinity. “Therefore,” Weinandy argues, “as the Spirit conformed Jesus to be the faithful Son on earth, so the Spirit conforms him as the Son, within the Trinity, so as to be

eternally pleasing to the Father.”<sup>13</sup> As the Holy Spirit acts in Jesus, so the Spirit of Jesus acts on his disciples: “The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of sonship, transforms us into the glorious image of God that is Christ fashioning us into sons of God.”<sup>14</sup> Though the Spirit is also associated with femininity, his proper activity, the paternal/filial love that makes the Father a father and the Son a son, is masculine.

### *The Femininity of the Church*

Although Christians, both men and women, are sons of God, and follow a masculine way of life, one of struggle, of descent into death, and of resurrection, the Church itself is nonetheless always feminine, the Bride and Mother. The meaning of the ascription of feminine titles to the Church has been obscured by the faulty apprehension of the meanings of masculinity and femininity. A more accurate conception of femininity reveals the reason for the femininity of the Church, the association of the Spirit with femininity, and the roots of femininity in God.

Most Christian writers, following Aristotle, see masculinity as activity and femininity as receptivity. Mary’s role in salvation and the Church’s role have usually been presented in these terms: Mary is receptive to the message of the Spirit, and receives the Word first in her heart and then in her womb, becoming the Theotokos, the mother of God. She is the mother of all believers, because she is the first to believe, and in a sense all other belief stems from her assent to the Incarnation. The church should imitate her, listening to the Word and responding to it. A Christian should be feminine and Marian, seeking only to hear the Word and respond to it. God is masculine, believers are feminine (and usually women); only those in the church who represent God’s activity and authority can act in a masculine fashion, and they are usually men, the clergy.

But receptivity is not the center of femininity. Integration and communion are at the heart of femininity, as separation and differentiation are at the heart of masculinity. Women and men have the same openness to the outward world and to the invisible world. Women may be more perceptive than men, but the key to their femi-

nine role is not precisely their responsiveness. Rather, it is their tendency to integrate rather than separate. The feminine is not responsiveness, but relationship and communion.

Mary hears the Word that comes forth in divine freedom, at the sole initiative of the Father, and indeed responds to it, but the important thing is that her response puts her into a relationship with God. The Church is made up of those who have been chosen by God in his freedom and who enter into relationship with each other because they have first entered into a relationship with God. Mary's response to the Word is not passivity. She does not remain in quiet contemplation, but acts, and acts to renew and revivify a relationship with her kinswoman Elizabeth. She celebrates in her song, the *Magnificat*, God's action in forming a people, the posterity of Abraham.

The Church stems from this first relationship. Catholics therefore honor Mary as the Mother of the Church, and Mary is the mother of the Church because she is the mother of God, with whom she has entered into intimate relationship through the Incarnation. In images of Pentecost, when the Church is visibly born of the action of the Holy Spirit of Jesus, Mary is put in the center of the action of the Spirit. Thus, the Church is a spouse because the Word enters and indwells it through his spirit, making her a mother because he makes her fruitful in giving birth to many sons of God.

The Spirit is the principle of unity in the Church because he is the principle of unity in the Trinity. As Manfred Hauke says, "The movement of the Father's love brings forth the Son as its perfect image, and the reciprocal love between Father and Son attains such fullness that it becomes itself a person, the Holy Spirit, the person in two persons, in whom archetype and image are interfused with one another. The divine 'circular movement' is closed in and through personal love."<sup>15</sup> As Hauke points out, "relationality" is more feminine than masculine, and therefore the Holy Spirit is associated with the feminine.<sup>16</sup>

The Church is feminine because it is a communion, and a reflection of the divine communion of the three persons of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church, and the Church is not

simply an assembly, an *ecclesia*, but even more profoundly a *communio*, a created reflection of the *communio* of the Three Persons. David L. Schindler encapsulates *communio* ecclesiology: “[T]he church has its proper reality as sharer in the divine trinitarian *communio*.”<sup>17</sup> Femininity connotes union, and the three persons are eternally united without being confused. The Trinity is the feminine aspect of God. It is the unity that exists in and through the divine persons, not apart from them. The Trinity is not a separate person, and cannot be addressed as *She*, even though the Latin liturgy calls upon the *sancta Trinitas, unus Deus*. *Trinitas* is feminine in Latin and in many Indo-European languages. On Trinity Sunday in Russia, Christians are called to forgive their enemies and to be reunited in love with all, for the Trinity is a mystery of love and union, and therefore of the feminine.

Thus, God is feminine in that he is a communion, but he cannot be addressed as feminine since we speak to him as a person, and his tripersonal nature is masculine. The Church is a personification rather than a person; in Scripture she is new Israel, the new daughter of Sion, the bride of Yahweh and of the Lamb, the Body of Christ which he cherishes. But the individuals who make up the Church are masculine because they are called to be imitators of the Son in his masculine action of sacrifice and expiation. Women can participate in this spiritual masculinity, but men could be expected to have a greater natural understanding of the pattern. Masculinity itself is part of the proto-evangelium of creation.

### *The Masculinity of the Christian*

In the New Testament, Christians are referred to as the sons and daughters of God only in quotation from the Old Testament. Otherwise, they are referred to as the children of God, sometimes with an implication of immaturity, or proleptically as the sons of God, with emphasis upon what they are destined to become. The *fatherhood of God* became an Enlightenment commonplace: *Alle Menschen werden Brüder*. That God is our Father and we are his children was held to be the common belief of all religions. But God is rarely de-

scribed as man's father in the Old Testament or in paganism, and "fatherhood" is clearly felt to be a metaphor, in the same way that God is the "father" of the dew. The begetting of the Son by the Father and the begetting of the Christian by God is a revelation of something humanity could never have imagined. The Son is truly begotten of God; he is not simply "like" God, the closest thing to God of any creature; rather he is the same substance (*ousia*) as God. He is the only-begotten; there is no other like him.

Yet Christians are also begotten in a sense that surpasses all metaphor and is almost impossible for reason to fathom.<sup>18</sup> The Son, by pouring forth the Holy Spirit, creates other sons. He conforms both men and women to his own image as Son, by that making them all God's sons (not daughters). God has no only-begotten daughter; he therefore has no daughters begotten of the Spirit, only sons. There is only one pattern for both men and women to be conformed to, that of the Son. In the Son, Christians become deiform, apotheosized, and achieve an intimacy and union with the godhead that is beyond the categories of natural reason. Christians are the children of God, growing into the image of the Son, that they may also become sons of the Father.<sup>19</sup>

### MASCULINITY IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The Christian, because he is a son of God, has a primarily masculine identity. In Christ there is no male or female; biological identity, like nationality and legal status, is ultimately irrelevant to whether one can become a son of God. Women as well as men are called to be sons of God and brothers of Jesus Christ. Hence, women are also called to participate in the essentially masculine process of initiation. The sacraments have always been open to women, as has martyrdom.

#### *Christian Initiation*

Various actions of the Church, especially baptism, the Eucharist, confirmation, and the laying on of hands came to be called *myster-ies* in the East and *sacraments* in the West. Although Christianity is not

simply a mystery religion, it decided to use a term, *mysterion*, which inevitably carried overtones of the mystery religions, to describe central Christian actions. Initiation is an important action in religions that have a concept of a realm that transcends the everyday world. These mystery initiations are closely parallel to masculine development. When Christianity called its key actions mysteries, it emphasized that in the life of the Church, which unites the believer with Jesus, the true initiation, the true mystery, was to be found. Some of the themes of the pagan mysteries were taken over into Christianity.<sup>20</sup>

The Western use of the term *sacramentum* to describe the liturgical actions of the Church carries military overtones. The *sacramentum* was the oath sworn by the soldier inducted into the army, and it transformed his life. He put aside all civilian concerns and henceforth devoted his life entirely to military affairs. Civilians were dismissed in soldier's slang as *pagani*, hicks, and Christians took over the term to describe those who had not enlisted in the army of Christ. Such use of military terminology emphasized the agonic nature of the Christian life, the struggle with Satan and all the forces of evil. The soldier has always been a potent image of the self-sacrificing savior.

Christian baptism is a rite of initiation. In defending masculine initiation rites, David Thomas notes that "Christianity is based upon a story of sufferings, followed by resurrection, redemption, and ascent into a better life that is an uncanny parallel of the narrative enacted in almost all ritual initiations."<sup>21</sup> Jesus's life is that of the hero and is therefore the consummation of masculinity. In baptism a Christian puts on Christ; he dies and is reborn with Christ. With Christ he descends into the abyss, confronts death—indeed dies—and is reborn to a new life.

Christian initiation is accomplished by the conformity of the believer to the death and resurrection of Christ. This is accomplished sacramentally by baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist. Baptism is not simply an initiation in the sense of a beginning; it is also an initiation in the sense of a death to an old self and rebirth as a new self. This meaning is stressed in the New Testament: *unless*

*you are born again and if we have died with Christ*, among other well-known passages. The early Church took over some of the symbols of the mysteries, which survived in the full rite of baptism at the Easter vigil: Death and resurrection were written in the heavens, in the daily and seasonal movement of the sun and moon, and especially at the moment in the great dance when the resurgent sun met the full moon at the vernal equinox, the promise of the resurrection that was to take place on earth.<sup>22</sup> The candles of the vigil allude to the *photismos*, the new light and understanding of the initiate—they may also allude to the torches of the searchers in the Eleusinian mysteries—and proclaim that here the true and final initiation can be found. The Spirit descends upon the initiate at confirmation, conforming him in principle to the crucified Christ. The initiate is united to the crucified and risen one by eating his body and drinking his blood in the Eucharist.

#### *The Martyrs and the Monks*

Beyond Baptism, Christian tradition has recognized an even deeper initiation, a stronger conformation to Christ. It is the baptism of fire, which “signifies a purification and a consecration, that is to say, a rite of initiation giving the right to a participation in the celestial Mysteries [i.e., the liturgy], just as baptism in water is the prerequisite for assisting in the earthly Mysteries.”<sup>23</sup> This baptism of fire gives access to the divine light and is achieved through martyrdom or the equivalent of martyrdom, the life of the monk. The Christian is not simply a student of Christ; discipleship consists not simply in hearing and applying the teachings of Christ, as if he were simply another sage. To be a disciple of Christ is to imitate Christ, and the key event in the life of Christ was his death and resurrection. The Christian who is most fully conformed to that death and resurrection is the best imitator of Christ: the martyr therefore most clearly fulfills the Christian call.

Jesus responds to Philip, who has conveyed the Greeks’ request to see him, that *unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies it remains alone; but if it dies it bears much fruit*. Jesus by this indirect

reply alludes to his own death, which would reconcile all men to God. The reunion of Jew and Greek in the Church was the first sign of the ultimate return of the cosmos to God. But Jesus implies something about his followers as well, whom he has told to take up the cross daily and follow their master. Luke describes the death of Stephen in terms parallel to Christ's death. In showing that Saul, who stood by consenting to the death of Stephen, becomes Paul the apostle, Luke also implies, as Tertullian later said, that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.

The theology of martyrdom developed very early under the pressure of martyrdom. The two great martyrs, Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna, left their imprint on all later accounts of martyrs. The martyr is the new athlete, the new soldier. His passion is not passive, but active, a battle. The Church felt, therefore, that martyrdom was, properly speaking, a masculine activity. While awaiting execution in the year 202, Perpetua had a dream in which an angel came to her and anointed her so that she became, mystically, a man, exclaiming, "Facta sum masculus."<sup>24</sup> All Christians, including women, are called to be athletes of Christ, soldiers against Satan, and to act in a masculine fashion in the spiritual realm.

After the age of the martyrs, the monks became the new athletes of Christ,<sup>25</sup> the successors to the martyrs.<sup>26</sup> *The Teaching to Monks* (*Doctrina ad monachos*) ascribed to Athanasius even claims that the monk is more of a soldier than the martyr: "The martyrs were often consummated in a battle lasting for only a moment; but the monastic institute obtains a martyrdom by means of a daily struggle."<sup>27</sup> The Irish monks saw both the ascetic life and the life of the pilgrim as a form of martyrdom.<sup>28</sup>

Anthony battled demons in the desert in a "contest,"<sup>29</sup> in "many wrestlings" against "destructive demons."<sup>30</sup> Benedict finds warfare a natural metaphor for monasticism, and recurs to it frequently in his Rule. He addresses the one who by his own will, *abrenuntians propriis voluntatibus*, will be in the army, *militaturus*, with *fortissima et praeclara arma*.<sup>31</sup> Hearts and minds must be prepared for *militanda* in obedience. Cenobites are monks who are in *monasteriale militans*;<sup>32</sup> anchorites are those who have learned how to fight, *pugnare*,

against the devil and can leave the column, *acie*, to engage in solo combat, *singularem pugnam*, to fight, *pugnare*, against the vices of mind and flesh.<sup>33</sup> Both slave and freeman are in the same rank, *aequalem servitutis militiam*.<sup>34</sup> The battle is fought against the devil.

Later monks continued to think of themselves as soldiers. The *Anonymous Life of St. Cuthbert* refers to God's soldier, *militis*.<sup>35</sup> Bede speaks of Cuthbert as an athlete and of his life as a warfare.<sup>36</sup> Cuthbert seeks out waste places as a scene of battle.<sup>37</sup> His withdrawal is not to seek peace but battle, the contest that is the way of life of a hermit.<sup>38</sup> Monks were "the champions of the Church who carry on the battle with evil spirits, and with the spirit of evil in the world. They are forever engaged in a wrestling match with their own passions; they are running a race for which they expect an incorruptible crown; the world is the arena in which they engage in a spirited contest with all that is opposed to the will of God."<sup>39</sup> The monastic life was an agonistic life, one of conflict. The monk did not flee from human society to find safety in solitude, but like the hero went out into the wilderness to confront the forces of evil and fought them to rid himself and the world of all traces of evil.

The monk underwent an initiation to prepare him for the battle. The reception of the candidate was regarded as a mystery, a *mysterion*, closely parallel to the initiation of baptism.<sup>40</sup> The baptismal creed had a threefold affirmation of the Trinity and a corresponding threefold rejection of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Parallel to the baptismal liturgy, the monastic profession according to the customs of St. Pachomius required a threefold "renunciation of the world, his parents, and himself."<sup>41</sup> This may be the root of the medieval definition of monasticism as the life of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The candidate received a new identity as part of his initiation and was given a new name and new clothes, the habit of the professed religious. Monastic profession is a rebirth<sup>42</sup> and like baptism and martyrdom causes the remission of sins.

Monasticism set the spiritual tone of Christianity for the millennium after the age of the martyrs and before the rise of scholasticism. The greatest pope of this age was a monk, Gregory, and his greatest work was a commentary on spiritual struggle, the *Moralia in*

*Job*. Monasticism is not unique to Christianity: there were Jewish monks, the Essenes, and there are Buddhist monks. The spiritual man is known in many religions, and his life is a quest for initiation into the mysteries of life and death, the attainment of full manhood and masculinity. This pattern of spiritual life was comprehensible to all men, even if they did not choose to follow it. It was not seen as effeminate; it was a life of struggle and combat against invisible foes and one's own irrational fears and vices, both deadlier than any human enemy.

### HEROIC CHRISTIANITY

Christians had to face the continued appeal of the ideology of masculinity in the pagan societies they confronted in converting Europe. The hero was the model of masculinity, and Christians had to explain to men who wanted to be heroes much more than they wanted to be Christians how a man could be both a hero and a Christian, how in fact Christ was the true hero, the true model for men. We are fortunate to have literary artifacts of this teaching in the literature of the Saxons and of the Anglo-Saxons.

Unknown poets reinterpreted Christianity for those whose souls were formed by the heroic ethos of Germanic paganism. On the continent, the *Heliand* depicted Christ as born in a hill-fort and working the miracle at Cana in a mead-hall.<sup>43</sup> The *Christ* and *The Dream of the Rood* retold the events of the Gospel in the heroic language of the Anglo-Saxons who had migrated to the British Isles. To be attractive to pagans, Christ had to be shown as a hero, and his apostles as loyal thanes.

The most extensive treatment of the pagan hero is in *Beowulf*. The relationship of the poem and Christianity is controversial, but its survival attests to an important fact: A monastic writer (and there were few others) thought *Beowulf* important enough to devote time and vellum to its preservation. Why was a monk interested in a pagan hero? The poem focuses on the grandeur of the hero, but also on the self-destructive nature of heroism and masculinity, perhaps hint-

ing that heroism can be fulfilled only in the self-abnegation of Christianity and monasticism.

Oblivion is frightening to all human beings, but especially to the hero, whose energies are focused upon asserting his identity and attaining immortality through fame. The fear of oblivion, as we have seen, is concretized in the fear of being eaten, and it is this fear that finds expression in many folktales that resonate with this (predominantly masculine) anxiety, folktales that lie at the root of the story of *Beowulf*. In *Beowulf*, the hero is always in danger of being eaten. The sea monsters want to feast on Beowulf, “sitting around a banquet at the bottom of the sea,”<sup>44</sup> but instead he serves them with death: “I served them with my dear sword, as was fitting.”<sup>45</sup> Grendel devours the retainers at Heorot, and Beowulf says that he will need no burial if he loses, because Grendel’s stomach will be his tomb: “He will carry away my bloody corpse, intent on eating it ... you will no longer need to trouble yourself about caring for my body.”<sup>46</sup>

Beowulf is threatened more by Grendel’s mother than by Grendel, although her strength is described as less than Grendel’s as a woman’s is less than a man’s.<sup>47</sup> Femininity is a grave danger to the boy who wants to become a man. The boy must be “separated from his mother”<sup>48</sup> so that he can put on a new male identity. In descending into the lake and the cave, Beowulf descends, like all initiates, into the womb to be reborn. He must confront and defeat the threatening aspects of femininity: “The chthonian Great Mother shows herself preminent as Goddess of the Dead, as Master of the Dead, that is, she displays aggressive and threatening aspects.”<sup>49</sup> Such is Grendel’s mother, who is never given a proper name. This lack of identity emphasizes that she is the threatening femininity that Beowulf must confront to establish his masculine identity.

Beowulf’s central trial, his combat with her, is surrounded by references to water. The descent into the mere has overtones of descent into mother earth and death. The youth who is to be initiated must confront “the monster of chaos,” who is often “a water-monster” because water is an almost universal symbol (in the many versions of the Deluge) of the chaos and disorder that threaten the fragile con-

structs of man.<sup>50</sup> Eliade says that “initiatory death is often symbolized, for example, by darkness, by cosmic night, by the telluric womb, the hut, the belly of a monster. All these images express regression to a preformal state, to a latent mode of being (complementary to the precosmogenic chaos) rather than total annihilation.”<sup>51</sup> Beowulf confronts Grendel at night, in a hall; he confronts Grendel’s mother in a cave in the earth.

Beowulf kills the Nicors who wished to eat him, Grendel, and Grendel’s mother, and he preserves the Geats from their enemies during his lifetime. His actions are surrounded by motifs of salvation, especially the middle action, the descent into the mere and the cleansing of the waters. The monster Grendel lives at the bottom of a lake, and again we have here the combination of a primeval creature and a depth of water, that is, a reference to chaos.

The recognition of Beowulf as a hero comes not through the discernment of a hidden identity, but by public knowledge of his victories through their tokens: Grendel’s arm and head, the giant sword, the dead dragon, and the recovered treasure. The public knowledge of his victories, his glory, is symbolized by bursts of mysterious light: the sun shines after his victory over the sea monsters, the mysterious burst of light in the cave after he kills Grendel’s mother, and the shining of the standard in the dragon’s lair. Darkness is the ultimate threat to the hero’s identity. Oblivion is worse than the grave. Light is a sign of victory over darkness (a natural symbol, but made prominent in Christian cultures by the light-darkness dualism in John’s Gospel), and *beorht beacen Godes* (the bright beacon of God) fills the sky at moments of hope or victory. Beowulf’s lasting memorial is his tomb, built on a headland, that becomes a beacon,<sup>52</sup> a light that signals his triumph in death. The light of victory shines on the hero, giving him fame—*kudos*, *kleos*, *dom* and *lof*—the only hope for deliverance from total oblivion.

Light comes from fire, but fire is a greedy spirit that also consumes. Fire will consume Heorot, which awaits “the furious surge of hostile flames.”<sup>53</sup> The images identify the engulfing waters with the fires of destroying enmity. The blade of the giant sword is consumed by the heat of Grendel’s mother’s blood: “That sword, that fighting-

blade, began to dwindle into icicles of war. It was a marvel of marvels how it all melted away, just like the ice.”<sup>54</sup> Fire consumes Beowulf’s body at the end of the poem: “Now live coals must devour the commander of fighters.”<sup>55</sup> Most ominously, “Heaven swallowed up the smoke” of Beowulf’s funeral pyre.<sup>56</sup> The Geats are consumed by their enemies and vanish like the very race that buried the treasure.

Heroic society was built upon heroic self-will, kinship, and wealth.<sup>57</sup> Each of these contains its own destruction. The hero, even when he is young, is dangerous: “Indeed, his early endowments of strength, initiative, and courage are too great to be contained easily; he poses a threat to orderly life for other, more ordinary people.”<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, to protect his community, to live out the masculine role, a man must have a reputation for violence.<sup>59</sup> He must be a troublemaker, and it is sometimes hard to direct his hostility only against external enemies: “The young warrior must transmute his humanity by a fit of aggressive and terror-striking fury, which assimilated him to the raging beast of prey. He became ‘heated’ to an extreme degree, flooded by a mysterious, nonhuman, and irresistible force that his fighting effort and vigor summoned from the utmost depths of his being.”<sup>60</sup> Beowulf shares many characteristics with the monsters he conquers, as he must if he is to conquer them. Grendel is very much Beowulf’s shadow-self, an personification of the dangers and evils implicit in the heroic character.<sup>61</sup> Beowulf becomes *gebolgen*, swollen with fury, full of *furor*, *wut*, *fergus*, *menos*. All of these words describe the transformation of the man into the warrior, who is either superhuman or subhuman, but in any case non-human.

The second basis of society in *Beowulf*, the one whose potential for evil is clear in the second fight with Grendel’s mother, is kinship or family, which is closely connected with femininity. *Mægth* (kinship) and *mæg* (woman) are, if not cognates, at least associated by sound. Women are peace-weavers: They knit together clans and reconcile differences, or at least they are supposed to. Beowulf expresses his doubts about the possibility of using marriage to patch up a quarrel.<sup>62</sup> Attempts to base lasting peace on kinship are as futile as attempts to terrorize enemies by heroic achievements. Beowulf’s killing of Grendel does not end the slaughter in Heorot; it only leads

to a feud. Grendel's mother is named only by her relationship, mother, and she keeps her hall under the waves, in a parody of Freawaru.<sup>63</sup> Germanic society was matrilineal, unlike other Indo-European societies. The female both knits together families and provides the connections that sustain feuds. *Beowulf* is full of feuds; indeed the digressions are mainly about feuds, and Heorot will eventually be destroyed in a feud.

The distribution of wealth in the form of gold, land, and food is the third major force for cohesion in heroic society. The owner of wealth is not supposed to rejoice in its mere possession, or else he gets a reputation for stinginess. Wealth is gained only to be given away. The circulation of wealth creates binding ties of gratitude. A king is a ring-giver, *beaggyfa*; his antithesis is the dragon, the miser, *avaritia*, who sits on gold and refuses to part with it. Yet, the dialectic of possession and giving is unstable.<sup>64</sup> One cannot give unless one possesses, yet possession of wealth is dangerous. It opens the way to avarice, to the hesitation to part with wealth and an eventual refusal to part with wealth. Wealth also attracts others who desire to possess it. Beowulf thinks that he is gaining happiness and safety for his people by gaining them the hoard. Yet the gold is useless, *unnyt*, to the Geats as it was to the dead race that had stored it in the ground.<sup>65</sup> It will only attract robbers and plunderers.

The person who put ink on vellum to preserve *Beowulf* came from an Anglo-Saxon, Christian culture; he was therefore writing in a monastic milieu, for an audience, whether clerical or lay, influenced by monastic ideals. England had been converted, in a wave of monastic evangelization, by Augustine, a monk, sent by a pope-monk, Gregory. Augustine knew from the violence that continued to plague England that the foundations of heroic society were flawed and that this society was demon-haunted. He also knew that the Christian, especially the monk, was a warrior, who conquered these demons with the weapons of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The monk was the new hero in a spiritual warfare, the real warfare, the archetype which earthly battle merely imitated.<sup>66</sup> The monk would want to enjoy some of the glory of the heroes of Germanic antiquity.

The three vows that distinguish monastic life and the forms of

religious life that derive from it are poverty, chastity, and obedience.<sup>67</sup> Through obedience, the monk gives up his own will; he obeys a superior, in whose commands he hears the words of God. Through chastity, he gives up sexuality and family life. Through poverty, he gives up ownership of earthly goods, and holds all property in common with his brethren. Thomas Aquinas explains that the vows have two purposes, first, in “tending to the perfection of charity,” and second, “quieting the mind from outward solicitude . . . . The disquiet of worldly solicitude is aroused in man in reference especially to three things. First, as regards the dispensing of external things, and this solicitude is removed from man by the vow of poverty; secondly, as regards the control of wife and children, which is cut away by the vow of continence; thirdly, as regards the disposal of one’s own actions, which is eliminated by the vow of obedience, whereby a man commits himself to the disposal of another.”<sup>68</sup>

The first fight in *Beowulf* is a confrontation with the evils implicit in heroism, especially self-assertion and pride. Obedience addresses the “inordinateness of the human will,” its tendency to assert itself above everything, even God. Heroism is based upon the assertion of the self in the face of challenge and danger; heroism involves pride, and is a form of egotism. The monk, by contrast, is self-effacing and seeks to find his life by losing it. Obedience to the spiritual father in a monastery is for the sake of learning humility, which conquers pride, the root of all sins. Benedict speaks of the twelve steps of humility in chapter seven of his Rule.<sup>69</sup> Hrothgar, in his parting advice to Beowulf, warns him of pride, “arrogance,” *oferhygda*,<sup>70</sup> and gives him “twelve treasures.”<sup>71</sup> Especially in the context of a warning about pride, an audience conversant with Benedict’s Rule would see the treasures as reminder of the twelve steps of humility. The poet seems here, in his usual appositive manner, to be asking his audience to see the parallels between the monastic and heroic ways of life. There may be a similar dynamic in the mentions of God’s light,<sup>72</sup> which could refer to the *deificum lumen*<sup>73</sup> of monastic life, and of “eternal gain”<sup>74</sup> which could refer to entrance to the monastic life.<sup>75</sup>

The vow of chastity was as much a renunciation of kinship as of

sexual activity. Nevertheless, there may be some hints of sexual activity in the fight between Beowulf and Grendel's mother. Any grappling of male and female, even in violence, has sexual overtones, and perhaps the sword that melts after the battle has a parallel in Riddle 20, in which the answer is either *sword* or *phallus*. Though finding sexual allusions in Beowulf's battle with Grendel's mother may seem far-fetched, the obscene riddle was favored by the Anglo-Saxons, who were amused by double-entendre.

Voluntary poverty exorcises the demon that lurks in gold. By giving up rights of possession, the monk attains both inner and outer tranquility. He owns nothing, and cannot be robbed. Yet his poverty allows him to enrich others with spiritual gifts. Only one who renounces the world can be trusted with the wealth of the world.

Monasticism, like baptism, was an initiation, and was a better initiation than Beowulf's. He did not confront, in his fights with the monsters, the deepest evils in the way the monk does in spiritual combat. Beowulf's death is a parallel to the death and rebirth of the Christian-monk, but he does not achieve the final victory. Beowulf conquers the dragon, but is destroyed in the fire, his funeral smoke mounts to heaven, and there is a great sadness in his end. He does not save his people, and the swallowing of the smoke is the oblivion that he has fought against in every battle. The monk, on the other hand, achieves this ultimate initiation. In his battle with the devil he receives a true baptism of fire, which "signifies a purification and a consecration, that is to say the rite of initiation giving the right to participate in the celestial mystery."<sup>76</sup> The baptism of fire is attained through asceticism and prayer, according to the teachings of Macarius.<sup>77</sup> The divine light from this fire, the *deificum lumen* (deifying light) of Benedict's Rule, was the object of the aspiration of the monk.<sup>78</sup> It is in monasticism that we must seek the ultimate significance of *Beowulf* for its Christian audience. Heroic glory is replaced by humble obedience; family by chastity; and wealth by poverty. Heroic society destroys itself because of its inherent self-contradictions. But even pagan heroes can be models for Christians who fight the good fight. Beowulf is praised by his own people because he was *manna mildust*, the gentlest of men,<sup>79</sup> and embodies the

gentleness that was also the ideal of the monks, the meek who inherited the earth.

#### ANTECEDENTS OF MEDIEVAL FEMINIZATION

Did any early Christian developments contribute to the later medieval feminization of the Church?<sup>80</sup> Judaism was male-oriented (although heroines like Deborah and Judith were prominent), and Christianity had a more balanced emphasis on male and female, both fully heirs of the new covenant, and on ultimate meanings of the masculine and feminine. In the New Testament, women have a bigger role than in the Old Testament. Some men received their faith from women and were affected by this mode of transmission. Timothy received his faith from his mother and grandmother, Lois and Eunice, and his lack of masculinity was of some concern to Paul: Paul exhorts him to stand up, to stir up the spirit he received, to be a little more forthright and firm. Most of the initial converts to Christianity were among the godfearers, Gentiles who took up some of the practices of Judaism, and “pagan women in particular tended to become godfearers,”<sup>81</sup> because the demands of Judaism on men, especially circumcision, were much harsher. Celsus claimed that Christians were “able to gain over only the silly, and the mean, and the stupid, with women and children.”<sup>82</sup> As Origen points out, however, Celsus is a snob and despises anything that appeals to the vulgar. If there was any disproportion of women in the church, it may have been that women, confined to the house, were also out of public notice and safer from persecution.<sup>83</sup> John Chrysostom, although he denigrates women as temptresses like Eve,<sup>84</sup> also occasionally refers to their greater piety<sup>85</sup> and implies they benefit from their seclusion from public life.<sup>86</sup>

As long as Christians had to face sudden and horrible death for their faith, the essentially masculine nature of the Christian vocation was clear. The Christian, male and female, as we have seen, was a soldier and an athlete. When the persecutions ended, virginity and celibacy replaced martyrdom as the emotional center of the church, the sign of its supernatural nature. Christians, being human, have a

hard time thinking in a balanced, reasonable manner about sexuality. The apostolic teaching is that both virginity and marriage are good; but virginity is higher because it allows the person to be fully occupied with the affairs of God. A married person, having cares in this world, can easily allow those cares to obscure the *unum necessarium*. Virginity and celibacy also anticipate the new creation, when there will be no longer marrying and giving in marriage, because death and its concomitant, reproduction, will be no more.

Because of the emphasis on virginity as the equivalent of martyrdom, and perhaps because of a Platonic suspicion of the body, the Church began to see virginity as the supreme sign of the new life brought by Christ. Especially in the East, encratic tendencies were strong. Some Syriac churches tried to limit membership in the church to virgins and celibates, and even the Greek Fathers strongly emphasized the importance of virginity as the precondition of perfection.

Virginity, in John Bugge's interpretation of the patristic texts, was praised because it was a means of escape from the world of sin, death, and reproduction.<sup>87</sup> The virgin attained a state of simplicity, like the simplicity of God. Origen added to this another strain of Platonism in his interpretation of the *Song of Songs*, in which he saw not only an allegory of the union of Christ and the Church, but an allegory of the union of the soul and God. This mystical marriage was open to both men and women, since the human soul was feminine in both. Athanasius spoke of virgins as "the brides of Christ."<sup>88</sup> Chrysostom speaks of virgins who see "only the Bridegroom."<sup>89</sup>

Two attitudes were associated with this. Marriage was not seen simply as lesser because belonging to the present age of the world, but as somehow evil. The vigilance of the Church against Manichaeism kept this attitude in check, but plainly there is a denigration of sexuality and marriage in the patristic church. What also happened, although not until much later, was that spiritual marriage became a substitute for carnal marriage, and Christ as the heavenly bridegroom became the object of erotic and even sexual longings.<sup>90</sup>

The basic pattern of masculinity and femininity in Jewish and Christian testaments is consistent with the pattern in other cultures. Masculinity was a spiritual quality: Men could fall short of it, and women could attain it. Mary's song of triumph recalls the story of Judith, who crushed the head of the enemy. What was new in Christianity was the invitation to both sexes to participate in the inner life of the godhead, to become sons of God and form a community which would be the bride of God, created by him and from him and revealing him. New depths of masculinity and femininity, of separation and communion, were revealed within the godhead, whose unity was now shown to be a Trinity of persons.

Before the year 1200, men and women played an equal role in the life of the church (of which the clergy was a minuscule part). Christianity had indeed found a place for femininity and given it a high value, but men perceived the religion itself as sufficiently masculine that they felt no need to distance themselves from it to attain a masculine identity. Indeed, the life of the monk was honored as a way to attain a masculine identity. The relationship of the sexes in the church showed no signs of imbalance. Although it is possible to gather misogynic statements from the Fathers, we should not take these too seriously. Many of the Fathers had difficult personalities, and were highly critical of everyone, both men and women. Even Tertullian and Jerome, although they could lambaste women for their worldliness, could also speak with reverence of female devotion. The Anglo-Saxon Church especially shows a harmony of men and women working together, both in the internal life of the church and in the monastic mission to their Germanic cousins on the Continent. Not until the High Middle Ages did something happen to the gender balance of the Church. Since then, men have disproportionately abandoned Christianity. Between the patristic and monastic eras and the modern era something happened to the Church to make it a world of women.