2

Gender, Hagiography, and the Bible

AS THE MOST HEAVILY SCRUTINIZED BOOK of the medieval era, the Bible created the normative principles of medieval culture.[1] Biblical images of women encompass the entire spectrum of Hebrew and Christian spirituality. Pregnant women symbolize the heavenly prototype of the earthly community (Revelation 12.1), and maternal and bridal figures represent earthly Jerusalem and the church (1 Samuel 1–2; Galatians 4.26–27; Revelation 19.7–8, 21.2ff). Hebrew women serve as the guardians of Israel (Judges 5.7) and personify human virtue (Proverbs 31.10–31), while powerful holy women possess the gifts of prophecy and political arbitration (Judges 4; Acts 21.9). Christian scripture portrays a handful of contrite women as believers of superior faith to most men (Mark 5.25–34, 7.24–30; Matthew 9.20–22, 15.21–28; Luke 8.43–48; John 11.1–3, 20–44). Repentant and mourning women function as the human signifiers of contrition, compunction, and submission to the will of God (Luke 1.26ff, 8.2–3, 15.8–10; John 4.7–30, 19.25). Both Hebrew and Christian females personify the contemplative and active components of spirituality (Genesis 29.16ff; Luke 10.38–42), and they sponsor and serve holy men (2 Kings 4.8–10; Mark 1.29–31; Matthew 8.14–15; Luke 4.38–39; Acts 9.36–41, 16.13–15). A few Christian women perform the duties of missionaries and deacons (Acts 18.1–26; 1 Corinthians 16.19; Romans 16.1–4; Philippians 4.2–3; Philemon 2). These unconventional depictions of spiritual women, however, are counterbalanced by more traditional representations of women as the embodiments of fleshly sin.

Corrupt female characters in sacred writings function as the incarnation of lust, idolatry, and prideful self-indulgence, and therefore they personify the part of human nature that is alienated from God. A few of the most important metaphors in Hebrew and Christian scripture rely on the image of woman as sin. In the Pentateuch, the harlot-figure exemplifies

apostate Israel and other debauched women symbolize the tyrannical empires of the ancient Near East and their associated urban vices (Jeremiah 3; Ezekiel 16, 23; Isaiah 23.17–18; Nahum 3.4). The book of Revelation (17–18) reproduces the harlot *topos* by identifying Babylon or the Roman Empire as a drunken whore. Guardians and destroyers of Israel, biblical women are simultaneously intimate with and estranged from God.

The Hebrew and Christian scriptures focus on physical appearance, spinning, domestic service, patronage, and contrition as the outward manifestations of feminine piety. Biblical representations of female spirituality surface in later patristic, monastic, and conciliar writings that simultaneously empower and domesticate women's spiritual prowess. The starting point for any consideration of gender and sacred discourse is the Hebrew depiction of the expulsion of Eve and Adam from paradise (Genesis 2–3) and the resulting division of labor between the sexes. The Judaic and Christian interpretations of this famous passage range from praise for Eve's acquisition of knowledge and condemnation of Adam's passivity to denunciation of Eve's seduction by the serpent and her subsequent enticement of Adam.[2] From the patristic period, biblical exegetes have concentrated on the story of the expulsion through the parable of human sexuality. The most immediate ramification of Adam and Eve's fall from grace, however, is God's merciful act of reclothing their naked bodies. In the *City of God*, Augustine explains that, in Genesis 3, God stripped off the garment of grace (immortality) and reclothed the first couple with garments of skin (mortality).[3] According to Genesis 3, clothing is the material representation of humankind's fallen state, and, in the subsequent books of the Hebrew Bible, ornamentation of women's bodies personifies further apostasy from God.

Biblical Clothing

"And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them" (Genesis 3.21). The expulsion of Eve and Adam from the garden and God's subsequent reclothing of the first couple in animal skins symbolize the death of their prelapsarian bodies and the birth of their animal-like mortality.[4] The Hebrew prophets, Christian evangelists and apostles, and patristic writers are extremely sensitive to the rhetorical purposes of clothing in the Torah. Because the reclothed human body is such an important image in this fundamental text from Genesis, early church fathers interpret subsequent books of the Hebrew Bible as using symbolic

clothing and hairstyles of individual humans as the outward manifestations of their inward piety or impiety. According to this exegetical tradition, the Pentateuch and the prophetic books of the Bible signify the corruption of the human soul by the increasingly elaborate ornamentation of the body.[5] The differences between symbolic male and female dress found in these books reflect ancient gender precepts of carnality as feminine and spirituality as masculine. In particular, women's clothing denotes defilement, apostasy, and the eventual destruction of Israel. The charismatic hair shirts of the Hebrew prophets, in contrast, serve as the focal point of masculine power and as the signifiers of the male prophets' proximity to the pristine human status before the fall.

In the Hebrew Bible, animal-hair garments manifest the charismatic and prophetic powers of God's holy men. Although nudity is the natural garment of the undefiled body, the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden made the veiling of the shameful, defiled body a necessary part of human existence. Certain humans, however, continue to wear the primitive clothing of the first couple. For example, God wraps the prophets Elijah and Elisha, like Adam and Eve, in animal garments (2 Kings 1.8), rendering the ascetic attire of the two prophets only one step removed from the prelapsarian nudity of Eden.[6] When Elijah ascends to heaven on a fiery chariot, he throws off his camel-hair mantle because nudity is the dress of paradise (2 Kings 2.13). Similarly, the gospel of John suggests that nudity is the celestial garment of the body by emphasizing that, when Simon Peter and John opened Christ's tomb, they found only the linen cloths that had covered the sacred corpse (John 20.5).

In addition to relating the proximity of the prophets to Eden, ascetic mantles are indicators of the miraculous powers of Hebrew holy men. Elijah's cloak parts rivers (2 Kings 2.14) and enables the prophet to hear God's voice: "He wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him, and said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' " (1 Kings 19.13). The hairy tunics of Hebrew and Christian ascetics connect holy men to the animal world, which is free of the taint of human civilization and its associated vices. The nude bodies of exceptional saints, according to Christian hagiographers, reflect the purity of the resurrected flesh. For example, the Gallo-Roman writer, Sulpicius Severus, recalls one Egyptian hermit who lived in such a state of divine grace that he had no need of clothing, and his body was covered only by his long hair and beard.[7] The outward appearance and dress of Hebrew and Christian holy men herald both their charismatic

authority and their intimacy with God. The clothing of biblical women, however, serves a different rhetorical purpose. Whereas male garments signify power, female clothing usually represents sin or women's subordination to the authority of men.

Opulent women's clothing is a primary metaphor of the defilement of Hebrew piety through urban decadence; it signifies human pride, vanity, deceit, and lust while underscoring the alienation of humans from God.[8] According to the prophet Isaiah, the corruption of humankind is epitomized by the outward demeanor and dress of the daughters of Zion. All human vice is manifested in the "finery of anklets, the headbands and the crescents; the pendants, the bracelets, and the scarfs; the headdresses, the armlets, the sashes, the perfume boxes, and the amulets; the signet rings and nose rings; the festal robes, the mantles, the cloaks, and the handbags; the garments of gauze, the linen garments, the turbans, and veils" of these depraved women (Isaiah 3.16–23). Isaiah prophesies that God will cleanse the filth of the daughters of Zion and the Creator will transform their perfumes, fine robes, and pride into stench, sackcloth, and shame (Isaiah 3.24–4.4). The adoption of sackcloth by women is not an act of power but an act of repentance for their true nature. The book of Revelation (17.4) mirrors Isaiah's use of ornamentation as the *signum* of human depravity in a rebuke of the perversions of immoral Rome: "The woman [Rome] was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication." The adorned body of a woman is the physical representation of human sin.

Individual women, such as the infamous Jezebel, assume the guise of the unrighteous daughters of Zion and Revelation's debauched harlot: "She [Jezebel] painted her eyes, and adorned her head" (2 Kings 9.30). The biblical Jezebel is a Phoenician idolater who takes her meals with "four hundred and fifty prophets of Ba'al and the four hundred prophets of Ashe'rah" (1 Kings 18.19).[9] The Phoenician woman also dominates her husband Ahab, King of Israel and Samaria (1 Kings 16.31–32), whom she induces to dedicate altars to the fertility deity Ba'al. The heathen queen orders the murder of Yahweh's prophets (1 Kings 18.13), attempts to destroy Elijah (1 Kings 18), and forces Ahab to kill an innocent man and seize his property (1 Kings 21.5–16). Elijah, after he defeats Jezebel's prophets at Mount Carmel, curses his female nemesis and prophesies that "the dogs shall eat Jezebel in the territory of Jezreel, and none shall bury her" (2 Kings 9.10). Jezebel, the supreme personification of human apostasy

from God, suffers one of the most gruesome deaths in the Bible. Her rebellious eunuchs throw the impious woman out of a window, her blood splatters the courtyard, and horses trample her body so savagely that only her skull, feet, and the palms of her hands are left to be fed to the dogs. Jezebel's executor, Jehu, pronounces that the wretched queen's corpse "shall be as dung upon the face of the field" (2 Kings 9.37). Jezebel, the unrepentant daughter of Zion, would later become the model in hagiographical discourse for all women who hinder the work of holy men.[10]

The transformation of the daughters of Zion from vehicles of sin into vehicles of repentance is one of the most important biblical images for subsequent depictions of holy women. Only through the eradication of outward ornament can women atone for the vices of their sex. For male prophets, ascetic garb makes a statement about otherworldly power, connects these charismatic men to the biblical past, and places them outside the boundaries of human society. In contrast, women's adoption of mourning dress is symbolic of the inherent depravity of the female sex and the necessity of physical penance.

Hairstyles, as depicted in holy scripture, also serve as outward indicators of either righteousness or ritual pollution. In the Hebrew Bible hairstyles are used metaphorically as *signa* of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 5.1–2) and the consecrated power of priests (Leviticus 21.10). In both Christian and Hebrew scripture, the arrangement of the hair represents holiness and apostasy, as well as physical strength, contrition, and bodily defilement.[11] Depictions of ritual hairstyles in the Hebrew Bible are but part of a larger series of strictures concerning purity, prayer, and offerings whereas, in the Pauline epistles, hairstyles and clothing function as the outward manifestations of the temporal social order necessitated by the fall from grace (Genesis 3).

The academic investigation into Paul's views on women and gender has inspired some of the most volatile theological debates of the last two decades.[12] Much of this scholarly disputation has centered around Paul's support of women as missionaries, patrons, and local church leaders as well as his advocacy of women's subjugation to the authority of men. In the tradition that ascribes all the "Pauline epistles"[13] to the apostle himself, the most provocative passage concerning the relationship between the sexes is in Galatians 3.28: "There is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Theologians and church historians have suggested that this passage is a pronouncement of mythical androgyny, a preaching device designed for mixed-sex audiences, a baptismal rite, or an announcement of eschatological equality between the sexes.[14] Galatians (3.28) can also be interpreted as a continuation of the "world upside down" leitmotif found in the life of Christ. Early Christian communities may have believed that there would be no supremacy based on sex, legal status, or economic status during the Final Judgment. Galatians (3.28) therefore could be a statement about the order of redemption which recognizes no hierarchy in contrast to the order of creation that results in a sexual hierarchy of male-female (Genesis 2). Certain sections of the Pauline corpus suggest that Christ's disciples advocated the traditional subordination of woman to man, and, consequently, these texts devote a great deal of attention to the outward demeanor and appearance of Christian women and less attention to the clothing, hair, and deportment of Christian men.

Some of the most famous passages from the epistles dictate the public activity and appearance of women. These sections clearly uphold the directive of Deuteronomy (22.5): "A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God." Cross-dressing, in a Hebrew context, was a form of ritual impurity because it rendered men and women "imperfect members of their class."[15] The "Pauline" (c. 50s-60s) and other epistles, 1–2 Timothy and 1–2 Peter (c. 50–120), follow the purity laws of Deuteronomy, imposing proper female behavior and appearance in the community or *ecclesia*.[16]

Several passages establish a sex-specific procedure for prayer in 1 Corinthians (11.3–16). Although Moses and Elijah were required to veil their heads when they spoke with Yahweh, the incarnation of God in human flesh allowed men to approach the Godhead without veils: "We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3.18).[17] Christian men, the text emphasizes, must pray or prophesy with their heads uncovered because they are the "image and glory of God," but women who do so are to wear veils. The veil is a visible reminder of woman's second place in creation and her subordination to male authority because "woman is the reflection of man" (1 Corinthians 11.7).[18] A woman's veil is defined as "a symbol of authority on her head" (1 Corinthians 11.10). If a female member of the community refuses to veil her head while praying or prophesying in public, the apostle decrees that "she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her wear a veil" (1 Corinthians 11.6). Shaving the head, according to Hebrew scripture, is a remedy for making an unclean person clean (Leviticus 14.8), an act of taking away power (Judges 16.19), and a sign of spiritual repentance

(Isaiah 3.24). Paul, in 1 Corinthians (11.6–7), suggests that an unveiled woman who does not shave her head is polluted, unrepentant, and defiant of the biblical order of creation. A male member of the *ecclesia* who refuses to cut his hair similarly transgresses the authority of Genesis (2).

In 1 Corinthians (11.14), Paul, who himself had cut his hair short at Cenchreae because of a vow (Acts 18.18), advises Christian men to wear their hair short, as long hair is dishonorable to their sex (1 Corinthians 11.14). Here Paul appears to be ignoring the Hebrew Bible's great hero, Samson the Nazarene (Judges 13–16), whose famous long hair signified his physical strength. The Nazarenes, however, let their hair grow only for brief periods of time so that they could cut it off and offer it to the Temple (Numbers 6.18). Their shorn heads would then symbolize purity and obedience to God. Christian women, however, are to keep their hair long as a "covering" (1 Corinthians 11.15). Paul seems to be arguing in 1 Corinthians (11.3–16) that the earthly relationship between woman and man must conform to the story of creation from Genesis (2). Man is made in the image of God, and, since woman is made from man, her physical appearance must reflect her subsidiary status. Long hair emasculates a man, whereas short hair empowers a woman. For Paul, cross-gendering violates Hebrew purity laws because a feminized man or a masculinized woman is ritually unclean. Any transgression of gender lines could potentially result in the contamination of the entire community and breach the natural order of creation as presented in Genesis (2). Both proper clothing and hair must reflect the divine order of the universe.

Paul ordains in 1 Corinthians (14.33–36) that women should remain silent in the community. This controversial passage has been explained as a later interpolation of 1 Corinthians (11.3–16) because it contradicts the apostle's earlier directive that women can pray as long as their heads are covered.[19] It is possible that these apparently dissenting passages reflect Paul's own struggle with the role of women in the church.[20] He tempers his radical support of women's celibacy, prophesy, missionary work, and the female diaconate by dictating the communal conduct of ordinary women in more traditional terms. When Paul writes of extraordinary women, such as Phoebe, the deacon of the church at Cenchreae (Romans 16.1–2), he leaves aside such patriarchal edicts: "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon [*diakonos*] of the church at Cenchreae . . . for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well." When he writes about women generally, however, he turns to conservative gender precepts and affirms gender divisions. The post-Pauline epistles, 1 Timothy and

1 Peter, highlight women's role in bringing sin into the world. The same letters also preach that women must combat continuously their inherent depravity.

1 Timothy 2.13–14 contains an exegesis on Genesis 2–3 which names Eve as the guilty party in the story of the fall: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor." The apostle Paul himself had named Adam as the violator of divine commandment: "Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin" (Romans 5.12). The epistles of Timothy and Peter, which include some of the most vehement attacks on women in the corpus, amplify the apostle's directives concerning female behavior and appearance and incorporate the Hebrew Bible's metaphor of the adorned woman as the embodiment of sin.

1 Peter and 1 Timothy apply Pauline rhetoric by proclaiming that women shall have no authority over men, they shall not teach men, and that they shall be "saved through bearing children" (1 Timothy 2.12–15). In a Christian redaction of the "daughters of Zion" metaphor, the author of 1 Peter (3.3–4) castigates women who wear luxurious clothing, display extravagant jewelry, and braid their hair.[21] 1 Timothy advises modest dress and submissive demeanor as the spiritual remedies for feminine wiles. The virtuous woman, according to both Timothy and Peter, should engage in charity and hospitality. She should be submissive to male authority, and she should acquiesce to her husband as "Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord" (1 Peter 3.6). The Christian woman should be modest, chaste, and domestic; she should wash "the feet of the saints" (1 Timothy 5.10). The pious matron should avoid the traditional female vices of idleness, quarrelsomeness, and self-indulgence, and she should not fall prey to false teachings (1 Timothy 5.11–13; 2 Timothy 3.6–7).

Whereas ideal female behavior in biblical rhetoric centers on domestic matters and physical appearance, exemplary male conduct is associated with public duty. The apostolic directives concerning public male demeanor concentrate on the qualities that make good administrators: temperance, intelligence, dignity, diplomacy, generosity, and sensitivity (1 Timothy 3). An effective bishop, according to 1 Timothy, must be able to rule his wife and children, "for if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for God's church?" (1 Timothy 3.5). The mandates concerning male and female comportment reveal a concern for the reputation of the *ecclesia* in the non-Christian world, but the guidelines for churchmen additionally emphasize public accountability and male

authority over a household. The edicts for women accentuate the importance of female submission to the authority of men and the eradication of uniquely feminine sins.[22]

The Theology of the Cosmetic[23]

Patristic writings supplement the Pauline construction of the ideal Christian woman and prescribe mourning dress and penance as spiritual treatments for the female soul. The patristic authors further the gender directives of the Pauline corpus by arguing that Eve's fall from grace continuously manifests itself in the lavish apparel of degenerate women. The patristic writers who established the Christian rhetoric of the cosmetic partook of the wider classical worldview that connected self-presentation with either piety or impiety. Stoic philosophers, including Seneca (4 BCE-65 CE), Musonius Rufus (c. 30–90s CE), and Epictetus (c. 50–130 CE), believed that the physical appearance of public men should reflect their interior virtue. Patristic writers, however, shifted the Stoic emphasis on male dress to that of female adornment to theologize Eve's role in the fall from grace. Christian theologians thus fused the Stoic rhetoric of outward appearance with the Hebrew discourse on exterior adornment as a *signum* of interior depravity. In urging women to adopt the mourning garb of the "daughters of Zion," theological treatises on women's dress and veils echo the rhetoric of the Hebrew Bible. Women who squander family fortunes on self-adornment are the unrepentant daughters of Eve.

Tertullian wrote the most impassioned castigation of female dress. He accuses women of destroying humankind by opening the door to the devil.[24] The theologian identifies the wardrobes of excessive, seductive women with the fall of Eve from primordial grace. Significantly, Tertullian argues that it was not covetousness of knowledge that led Eve into sin but desire for ornamentation.[25] He claims that if gems, gold, and embroidered clothing had been available to Eve after the expulsion, she would have cast aside the tunic of skins provided by God. The "daughters of Eve," he argues, "still think of putting adornments over the skins of animals."[26] Even luxuriant color connotes unnatural vice, for had God desired women to dress in brilliant colors he would have created blue and purple sheep. In Tertullian's opinion, Satan is a licentious artist who transformed the spiritual bodies of Adam and Eve into fleshly corpses. Satan's minions instruct women in the art of cosmetics and personal adornment and teach men the mysteries of metallurgy, astrology, herbal cures, and philosophy.[27] Men

pervert the natural order of the universe through illegitimate knowledge; women desecrate divine order through deceitful self-presentation.

The "cosmetic" theologian also argues that the angels mentioned by Paul are Satan's servants who instruct women in the arts of bodily adornment ("That is why a woman ought to have a veil on her head, because of the angels," 1 Corinthians 11.10).[28] Tertullian supports the legitimacy of the apocryphal book of Enoch which details the legend of the fallen angels who seduce the "daughters of man."[29] This legend is derived from Genesis (6.2), which enigmatically states that "the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair; and they took to wife such of them as they chose." In *On the Veiling of Virgins*, Tertullian makes the direct connection between women's veils and the angels who fall on account of earthly women. Men, Tertullian argues, do not need to veil their heads because they did not cause the angels to sin and because the head of man is Christ. Virginal veils serve as helmets and shields against temptation, scandal, and the seduction of angels.[30] The exegete adds at the end of this vituperative attack that fine clothes "are the trappings appropriate to a woman who was condemned and is dead, arrayed as if to lend splendor to her funeral."[31] Women thus must wear penitential garb to escape spiritual death and to expiate the original sin of Eve. Tertullian asserts that holy women who dress their bodies in austere and humble garments will be rewarded spiritually by having their souls adorned in silk and fine linen. Female ascetics must combat their natural inclination to tempt angelic beings by correlating their flesh to the austere physiognomies of poor apostles and undomesticated prophets.

The bishop and martyr Cyprian of Carthage (c. 200–258) defines the ideal apparel of holy women in his treatise *On the Dress of Virgins*, modeled after Tertullian's discourse on ornamentation.[32] The bishop states that "continence and modesty consist not alone in purity of the flesh, but also in modesty of dress and adornment."[33] Humble dress therefore is a concrete sign of a woman's chastity, which should be evident in the soul as well as to the physical eyes. Cyprian cites both the passages from Isaiah on the "daughters of Zion" (3.16ff) and the adorned harlot of Revelation (17.1–6) as justifications for his insistent condemnation of sumptuous female attire. "Apostate angels" induce women to put on jewelry and makeup, to dye their hair, and to take luxurious baths, but such alteration of a woman's divinely given image, according to Cyprian, transforms her body into the devil's vessel. After all, the bishop argues, if the Son of Man's hair is "white as white wool, white as snow" (Revelation 1.14), then holy

women, in imitation of him, should be content with their postlapsarian bodies and not try to disguise their true nature through ornamentation.[34]

Jerome similarly associates the fine raiment of Roman women with covetousness. He contrasts the hunger of Elijah, the nakedness of Christ, and the poverty of the apostles with the teeming closets of patrician women.[35] Jerome advises the mothers of young girls, who are vowed to virginity, to dress them in mourning garb (*pulla tunica*), such as little black cloaks, and to take away their elegant linens and gems.[36] In the hands of patristic writers, the Hebrew metaphor of the adorned woman is no longer merely a penitential *topos*; it has become part of a thriving theological exegesis on the fall.

The church fathers prescribe sober dress and veils as spiritual remedies for the natural pollution of womankind. Papal, episcopal, and monastic legislators gradually transformed the patristic discourse on corrupt female dress into ad hoc institutional practice.[37] Eastern and western church councils between the fourth and seventh centuries reiterated the apostle Paul's directives on women's public demeanor, veils, and dress. One fifth-century North African council forbids women to teach men in public. The same council mandates that women should wear appropriately somber vestments when receiving the veil from bishops. Church councils began to command virgins to strip off their silks, gold, and jewels and to stand at the altar in consecrated black.[38] The veiling of professed religious females was to be carried out in public, supervised by bishops. Episcopal councils also dictate the appropriate age for women to take the veil.[39] The papacy took similar actions to regulate the veiling of professional religious women and to forbid nuns from touching any of the sacred objects within the eucharistic spaces of churches.[40] A series of sixth-century Gallo-Roman church decrees require women to be veiled in the presence of the eucharist; they could not receive the eucharist in their bare hands, and they could not touch any consecrated objects.[41]

Legislation of the Council of Gangra (325–381), which was replicated in subsequent councils, cites Deuteronomy (22.5) and Paul (1 Corinthians 11.10) as authoritative justifications for its condemnation of "theatrical transvestism."[42] The denunciation of cross-dressing as theatrical suggests that the roots of transvestism are in mime and theatre. The canon forbidding cross-dressing follows a discussion of false ascetics who misuse the austere dress of spiritual men. A transvestite therefore violates the ritual purity regulations of the Hebrew Bible, transgresses the authority of the apostle Paul, disrupts social order, and emulates the decadence of professional actors and mimes. Later episcopal councils condemn women's cross-dressing as a pagan abomination perhaps because ancient cults had practiced cross-dressing as part of their fertility rites. Fifth-century Roman law forbade women with shaved heads from crossing the threshold of churches, while legal texts threatened the expulsion of bishops who allowed bald women into their sanctuaries.[43] The condemnation of spiritual transvestism also appears in the hagiographical accounts of the fourth-century Pachomian monastery at Tabennisi in Egypt. According to tradition, the female community that was built across the river from the male *coenobium* adhered to the strict rule of Pachomius except that the women were forbidden from donning the goat hair worn by the male ascetics.[44]

Subsequent monastic rules similarly safeguard female religious from their natural inclinations toward luxurious adornment and at the same time protect cloistered women from the rigorous regime of masculinized *askesis*. The first significant rule for women in the West, that of Caesarius of Arles (c. 470–542), emphasizes modest clothing and austere material possessions.[45] Clothing is such an important metaphor in Caesarius's monastic legislation that another sixth-century bishop in Gaul claimed that Caesarius's rule was "as sweet as a vestment of linen," perhaps a reference to Caesarius's own use of linen as symbolic of the spiritual "inner garments" of chaste souls.[46] The bishop of Arles wrote two monastic rules, one for the male community at Arles and the other for the women's cloister at Saint Jean which was under the direction of his sister, Caesaria.[47] In adapting his male rule to what he regarded as the unique spiritual requirements of the female sex, Caesarius added more detailed stipulations on material culture within the women's cloister.

Caesarius underscores the dangers of luxury within a women's community. He warns nuns (but not monks) against luxurious clothing, furnishings, and sacramental objects. Only in the rule for women does Caesarius provide a detailed description of dress. He bans bright colors and allows only milk-white dress or undyed cloth. He designates appropriate colors and textiles and even suggests which items may be embroidered. There is to be no purple trim, no purple dye, no silk, and no *bombycine* (a heavy fabric fashioned from mixed yarns).[48] According to Caesarius, female clothing—indeed, all objects in the women's cloister—should be selected and designed for the good of the spirit, not for earthly pleasure or physical ease. His influential rule for female religious was intended to combat the inherent feminine impulse toward luxury by carefully constructing its radical opposite—somber clothing and modest material objects.[49]

Hagiographical *vitae* popularized the image of the solemn, veiled, or mourning holy woman. Women's changed dress became the central metaphor for the demise of their earthly attachment to ornamentation and the rebirth of their life of ascetic penance because sacred scripture and patristic discourse associated the feminine with vanity and self-indulgence.[50] Late antique and early medieval holy women reverse Eve's covetousness of ornamentation by wearing undyed, austere attire and by donating their luxurious material objects to the churches and tombs of the holy dead. There were a handful of holy women who donned the charismatic hair shirts of the Hebrew prophets and male ascetics as well as the mourning dress of the daughters of Zion. Most church fathers disapproved of women who adopted masculine dress, and they upheld Paul's ordinances concerning gender distinctions and social order. Sacred fictions, in spite of patristic and episcopal proscriptions of spiritual cross-dressing, continue to record the legendary lives of the great transvestite saints. Obviously, tantalizing sacred portraits of women who shave their heads and put on male ascetic attire continued to intrigue both hagiographers and their audiences.[51] Other sanctified women wear linen, which represents both "the righteous deeds of the saints" (Revelation 19.8) and Christ's resurrection.[52] Saints, even as young girls, repudiate sparkling gems, desire to wear "Christ's" unstained linen, and receive ecstatic visions of their future veilings.[53]

In the late antique theological world, veiling of women typically signified their second place in creation, their role in the fall, and the resulting submission of women to male authority.[54] By the early Middle Ages, however, the veil also became an emblem of a woman's spiritual vocation; it signified her disengagement from marriage and the family and was the cynosure of her otherworldly citizenship. Virgin's veils possess miraculous powers and are capable of withstanding swords because the veil, like virginity, is impermeable.[55] The hair of these righteous females has none of the negative connotations of feminine hair in classical and sacred discourse; remnants of saints' hair function as charismatic relics capable of healing the diseased and possessed.[56] Hagiographers refashion the negative attributes of female bodies—deportment, dress, and hair—into vessels of repentance, with women's charismatic power stemming from the eradication of feminine vice.

The *vitae* of late antique and early medieval holy women therefore popularize the theology of the cosmetic that was promulgated by both sacred scripture and patristic discourse. Because female apparel had traditionally associated women with spiritual apostasy, churchmen designed

appropriate ascetic attire that would immediately signify the alienation of these special women from the transgressions of their sex. The hagiographical rewriting of female dress transforms the self-indulgent daughters of Eve into the repentant daughters of Zion.

Biblical Spinning and Serving Women

Patristic, monastic, and hagiographical writers also appropriate the image of the chaste, charitable spinning woman from Hebrew, Christian, and even classical sacred discourse as symbols of women saints' virginal purity. Spinning is linked intimately with charity and ritualistic piety and, in the Hebrew Bible, the virtue of spinning women serves as a contrast to the depravity and apostasy of adorned women. The book of Proverbs (31.10–31) defines the ideal woman: "She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. . . . She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches to the needy." In Exodus (35.25–26), women "who have the ability to spin with their hands" make "spin offerings" to Yahweh. The Christian compiler of Acts judges a woman's worth by the beauty of her clothwork. In Acts (9.36–41) the apostle Peter resurrects a charitable widow named Tabitha after her friends had displayed before him the exquisite tunics and garments she had woven.

The Hebrew and Christian Bibles also glorify women who serve or patronize holy men. In 1 Kings (17.9–16) Yahweh commands a pious widow to feed and serve Elijah and, in return, the prophet multiplies her grain and oil. The synoptic gospels recount Jesus' resurrection of Peter's mother-in-law, who immediately upon rising waits upon the men (Mark 1.29–31; Matthew 8.14–15; Luke 4.38–39). In both instances, women who serve men are the recipients of divine gifts. Luke uses Martha, the sister of Mary and Lazarus who dispenses food and drink to Jesus and the apostles (Luke 10.38–42), as the paradigm of women's service to men. Both the books of Luke and Acts praise a number of women who finance the missionary movement and offer their households as shelters to the neophyte community. Sacred scripture and classical discourse formulate female spirituality through the images of domesticity and spinning.

In classical literature, spinning and working wool signify a woman's chastity, charity, and femininity.[57] Neither masculinized women, such as the Amazons, nor virile male citizens worked cloth.[58] The Hebrew and Christian Bibles similarly assign gender-specific work. The division of the labor, as recorded in Genesis (3.16–19) and the gospel of Matthew (6.28),

is that men shall toil and women shall spin. Like cross-dressing, transposing work roles results in ritual impurity. In 2 Samuel (3.29), King David curses the house of Jo'ab by proclaiming that each successive generation will never be without a son who "has a discharge, or who is leprous, or who holds a spindle, or who is slain by the sword, or who lacks bread." Thus the compilers of the Hebrew Bible rank effeminacy, or the transposing of traditional work roles, with oozing diseases, defeat, and starvation. The woman who holds the spindle, however, like the woman who engages in charitable acts or serves holy men, is the exemplar of her sex.

According to patristic writers, the spinning and weaving of virgins signify their fidelity to Christ and their charity to his poor. Tertullian advises holy women to keep their hands busy with spinning at home.[59] The patristic author Ambrose (c. 340–397) asserts that God had given women the wisdom of textiles. Jerome informs his virgins that spinning and weaving are fundamental components of female spirituality. The Gallo-Roman aristocrat Sidonius of Apollonaris (c. 430–487) agrees that men philosophize and women spin.[60] Caesarius preaches that the church is like a spinning woman who weaves Christ in a "double cloak" of flesh and divinity.[61] Because patristic discourse embraces both Hebrew and classical rhetorical devices, the church fathers naturally applied the familiar literary image of the chaste, spinning woman to Christian saints. Monastic legislators then converted the theoretical discourse of the virginal spinning matron into ad hoc institutional practice.

Caesarius of Arles devotes several sections of his women's rule to spinning and weaving. The nuns are to spin daily while reading aloud. Significantly, the sister in charge of woolwork holds an office of equal importance to that of the cellarer and porter—the two important offices in the male *regula*. All the nuns produce the cloister's garments, but the Benedictine Rule, the major male *regula* of the sixth century, required monks to purchase vestments elsewhere rather than make them in the monastery.[62] The significance of this attention to clothwork in female *regulae* is twofold: it points to the historical reality of the convent as a primary producer of liturgical cloth and monastic dress; and the symbolic use of spinning in both monastic *regulae* and in saints' *vitae* reinforces the ancient association of women's piety with clothwork.

A number of famous women saints spin, sew, or weave in order to manifest their charity or charismatic power. A few sacred depictions of male martyrs, however, use working wool or donning female dress as part of a ritualistic humiliation. For example, the life of the male martyr, Hesychius of Antioch, replicates the Hebrew and classical condemnations of men who spin. This rather unusual martyr is "dressed in a slave's tunic and delivered to the wool workers in a fabric mill to be cruelly ridiculed."[63] Other male martyrs, such as Serge and Bacchus, are stripped of their masculine attire and paraded about cities in women's clothing.[64] In male sacred fiction, cross-dressing or working wool thus appear as ceremonial punishments. In female *vitae*, however, cloth working is a crucial aspect of female piety, and transvestism can serve as an outward indication of spiritual virility.

Many female saints have some connection, however tenuous or insubstantial, with the domestic arts. The desert hermit Piamoun spins flax in her cell when she is not performing her requisite charismatic duties as an anchorite. Even the undomestic and unconventional Mary of Egypt, the harlot-saint, carries a distaff.[65] Melania the Younger spins cloth in Jerusalem while her husband, Pinian, chops wood in imitation of the evangelical gendered-work directive (Matthew 6.28). The younger Melania also engages in extensive charitable works, as does the ideal woman of Proverbs who spins and extends her hand to the poor.[66] When Radegund of Poitiers' friend, Bishop Gregory of Tours, comes to her funeral, the nuns show him her spindles and he weeps at the sight of them.[67] The queen's spindles are so infused with the Holy Spirit that they could expel demons from the cloister.[68] The Frankish queen Chlotild weaves in silence while she performs miracles.[69] Frankish women saints also weave and spin ecclesiastical vestments, altar cloths, and altar hangings for the consecrated male hierarchy.[70] Pious women who spin are connected intimately with both philanthropic acts and service to holy men.

Hagiographical discourse duplicates biblical images of humble serving women. In their *vitae*, late Roman patrician holy women and northern European noble saints of the early Middle Ages disavow their aristocratic origins through their servile demeanor, modest dress, and domestic deeds. The Empress Helena dresses as a humble servant and ministers to nuns at table.[71] Melania the Elder dons a slave's hood and waits upon important churchmen.[72] In their lives, the Theodosian empresses humanize the public image of the imperial family by clothing the poor, working in soup kitchens, and washing dishes.[73] The holy women of the Frankish aristocracy imitate the philanthropic deeds of the late Roman empresses. Radegund of Poitiers ministers to lepers, the poor, and the diseased. She cleans churches and waits upon holy men in imitation of Martha's service to Jesus and the apostles.[74] In the life of Martin of Tours, Maximas, the wife of a

Roman official, emulates Mary Magdalene's repentance by drenching the Christ-like Martin's feet with her tears and wiping them with her hair. She also imitates the pious service of Martha by making dinner for the bishop of Tours, mixing his drink with her own hand and collecting the crumbs after he had finished.[75] Other holy women, such as the Frankish Austreberta, display their obedience to God by baking bread.[76] In Frankish Gaul, the domestic service motif culminates in the archetypal housekeeping saint who cooks, spins cloth, washes the feet of the poor, and nurses the sick.[77]

The refashioned images of late Roman and early medieval aristocratic women also include their replicating evangelical women's financial patronage of the institution of the church. In both Luke and Acts, wealthy women finance and shelter the neophyte missionary movement and the early Christian community. In Acts (16.14–15), Lydia, a merchant-woman, offers her residence to the apostles as a refuge. In imitation of wealthy, evangelical women such as Lydia, late antique patricians serve as ecclesiastical benefactors by building churches, funding male careers, and dispensing alms. Early medieval holy women simulate the universal patronage of the late Roman patricians albeit on a more provincial level. Frankish women establish monasteries, decorate altars, and finance local episcopal politics. But like the women of Galilee who witness holy events from a distance (Matthew 27.55), the spirituality of early medieval holy women remains supplemental to that of important male saints. Female saints support the consecrated hierarchy of the church as humble servants who remain outside the closed circle of male power.

Biblical Women as Simple Faith

Spinning, service, and patronage are integral facets of the ascetic lives of late antique and early medieval female saints, and these feminine virtues replicate the charity and piety of women in the Hebrew and Christian Bibles. Biblical representation of repentant females personifying a simple faith in God is also repeated in lives of women saints. A favorite motif of evangelical authors is to castigate the rational intellect of the male apostles by promoting the simple faith of women whose belief in Christ is stronger than that of the men (Mark 5.25–34, 7.24–30; Matthew 9.20–26, 15.22–28; Luke 8.43–48; John 11.1–3, 20–44). Because ancient theology associated women with the irrational and emotional, they were the perfect metaphorical representations of the purest faith in God. Faith in God, according to the apostle Paul, stands in opposition to reliance on human knowledge:

"Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" (1 Corinthians 1.20). Paul uses the rhetoric of inversion to admonish those who rely on wondrous signs or philosophy to believe in God (1 Corinthians 1.22). He proclaims that "the unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2.14). Only those who become "fools for Christ's sake" can achieve divine wisdom. In this perspective, women's irrational psyches made them ideal "fools for Christ."

Evangelical authors use the simple faith of women who believe in Christ as a foil to the apostles who often demand "signs and philosophy." The synoptic gospels recount the famous story of the woman who touches the fringes of Christ's garments and is healed immediately of an "issue of blood" (Mark 5.25–34; Matthew 9.20–26; Luke 8.43–48). This healing is an act of inclusion because Christ violates Hebrew purity laws by curing a hemorrhaging woman (Leviticus 15.25–30), considered a social pariah because she transferred her uncleanliness to anyone or anything she touched, to skin, clothing, bedding, and entire households. Indeed the Bible designates all humans who ooze—lepers, menstruating women, and men who discharge matter—as unclean (Leviticus 12–15). After Jesus heals the woman who had suffered for twelve years from an issue of blood, he resurrects a twelve-year-old girl (Mark 5.42). In Luke, Jesus straightens the body of a woman who had been bent over for eighteen years (13.11–13). Jesus' healings of a menstruating woman, a young girl at the onset of menstruation, and a postmenopausal woman signify the universal restoration of the female life cycle.[78]

Jesus' metaphorical healing of a *hemorrhissa* communicates the important spiritual messages of the power of faith. The gospel of Mark states that the woman had sought the healing powers of doctors and had spent all her money seeking a cure. Yet Jesus restores the unclean woman: "And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone forth from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, 'who touched my garments?' " The male apostles challenge Jesus: "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, 'Who touched me?' " (Mark 5.31). The trembling woman, however, approaches Jesus and prostrates herself before him. Jesus instructs her: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease" (Mark 5.34). Jesus shows no fear that the bleeding woman has transferred her uncleanliness to his garments. He ignores the male apostles who question his authority. The gospel thus asserts that the power of faith overcomes all earthly healing arts. The unclean

woman personifies pure faith in God and, although she is outside the ritual boundaries of the Law, she is a recipient of the divine gift of healing. Her simple faith rivals that of a male apostle, who distrusted the charismatic abilities of Jesus: "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14.31).

Sinful or idolatrous women in the gospels are sometimes represented as the human manifestation of pristine faith in Christ. In Matthew (15.22–28) a woman implores Jesus to exorcise her possessed daughter. She is a Canaanite and therefore an idolater and enemy of the Jews; like the hemorrhaging woman, she lives outside the ritual confines of the Law. The apostles, annoyed by the woman's pleading, beg Jesus to send her away, but he heals the daughter in response to the simple faith of the mother. The significance of the event parallels that of the healing of the woman with an issue of blood. The Canaanite woman believes in the Messiah more strongly than do the apostles who instinctively dismiss her plea. The gospel of Mark (7.26–30) repeats the story but designates a Syrophoenician woman as the zealous gentile convert. Finally in John (4.7–30), Jesus converts an unnamed Samaritan woman not by performing an exorcism but by speaking with her in public. In Ravenna, sixth-century mosaicists chose to depict the meeting between Jesus and the woman of Samaria (Figure 1).

Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at a watering well, where he asks her for a drink. She responds: "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria? For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans." Jesus reveals his supernatural clairvoyance by commanding her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." She answers, "I have no husband." Jesus responds, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband." The woman then recognizes the Son of God: "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet" (John 4.18). At this point in the narrative, the apostles approach Jesus and ask him why he is speaking to a woman. The Samaritan woman goes out among her people to announce the coming of the Messiah. Early Christian writers regarded this woman as the first missionary to the gentiles.[79] The evangelical presentation of Christ's conversion of women—even adulteresses—created a powerful, enduring prototype for the spiritual powers of repentance and obedience.[80]

The conversion of the Samaritan, Syrophoenician, and Canaanite women affirms Jesus' embrace of the excluded, the triumph of divine healing over earthly medicine, and the vacillating faith of the male apostles.

Figure 1. Woman of Samaria at the well. Sixth-century mosaic. S. Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna, Italy. Alinari/Art Resource, New York.

These gospel stories represent pure faith in God through the conversion of women who believe in the Messiah when the male apostles doubt. The metamorphosis of sinful, polluted women into contrite vessels of faith represents the possibility of the redemption of universal humanity, for if defiled women can become apostles of God then salvation is open to everyone. The authors of the gospels employ the rhetoric of inversion to remind male audiences that faith depends on submission and repentance, that is, on qualities closely associated with the simple faith of the female. The evangelists represent the male intellect as a "stumbling block" to faith. Feminine belief in divine power is the mirror-opposite of masculine reason.

Because women represent faith in Christ, they also personify belief in his resurrection. The anointing of Jesus by a woman is the most significant foreshadowing of his crucifixion in the gospels (Matthew 26.6–13; Mark 14.3–9; Luke 7.37–50; John 12.1–8). She enters the male banqueting room with unbound hair, a style favored by prostitutes of the time. She wipes the feet of Jesus with her hair and anoints him with ointment from an ala-

baster flask, entreating him to forgive her sins. In two of the gospels the anointing takes place in the house of a leper. In Luke (7.39), the event occurs in the house of a Pharisee who is scandalized that Jesus would allow a sinful woman to anoint him: "If this man [Jesus] were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." Jesus, however, rebukes the legalistic Pharisee for being less hospitable than the contrite woman: "I entered this your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair" (Luke 7.44). In the Mark (14.6–7) and Matthew (26.10–11) versions of the story, the male disciples question Jesus for allowing the woman to waste three hundred denarii's worth of oil. Jesus reprimands the men: "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing for me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you will, you can do good to them; but you will not always have me." He then acknowledges the act as a prophetic sign of his burial and immortalizes the symbolic actions of the woman by stating that the gospel shall be preached in all nations "in memory of her."[81] He admonishes the men at the table for both their inhospitality and their inability to comprehend the eschatological significance of the contrite woman's deed.

Such anointing also foreshadows the role of women at Christ's crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, as does the account of Lazarus in John (11.1–44). This text also parallels Jesus' healing of defiled women inasmuch as Hebrew purity laws decreed that dead bodies pollute those who come into contact with them: "He who touches the dead body of any person shall be unclean seven days" (Numbers 19.11). In John, Jesus resurrects Lazarus who had been dead for four days. The number of days is revealing because the ancient Hebrews believed that the soul lingered over the body for three days before departing the earth.[82] The mourners had entombed Lazarus in a cave that is reminiscent of Christ's own sepulcher, with a huge stone blocking the entrance. Jesus enters the cave where there is no odor of death and raises the dead man. He performs this miracle because Lazarus's sister, Martha, acknowledges him as the Messiah: "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world." Both Martha and Mary, who represent active and contemplative spirituality, possess a steadfast faith in the Son of God. Their mourning for Lazarus and their subsequent faith in Christ's ability to revive him portend the symbolic function of women at the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.[83]

Women representing simple faith are the principle actors in the story of the crucifixion and resurrection. Mourning women dominate these crucial theological passages of the New Testament both because of their ancient cultural role as the anointers and custodians of dead bodies and because of the evangelical motif of inversion. All the gospels mention the women who stood at the cross (Matthew 27.55–56; Mark 15.40–41; Luke 23.49; John 19.25–27). In John (20.11–18), Mary Magdalene is the first witness of the resurrection. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome prepare to anoint the body of the dead Jesus with spices and ointments (Mark 16.1; Luke 23.55–24.1; Matthew 28.1), but angels command the women to announce the resurrection of Christ to the male apostles. In Mark (16.9–11) and Luke (24.10–11), the male disciples refuse to believe that the resurrected Christ appeared first to Mary Magdalene and the other women. Christ later castigates males for their spiritual vacillation: "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" (Luke 24.25). The spiritual message of the crucifixion and resurrection passages repeats the motif of inversion from the *vita Christi*, that women represent faith because they are the incarnations of simplicity and emotion. Sinful women, such as Mary Magdalene and the Samaritan woman, underscore the possibility of redemption for all of humanity; Christ's choosing to appear to a contrite sinner, Mary Magdalene, further emphasizes the hope of universal salvation. The dead Christ thus extends his special relationship with the female sex that he had initiated during his life and ministry.

Patristic and hagiographical texts accentuate the singular association between the crucified Christ and repentant women. Augustine praises the women who stood at the cross because their devotion to Christ's body represents perfect faith in God and the resurrection.[84] Hagiographical *vitae* similarly stress the theological importance of the faithful women of the New Testament and the symbolic connection of these women with the dead body of Christ. Pious female pilgrims to the Holy Land sought out the places associated with the faithful women of the Bible. The early fifth-century traveler Egeria stood on the spot where the angel announced the resurrection to the holy women.[85] Melania the Younger stayed at the martyrion of Saint Phocas because it was reputed to be home of the faithful Canaanite woman of Matthew (15.22–28).[86] Paula visited the Holy Sepulcher and, in an ecstatic frenzy, rolled on the stone floor and licked the rocks on which the Lord's dead body had lain.[87] In numerous ways, the sacred biographies of women elevate their subjects to the status of the evangelical female custodians of the crucifixion.

Female saints, according to their *vitae*, procure relics of the true cross to manifest their special relationship with the crucified Christ. According to a late-fourth-century sacred fiction, the Augusta Helena, mother of

Constantine, discovered the wood of the true cross in Jerusalem.[88] Two centuries later, the Frankish queen Radegund obtained similar relics for her cloister at Poitiers.[89] Melania the Elder received from the bishop of Jerusalem a fragment of the *lignum crucis*, something which Macrina, the sister of Saint Basil and Saint Gregory of Nyssa, wore around her neck.[90] The Frankish holy woman Rusticula always carried a piece of the cross with her, and she rededicated to the holy cross a church that had previously been consecrated to the militant archangel, Michael.[91] Female saints frequent the places where biblical women manifested their simple faith, and they care for the material remains of Christ's death. Similarly, they mourn the deaths of contemporary Christ-like holy men, prepare their bodies for death, and safeguard their relics.[92] They also care for male shrines, as when the Frankish holy woman Ingitrude regularly washed the tomb of Saint Martin.[93] Although women's care for the dead was part of their larger, pre-Christian role as custodians of familial memory,[94] the hagiographical depiction of female saints who nurture the dead bodies of holy men is evocative of the biblical portrait of the contrite women who prepared Christ's corpse for burial.[95]

Hebrew and Christian scriptures create a twofold image of sacred gender. On the one hand, spiritual women personify unwavering faith, active service, and repentance. On the other hand, depraved women represent alienation from God, carnal vice, and deceit. In Hebrew discourse, the elaborate ornamentation of female bodies symbolizes humankind's unfaithfulness. Pauline and patristic writings on female appearance and demeanor adopt the Hebrew metaphor of adorned women as vessels of sin, and contrite, austere female bodies as vessels of redemption. The patristic theology of the cosmetic distinctively fuses the Hebrew image of the painted woman with the Stoic doctrine of self-presentation as the outward unveiling of interior piety or depravity. Late antique and early medieval conciliar, monastic, and hagiographical sources foster both the Pauline and patristic proscriptions concerning the female body and public behavior. Veiled, repentant, somber women manifest absolute submission to divine authority. Hebrew and Christian scripture also link women's chastity and piety with spinning and charity. In creating archetypal representations of female sanctity, patristic, monastic, and hagiographical sources similarly embrace the charitable, spinning woman of Proverbs, the domestic female servant of the gospels, and the women in Acts who finance and house the apostles.

The evangelists likewise portray Christ's conversion of polluted and idolatrous women to proclaim the possibility of salvation for sinful humanity as a whole. Women's sacred biographies further depict the conversion of their heroines to the life of radical self-denial as a prooftext of ecumenical redemption. Finally, repentant women share a singular relationship with the crucified Christ; they are the custodians of his dead body and the principal mourners of his passion. Hagiographical *vitae* stress this special alliance by linking female saints with relics of the passion and by depicting women's pilgrimages to the Holy Land and their mystical apprehension of the events leading to the passion and resurrection. Roman and Frankish women nurture the bodies of Christ-like holy men and serve as caretakers of male tombs. At the same time, and perhaps in reaction to the exaltation of female qualities and deeds, representations of masculine spirituality positioned female sanctity as disparate from and subordinate to male authority.

THE MIDDLE AGES SERIES

Ruth Mazo Karras, General Editor
Edward Peters, Founding Editor

A complete list of books in the series
is available from the publisher.

Sacred Fictions

Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity

Lynda L. Coon

PENN
University of Pennsylvania Press
Philadelphia