Radical feminist Mary Daly, who holds degrees in philosophy and theology, is one of the most brilliant and original thinkers of the second wave. Her second book, Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation (1973), introduced insights so piercing and language analysis so innovative it generated a unique form of inquiry in women's studies for more than two decades. Among the books that followed are Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism (1978), Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy (1984), Outercourse: The Be-Dazzling Voyage (1992), and Quintessence ... Realizing the Archaic Future: A Radical Elemental Feminist Manifesto (1998).

The Church and the Second Sex was Daly's first book, it created a furor at Boston College, where she taught, because in it Daly made a "case against the Church," arguing that it supported destructive views of women. Here she chronicles the misogynist attitudes and beliefs of the Judeo-Christian tradition, from the Old Testament, to the New Testament, and through the early Fathers of Christianity.

I. SCRIPTURE

THE BIBLE MANIFESTS THE UNFORTUNATE—often miserable—condition of women in ancient times. The authors of both the Old and the New Testaments were men of their times, and it would be naive to think that they were free of the prejudices of their epochs. It is therefore a most dubious process to construct an idea of 'feminine nature' or of 'God's plan for women' from biblical texts. As one theologian expressed it: 'Let us be careful not to transcribe into terms of nature that which is written in terms of history.'

An example will illustrate this point. The New Testament gave advice to women (and to slaves) which would help them to bear the subhuman (by today's standards) conditions imposed upon them. It would be foolish to erect, on this basis, a picture of 'immutable' feminine qualities and virtues. Thus, although obedience was required of women and slaves, there is nothing about obedience which makes it intrinsically more appropriate for women than for men. The idea of taking feminine 'types' from the Bible as models for modern women may be an exercise for the imagination, but it is difficult to justify as a method. Any rigid abstraction of types from history implies a basic fallacy.

Old Testament

The Bible contains much to jolt the modern woman, who is accustomed to think of herself as an autonomous person. In the writings of the Old Testament women emerge as subjugated and inferior beings. Although the wife of an Israelite was not on the level of a slave, and however much better off she was than wives in other near-eastern nations, it is indicative of her inferior condition that the wife addressed her husband as a slave addressed his master, or a subject his king.

According to Fr Roland de Vaux:

'The Decalogue includes a man's wife among his possessions, along with his house and land, his male and female slaves, his ox and his ass (Ex 20:17; Dt 5:21). Her husband can repudiate her, but she cannot claim a divorce; all her life she remains a minor. The wife does not inherit from her husband, nor daughters from their father, except when there is no male heir. (Nb 27:8). A vow made by a girl or married woman needs, to be valid, the consent of father or husband and if this consent is withheld, the vow is null and void (Nb 30:4-17).'

Whereas misconduct on the part of the wife was severely punished, infidelity on the part of the man...
The Church and the Second Sex

New Testament

...starkly: they emerge as persons, for they are treated as persons, often in such contrast with prevailing custom as to astonish onlookers. The behavior of Jesus toward the Samaritan woman puzzled even his disciples, who were surprised that he would speak to her in public (John 4:27). Then there was his defense of the adulterous woman, who according to the law of Moses should have been stoned (John 8:1-11). There was the case of the prostitute whose many sins he forgave because she had loved much (Luke 7:36-50). In the Gospel narratives the close friendship of Jesus with certain women is manifested in the context of the crucifixion and resurrection. What stands out is the fact that these, his friends, he saw as persons, to whom he gave the supreme yet simple gift of his brotherhood.

The contemporary social inferiority of women was, indeed, reflected in the New Testament. Although the seeds of emancipation were present in the Christian message, their full implications were not evident to the first century authors. The most strikingly antifeminist passages are, of course, in the Pauline texts, which are all too familiar to Catholic women, who have heard them cited approvingly ad nauseam. We now know it is important to understand that Paul was greatly preoccupied with order in society and in Christian assemblies in particular. In modern parlance, it seemed necessary to sustain a good ‘image’ of the Church. Thus it appeared to him an important consideration that women should not have too predominant a place in Christian assemblies, that they should not ‘speak’ too much or unveil their heads. This would have caused scandal and ridicule of the new sect, which already had to face accusations of immorality and effeminacy. In ancient Corinth, as one scholar has pointed out, for a woman to go out unveiled would be to behave like a prostitute. Paul was concerned with protecting the new Church against scandal. Thus he repeatedly insisted upon ‘correct’ sexual behavior, including the subjection of wives at meetings. Once this is understood, it becomes evident that it is a perversion to use Pauline texts, which should be interpreted within their own social context, to support the claim that even today, in a totally different society, women should be subject.

Paul looked for theological justification for the prevailing customs, such as the custom that women should wear veils. This partially accounts for his
reference to Genesis 2 in I Corinthians II:7ff, which he interprets to mean that woman is for man and not the contrary. We have here the idea that man is the 'image and glory of God,' whereas woman is 'the glory of man.' Then there is his biased statement which has been quoted with relish by preachers ever since: 'For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.' Modern scripture scholars do not, of course, agree with this interpretation of Genesis. Moreover, Paul himself evidently noticed that there was something wrong and corrected himself immediately afterward: 'Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.' However, the damage was done. For two thousand years women have endured sermons on the 'glory of man' theme, and we still receive a yearly harvest of theological essays and books dealing with the 'theology of femininity', which rely heavily upon the 'symbolism of the veil' and 'God's plan for women' as made known through Paul.

A similar procedure of using the then current interpretation of Genesis to buttress convention is seen in another text, which is no longer generally thought to have been written by Paul, although it surely was written under the influence of the Pauline tradition:

'[I desire] also that women should adorn themselves modestly and sensibly in seemly apparel, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly attire but by good deeds, as befits women who profess religion. Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty' (I Timothy 2:9–15).

The author tries to support the androcentric attitudes and practices of his times by reference to Genesis. The fact is, of course, that there is no evidence that God made woman subordinate or that the social facts of the past should be prolonged and erected into an immutable destiny.

It is interesting to observe that those who have been fond of quoting such texts down through the ages to keep women 'in their place' have been obliged to adapt their interpretations. For example, that famous 'I permit no woman to teach' was used in the past against women who attempted to teach the catechism. It was later used by some to support prohibitions against their taking theological degrees. Today, women do take such degrees and do in fact teach theology. The same text, however, is still used by some writers to support their exclusion from the hierarchy, although it has been refuted. Moreover, it is evident that a certain selectivity is operative in the use of such texts on the subject of women. Few of those who cite this passage in justification of women's traditional silence would, for example, go so far as to argue that women should not braid their hair, nor wear gold or pearls or expensive clothing. To go to this extent would be considered absurd. On the other hand, many still cite Paul's words to support the custom of women covering their heads in Church. Such inconsistencies demonstrate the unreliability of the process of applying culturally conditioned texts within changed and changing social contexts.

One of the most frequently quoted texts is, of course, the following:

'Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. As the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands' (Eph 5:22–24).

2. THE PATRISTIC PERIOD

An examination of the writings of the Church Fathers brings vividly into sight the fact that there is, indeed, a problem of women and the Church. The following statement of Jerome strikes the modern reader as weird:

'As long as woman is for birth and children, she is different from man as body is from soul. But when she wishes to serve Christ more than the world, then
she will cease to be a woman and will be called man (vir).\textsuperscript{14}

A similar idea is expressed by Ambrose, who remarks that

'she who does not believe is a woman and should be designated by the name of her sex, whereas she who believes progresses to perfect manhood, to the measure of the adulthood of Christ. She then dispenses with the name of her sex, the seductiveness of youth, the garrulousness of old age.'\textsuperscript{15}

These strange utterances can be understood only if one realizes the lowness of women in the commonly held view. The characteristics which the Fathers considered to be typically feminine include fickleness and shallowness,\textsuperscript{6} as well as garrulousness and weakness,\textsuperscript{7} slowness of understanding,\textsuperscript{8} and instability of mind.\textsuperscript{9} For the most part, the attitude was one of puzzlement over the seemingly incongruous fact of woman's existence. Augustine summed up the general idea in saying that he did not see in what way it could be said that woman was made for a help for man, if the work of child-bearing be excluded.\textsuperscript{10} Clement of Alexandria was also evidently baffled. Although he was somewhat more liberal than Augustine and concluded that men and women have the same nature, he inconsistently upheld masculine superiority.\textsuperscript{11}

In Genesis the Fathers found an 'explanation' of woman's inferiority which served as a guarantee of divine approval for perpetuating the situation which made her inferior. John Chrysostom thought it followed from the later creation of Eve that God gave the more necessary and more honorable role to man, the more petty and the less honorable to woman.\textsuperscript{12} Ambrosiaster remarks that woman is inferior to man, since she is only a portion of him.\textsuperscript{13} Thus there was an uncritical acceptance of the androcentric myth of Eve's creation. Linked to this was their refusal, in varying degrees of inflexibility, to grant that woman is the image of God, an attitude in large measure inspired by Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians. Ambrosiaster states baldly that man is made to the image of God, but not woman.\textsuperscript{14} Augustine wrote that only man is the image and glory of God. Since the believing woman, who is co-heiress of grace, cannot lay aside her sex, she is restored to the image of God only where there is no sex, that is, in the spirit.\textsuperscript{15}

Together with the biblical account, the Fathers were confronted with an image of woman produced by oppressive conditions which were universal. In contrast to their modern counterparts, women in the early centuries of the Christian era—and, in fact, throughout nearly all of the Christian era—had a girlhood of strict seclusion and of minimal education which prepared them for the life of mindless subordinates. This was followed by an early marriage which effectively cut them off for the rest of their lives from the possibility of autonomous action. Valued chiefly for their reproductive organs, which also inspired horror, and despised for their ignorance, they were denied full personhood. Their inferiority was a fact; it appeared to be 'natural'. Thus, experience apparently supported the ribbon story, just as the myth itself helped 'explain' the common experience of women as incomplete and lesser humans. The vicious circle persisted, for the very emancipation which would prove that women were not 'naturally' defective was denied them in the name of that defectiveness which was claimed to be natural and divinely ordained. Thus, Augustine taught that the order of things subjugates woman to man.\textsuperscript{16} Jerome wrote that it is contrary to the order of nature, or of law, that women should speak in the assembly of men.\textsuperscript{17} He maintained that the man should be commanded to love his wife, whereas the woman should fear her husband:

'For love befits the man; fear befits the woman. As for the slave, not only fear is befitting him, but also trembling.'\textsuperscript{18}

Thus the 'ideal' marital situation proposed by Jerome—an 'ideal' suited to encourage such perversities as the sadomasochistic couple—appears highly abnormal to the modern person. It is significant that he was unable to find an adequate difference between the roles of wife and slave other than the fact that the fear of the latter should be so strong as to be accompanied by trembling.

The presumed defectiveness of woman extended also, and perhaps especially, into the moral sphere. The primary grievance against her was her supposed guilt in the Fall. The violence of some of
the tirades on this subject has psychoanalytic implications. Tertullian, for example, wrote for the edification of his contemporaries:

‘Do you not know that you are Eve? . . . You are the devil’s gateway. . . . How easily you destroyed man, the image of God. Because of the death which you brought upon us, even the Son of God had to die.’

Clement of Alexandria taught that it is shameful for woman to think of what nature she has. Augustine cynically complained that man, who was of superior intelligence, couldn’t have been seduced, and so the woman, who was small of intellect, was given to him. The logical inconsistencies implied in this seem to have escaped him: this dull-witted creature could hardly have been too responsible. Moreover, she was clever enough to seduce man, which the ingenious devil could not do. Why did that paragon of intelligence and virtue succumb so easily? It is all too evident that logic is not operative in such invective, which neurotically projects all guilt upon the woman. For the Fathers, woman is a temptress of whom men should beware. That the problem might be reciprocal is not even considered.

There were attempts to balance the alleged guilt-laden condition of the female sex, but these, unfortunately, did not take the form of an admission of guilt shared by the sexes. Instead, Eve was balanced off by Mary. Thus, for example, Origen remarks that as sin came from the woman so does the beginning of salvation. Augustine wrote that woman is honored in Mary. He claimed that since man (homo) fell through the female sex, he was restored through the female sex. ‘Through the woman, death; through the woman, life.’ This type of compensation produced an ambivalent image of woman. Mary was glorified, but she was unique. Women in the concrete did not shake off their bad reputation and continued to bear most of the burden of blame. The sort of polemic, therefore, which attempts to cover the antifeminism of the Fathers by pointing to their glorification of Mary ignores the important point that this did not improve their doctrine about concrete, living women. In fact there is every reason to suspect that this compensation unconsciously served as a means to relieve any possible guilt feelings about injustice to the other sex.

In the mentality of the Fathers, woman and sexuality were identified. Their horror of sex was also a horror of woman. There is no evidence that they realized the projection mechanisms involved in this misogynistic attitude. In fact, male guilt feelings over sex and hyper-susceptibility to sexual stimulation and suggestion were transferred to ‘the other’, the ‘guilty’ sex. The idea of a special guilt attached to the female sex gave support to the double moral standard which prevailed. For example, in cases of adultery, the wife had to take back her unfaithful husband, but if the wife was unfaithful, she could be rejected.

Even in the face of such oppressive conditions a few women managed to attain stature. Jerome admitted that many women were better than their husbands. But more significant is the fact that the existence of exceptions, no matter how numerous, did not change the generalizations about feminine ‘nature’. Hence the strange ambivalence which we have noted.

On the whole, then, the Fathers display a strongly disparaging attitude toward women, at times even a fierce misogyny. There is the recurrent theme that by faith a woman transcends the limitations imposed by her sex. It would never occur to the Fathers to say the same of a man. When woman achieves this transcendence which is, of course, not due to her own efforts but is a ‘supernatural’ gift, she is given the compliment of being called ‘man’ (vir). Thus there is an assumption that all that is of dignity and value in human nature is proper to the male sex. There is an identification of ‘male’ and ‘human’. Even the woman who was elevated by grace retained her abominable nature. No matter what praise the Fathers may have accorded to individuals, it is not possible to conclude that in their doctrine women are recognized as fully human. . . .

3. THE MIDDLE AGES

Theological opinion of women was hardly better in the Middle Ages, although some of the fierceness of tone was mitigated. The twelfth century theologian, Peter the Lombard, whose Sentences became a standard textbook to be commented upon by teachers of theology, went so far as to write that woman is sensuality itself, which is well signified by woman, since in woman this naturally prevails.
ture repeated many of the standard ideas. He thought that the image of God is realized more in man than in woman, not in its primary meaning, but in an accidental way. He repeats the old idea that woman signifies the 'inferior part' of the soul; man, the 'superior part'.

What was new in the picture in the Middle Ages was the assimilation into theology of Aristotelianism, which provided the conceptual tools for fixing woman's place in the universe and which, ironically, could have been used to free her. In the writings of Thomas Aquinas, which later came to have a place of unique pre-eminence in the Church, Aristotelian thought was wedded to the standard biblical interpretations, so that the seeming weight of 'science' was added to that of authority. Thus, following Aristotle, Aquinas held that the female is defective as regards her individual nature. He wrote that she is, in fact, a misbegotten male, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex. Her existence is due to some defect in the active force (that of the father), or to some material indisposition, or even to some external influence, such as that of the south wind, which is moist. He adds that, as regards human nature in general, woman is not misbegotten, but is included in nature's intention as directed to the work of generation. It seems that this really is all she is good for, 'since a man can be more efficiently helped by another man in other works'.

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that Thomas thought woman has a major or even an equal role, even in her one specialty, i.e. reproduction. He wrote:

'Father and mother are loved as principles of our natural origin. Now the father is principle in a more excellent way than the mother, because he is the active principle, while the mother is a passive and material principle. Consequently, strictly speaking, the father is to be loved more.'

Notes


3. Pastor André Dumas, op. cit., p. 28.


14. Ibid.


16. PL 34, 204. De Genesi contra Manich. II, II.


22. PG 13, 1819 C. In Lucam homilia VIII.


27. Comm. in Sec. Librum Sententiarum Petri Lombardi (Quaracchi edition), dist. XVI, art. 2, q. 2.

28. Ibid., dist. XVIII, art. I, q. I.

29. Summa Theologiae, I, 92, I, ad I. Albert the Great also wrote that woman is misbegotten: in II P. Sum. Theol. (Borgnet), tract. 13, q. 80, membro I.


31. Ibid., II–II, 26, 10 c.