

presented by women themselves and in the way they experience it. A virgin woman is full of glamour, radiance and magnificence since she is dedicated to the church, which according to the Apocalypse is “our mother”, the “temple and tabernacle of God” (Rev. 12:1-6). Chastity is highly praised, whereas marriage is considered a need of the fallen human nature.

In fact, Christians in the Mediterranean basin at the end of the third century considered chastity as the supreme gift from heaven, an angelic quality on earth. Women who chose chastity belonged to the categories mentioned earlier – nuns, widows and virgins – and believed that the rejection of the sex instinct could contribute to spiritual perfection. Those who did not choose virginity are confined to the roles of mother and wife.

In the New Testament we see all the marginal and stigmatized groups of the society finding a place near Christ: prostitutes, tax-collectors, Gentiles, children, those possessed by demons, lepers, bandits. For the first time, women find their place. The idea of motherhood as a woman’s sole mission was surpassed, and the reliability of women was recognized, as in the case of the Myrrh-Bearing Women who came to the empty tomb. These are signs pointing to the transformation of an ossified and callous society governed by men alone. But solidified mentalities change at a very slow pace, because the grace of God presupposes voluntary human cooperation. Hundreds of years later, after centuries of Christian life in Western societies, a different social situation seems possible for women, after the chain reaction in all aspects of life precipitated by the Industrial Revolution.

Women today are successfully assuming new and creative roles in society and are rightfully seeking a re-evaluation of their position in the life of the church. Certainly the service of contemporary women in the life of the parish and diocese varies according to the needs and the challenges that the local church accepts. This presence vindicates women and proves the spiritual equality concerning salvation and its expression in the society.

The Women in the Easter Narrative

Apostles of the Apostles

CONSTANTINA PEPPA

In his commentary on the Song of Solomon, St Hippolytus of Rome sets forth an allegorical interpretation of the biblical text, in which he also brings out his theological views.

Hippolytus interprets Song of Solomon 3:1ff. by means of the Easter narrative as found in the Matthean and Johannine gospel traditions. Here he introduces the symbolism of the old and the new Eve, who for Hippolytus are “types” (*typoi*) for the synagogue and the church respectively. According to the commentary (ch. 25), the transition from synagogue to church, from the old Eve to the new Eve, takes place by means of the Tree of Life, which is itself the Risen One and to which Eve clings passionately, “in order to be able to rise into the air”. This begins at the moment in which the women encounter the Risen One and continues through their proclamation of the resurrection; as *typoi* of the new Eve, the women become “apostles of Christ”.

In the woman who clings to the feet of Jesus (Johannine tradition) in order to ascend along with him, Hippolytus sees Eve, whom Christ brings with him as a “sacrifice” in the sense of an offering (*dōron*) to his Father. Eve is no longer a fallen woman, but rather one who has been redeemed; it is no longer the Tree of Knowledge which she is touching, but rather the Risen One, the Tree of Life. According to Hippolytus, the Eve who touches the Tree of Life, the tree which overcomes death, is the new Eve, the church.

In this same chapter of the commentary, Hippolytus speaks of the inner connection between the old Eve and the new Eve. As noted above, the women in the Easter narrative are *typoi* of the new Eve; and if the old Eve represents the synagogue, then the women witnesses to the resurrection, as *typoi* of the new Eve, represent the church. The women in the Easter narrative are sent by the Risen One to the disciples, to proclaim the resurrection to them. Thus they become “apostles to the apostles”, or “apostles of the apostles”.

That women too may become apostles is important for Hippolytus, because in this way they represent a counter-concept to the first Eve. For these witnesses to the resurrection are "good witnesses" who present a "good testimony".

The new Eve as *typos* of the church has been made new by Christ. The new Eve becomes the helper, the partner of the new Adam, because she does not lead him into wrongdoing as the old Eve did, but rather announces the good news and the truth of the resurrection.

The encounter of the Risen One with the women is the moment in which the new Eve, the church, takes the place of the old Eve, the synagogue. The women's proclamation of the resurrection brings about the end of the synagogue and the beginning of the church. The synagogue falls silent, the church declares itself.

In this commentary we do not find the comparison of Eve with Mary which is so often drawn in the patristic literature. Rather, the comparison is of Eve with the women of the Easter narrative. Since it was not Mary's task to make a proclamation, the comparison with the women in the Easter narrative is possible precisely because they became the ones who announced the news of the resurrection.

Conclusions

The mission given to women to proclaim the word of God at the very beginning of the church puts the service of women in this same church in a new light. In the new Eve, the church, women are called to proclaim "the resurrection as gospel". This is true even though the task of these "apostles of the apostles" was not to preach to the public, but rather to the disciples. The women in the Easter narrative are the first ones who not only heard the good news, but also brought it to the men, the disciples. These means that men have not only proclaimed the message to women, but also – and even, first of all – heard it from them. So the term "apostles of the apostles" is a correction of any image of the church in which women are only supposed to listen and preaching is to be done exclusively by men.

Saints and Spirit-Bearers

Models for Orthodox Women

MOTHER MARIA (RULE)

Saints

The word "saints" was a term applied at an early date to all Christians. For example, it is used in the salutations at the beginning of Paul's letters to the Ephesians and the Philippians.

According to Luke, the name "Christians" was first used in Antioch (Acts 11:26). The next recorded use of it is in the account of Paul's trial in Jerusalem before Agrippa, who asks in response to Paul's proclamation of Christ in his defence: "Are you so quickly persuading me to become a Christian?" (Acts 26:28). Paul had spoken of his own upbringing, his persecution of Christ's followers, his conversion and his mission to preach repentance, forgiveness and Christ's rising from the dead to the Gentiles. St Peter writes of suffering as one of the fundamental marks of a Christian: "If any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace" (1 Pet. 4:16). Christians are named for their Leader; the signs are witness and suffering, obedience, repentance and conversion.

I remember listening to an elderly archimandrite reminisce about events in western Serbia during the second world war, when he was in charge of a small monastery at Rača on the River Drina, just across from Bosnia. In the village marketplace one day he was complaining to an old peasant about the terrible burden of taxes imposed by the Nazis. The quota of cattle and grain was so crippling that he did not know how the monks could survive. The old man interrupted him: "But Father, what are you moaning about? We are Orthodox Christians and we must expect to suffer."

We have a calendar of saints, but only God knows the names of all the saints. This is wonderfully exemplified in C.S. Lewis's novel *The Great Divorce*. A young man – the writer in a dream – takes a bus trip from hell to heaven. His guide is a man he had always venerated, the 19th-century Scottish novelist and poet George Macdonald. The account of their journey, which develops the theme of transforming and redeeming love, includes this passage:

This is a translation from German of a portion of the author's dissertation (Bern, 1994) entitled *Die Töchter der Kirche Christi und die frohe Botschaft des Sohnes Gottes* ("The Daughters of Christ's Church and the Good News of the Son of God").