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# Lessons in Montanism: Charismatics, Feminists, and the Twentieth Century Roman Catholic Church

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LESSONS IN MONTANISM: CHARISMATICS, FEMINISTS,  
AND THE TWENTIETH CENTURY  
ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

being

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate Faculty  
of the Fort Hays State University in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts

by

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## ABSTRACT

Christianity arose in the midst of a pagan world filled with many different cultic beliefs that worshipped a variety of gods and goddesses. Homogeneity did not become a characteristic of Christianity itself until after the first five centuries of debate hammering out the theological doctrines and modes of praxis that determined what was and was not heresy. Debates continue to take place among scholars concerning pagan influences on the early emerging Christian world. One of the many sects that developed, Montanism, a reform movement within the orthodox Christian Church, came into being as a result of the persecution of Christians and a perceived laxity by the Church toward those who recanted. This movement that utilized frenzied prophecy and allowed women to exercise leadership roles, including the office of the keys, is especially viewed by some as a pagan-Christian hybrid. By the fifth century A.D., the orthodox Church declared Montanism anathema and it ceased to exist as a cult.

Throughout the history of the Christian Church, ideologies that do not agree with orthodox standards of doctrinal beliefs and praxis occur and reoccur in varying forms. The twentieth century produced two movements in the Roman Catholic Church in the United States that reflected characteristics of the Montanist movement in the early Church. One of these, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, found acceptable by the Roman Catholic hierarchy continues to influence life and social teaching within the orthodoxy of the Church. The other, the feminist movement, condemned by the Church and labeled heretical, resulting in numerous excommunications, brought a new schism to the Christian Church.

This paper examines the rise and fall of Montanism in the early Christian Church, its characteristics and the causes of its demise. This creates a platform from which the two movements in the late twentieth century Catholic Church in the United States, the Charismatic Renewal and the Catholic feminist movement, can be explored. Each movement contained elements similar to Montanistic ideology, yet only one found itself condemned. The similarities and differences between each movement and Montanism, with their attitudes of unity or divisiveness, when looked at closely, explain why this is so. Montanism's demise can be attributed to its multi-layered challenge to the hierarchical authority of the developing ecclesiastical Christian Church, particularly in regard to the office of the prophet that became subsumed by the office of the bishop and the roles Montanism allowed women to exercise. In the end, unlike the Catholic feminist movement, the recent Charismatic Renewal movement was acceptable to the Church because it did not reject Church authority; like Montanism, the feminist movement's refusal to accept that authority, dismissing Canon Law and Tradition, was the reason it failed to be accepted.

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## INTRODUCTION

Montanism, a Christian movement from the second through fourth centuries A.D., co-existed with the emerging Christian Church in Europe, Asia Minor, and Northern Africa for three centuries. As controversy arose surrounding it, its opponents named it Montanism after its supposed founder, Montanus. The movement called itself the New Prophecy since the Judeo-Christian office of the prophet and prophetic utterance took a prominent position in the key characteristics of the movement. It arose as a reaction to perceived laxity and carnality among professing Christians<sup>1</sup> and a growing hierarchical structure that obscured the primitive simplicity of the church. It professed and adhered to the basic tenets of orthodox Christianity such as the belief in one triune God, Jesus Christ as one in being with the Father, baptism for forgiveness of sin and restoration to God's grace, etc., while placing an emphasis on critical issues concerning whether a Christian who apostatizes under persecution can be forgiven again, the type of fasting required, what role a woman could assume, and the prophetic challenge to authority that enraged its opponents, provoked slanderous suspicions by the third century, and ultimately placed an irrevocable wedge between the two parties. Full condemnation by the hierarchy did not take place until the fourth century.

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<sup>1</sup> James Edward McGoldrick, *Christianity and its Competitors* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2006), 35.

At the end of the nineteenth century, John De Soyres produced a seminal work on the subject of Montanism.<sup>2</sup> Through the use of primary documents he traced the origins, spread, and demise of the movement. In addition, he wrote concerning its tenets of faith, its peculiarities, and its differences with Church orthodoxy, especially in its emerging ecclesiastical form centered in Rome. His work led to the interpretation that a cult of martyrdom caused the eventual proclamation that the movement was heretical, an interpretation that would not be challenged until the late 1990s.

William D. Ramsey, a contemporary of De Soyres in the late nineteenth century, and an archeologist, did premier work in the field of Christian epigraphy, the study of writings on grave stones and other funereal artifacts. He spent considerable time in the field in the region of Phrygia looking at epigraphical patterns and geographical locations (hereafter referred to as geolocation, the common terminology of the field). Debates took place for over sixty years by a progression of Montanist historians such as W. Schepelern and the French historian H. Gregoire in the 1920s, P. de Labriolle and H. LeClerq in the 1930s, two Italians C. Cecchelli and A. Ferrua in the 1940s, and Elsa Gibson in the 1970s regarding Ramsey's determinations concerning what could be considered authentically Montanist, as well as where the groupings seemed to indicate the origins and spread of Montanism based on archeological evidence alone.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John De Soyres, *Montanism and the Primitive Church: a Study in the Ecclesiastical History of the Second Century* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1878; reprinted Lexington, Kentucky: The Keystone Printery for the American Theological Association, 1965).

<sup>3</sup> Scott T. Carroll, "An Historical Geographical Analysis of the Origins of Montanism" (Master's thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1987), 19-34.

In 1996, Christine Trevett published her groundbreaking book *Montanism: Gender, Authority, and the New Prophecy*.<sup>4</sup> The first monograph printed in English on the history of Montanism since De Soyres' *Montanism and the Primitive Church* published in 1878, she undertakes a painstaking critical analysis of the body of work preceding hers, making use of extensive primary and secondary materials. She reaches a number of original conclusions, including an assertion that it was the challenge to authority posed by Montanism to the emerging Christian hierarchical church's authority that brought on its demise and not a cult of martyrdom, the established historical viewpoint for over a century.

Trevett's contemporary, William Tabbernee, complements Trevett's academic work with his extensive field work as an archeologist and a specialist in Christian epigraphy. This archeological work has brought to light much new information to aid in the exploration of the Montanist movement, including the identification of Pepouza, the geolocation considered by Montanists to be the site of the imminent arrival of the second coming of Christ, and the location of the tomb of Montanus and the founding prophetesses. The large amount of epigraphical discoveries, published by Tabbernee in an extensive volume, is available for the serious inquirer's reference.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Tabbernee has published several books presenting various aspects of current knowledge and suppositions regarding Montanist beliefs and activities, its spread and its

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<sup>4</sup> Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

<sup>5</sup> William Tabbernee, *Montanist Inscriptions and Testimonia* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997).

controversies. One book in particular, *Prophets and Gravestones*,<sup>6</sup> is an imaginative journey through four centuries of Montanist history through Montanist eyes, piecing together valid information and sources that serve to place the reader accurately in the midst of the Montanist milieu.

John De Soyres closed his book by asking in the final paragraph: did the prophetic utterances of Montanism truly proceed from the Holy Spirit or were they something else? A little over a century later, Trevett opens her book with a revised version of the same question, asking: “Was the ‘Spirit’ which Tertullian [a third century Christian elder at Carthage] preached, and for which Perpetua [a third century North African Montanist martyr] died, the Father of lies, or was it the Spirit of God?”<sup>7</sup> She makes it clear that it is out of the scope of the historian to attempt an answer. In adherence to good historical methods, it is not within the scope of this investigation either. It will be up to the reader to decide for him or herself.

Looking at available sources, the first chapter of this thesis will lay a foundation for an understanding of the basics of the Montanist movement. It is important to gain insight regarding its origins within the Christian Church, the culture within which it emerged, and who its leaders were. Chapter Two explores the role of prophecy intrinsic to the movement. It also looks at how ecclesiastical roles formed within Montanism and the views that allowed both women and men to perform them, which includes pneumatological (pertaining to the Holy Spirit) and Mariological (pertaining to the Virgin

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<sup>6</sup> Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publisher Marketing, LLC, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Trevett, 1.

Mary, the Mother of God) perspectives. Chapter Three will look at the historical evidences of the dissension between the Montanist and what became the Catholic segments of the evolving church. The chapter follows the progression of injunctions and the documentation of the major synods and councils that led to the final pronouncement of anathema. Chapters four and five detail two late twentieth century movements creating a framework for the exploration of how Montanist themes and ideas, particularly in regard to the two issues of prophecy and women, bear relevance in each circumstance. In the end, unlike the Catholic feminist movement, the recent Charismatic Renewal movement was acceptable to the Church because it did not reject Church authority; like Montanism, the feminist movement's refusal to accept that authority, dismissing Canon Law and Tradition, was the reason it failed to be accepted.

## MONTANISM ORIGINS

Historical antiquity shrouds the exact date for the origins of Montanism. Historian Eusebius of Caesarea (260 – 340) placed the first manifestations of Montanism in Asia Minor during the pro-consulate of Gratus, positing a date of about 172. Epiphanius of Salamis (d. 403) wrote that the movement began in the “93<sup>rd</sup> year after the ascension of our Lord.”<sup>8</sup> Epiphanius fixed the year of ascension as the eighteenth year of Tiberius. This places the Montanist origins at 125. The matter becomes clouded, however, due to the fact that Epiphanius says three different things in three different writings. In the second he speaks of Montanism beginning during the nineteenth year of Antoninus Pius, which makes it 157. In a third case, he states the time elapsing between the death of Maximilla (one of the original prophetesses) and his writing was two hundred ninety years. The date of this writing, historically set in the year 390, places the Montanist emergence in the first century. To add to the confusion, another source, the *Chronicon Paschale*, gives the Montanist date as 182. Using the writings of Soter (a bishop of Rome 167-175 or 161-171), John De Soyres places the date of Montanist origin around 130<sup>9</sup> and McGoldrick cites Maximilla’s death in 180.<sup>10</sup>

As much as the exact date of its appearance is debated, there is none regarding its place of birth. Montanism made its first appearance in the area of Phrygia, Asia Minor.

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<sup>8</sup> Epiphanius as cited in: John De Soyres, *Montanism and The Primitive Church: A Study in the Ecclesiastical History of the Second Century* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1878; reprinted Lexington, Kentucky: The Keystone Printery for the American Theological Association, 1965), Book I, 26.

<sup>9</sup> De Soyres, Book I, 27-31.

<sup>10</sup> McGoldrick, 37.

Literary evidence from the Anonymous<sup>11</sup> in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* states that Montanus, the movement's supposed leader, began preaching in Ardabau. There is no site discovery for Ardabau determined by archeologists at the present time. In his Master's thesis, Scott T. Carroll postulates that Ardabau was not an actual village and argues for a Philadelphia origin for Montanism.<sup>12</sup> Carroll uses a historical geographical reconstruction of the movement's initial sphere of activity and reconstructs Asia Minor's second century road system using archeological and literary evidence. He then plots the movement's first decade's activities against available routes. It is a significant study, looking at the trajectory from the Church of Philadelphia in the Book of Revelation to the place that produced the emergence of a charismatic leader like Montanus.

Carroll's starting point was the work of W.M. Calder in the 1920s. Calder was an archeologist and a lecturer on Christian epigraphy at the University of Manchester. Calder himself was dependent on the work of William D. Ramsey and Ramsey's student J.G.C. Anderson. Ramsey did premier work in the field of Christian epigraphy from Phrygia in the late nineteenth century. Using archeological work alone, he substantiated "two distinct tides of Christianizing influence springing from different sources and showing a different character."<sup>13</sup> Ramsay argued that the upper Tembris river valley was evangelized from Bithynia.<sup>14</sup> He believed the "Christians to Christians" formula

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<sup>11</sup> Eusebius quotes frequently from this source which he only refers to as the Anonymous. Historians have never identified who the Anonymous was.

<sup>12</sup> Carroll, 5.

<sup>13</sup> Ramsey as cited in Carroll, 17.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

epigraphy was Montanist, calling attention to themselves in a way the more cautious orthodox Christians did not.<sup>15</sup> This coincided with the Montanist view that it was incumbent upon Christians to witness to their faith no matter the cost, and that those who did without recanting could be considered the true Christians. Such pronounced epigraphy would potentially cause a risk in the midst of persecution to others who might visit the gravesite.



**Χρηστι (+ανόν) [CHRESTIAN]**  
 or  
**Χριστι (+ανόν) [CHRISTIAN]**

ILLUSTRATION 1 Early Christian "Epigraphic Habit": A Critical Review, PRF Brown, 2007

Calder used the newly discovered epigraphy, especially tombstones using the “Christians to Christians” formula to trace Montanist communities geographically.<sup>16</sup> During the period of Calder’s work, the geolocation of central-west Phrygia produced no archeological evidence; it was all in the north. He postulated an independent source

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>16</sup> Carroll, 7.



having access to both the Tembris valley region and central-western Phrygia as the place from which Montanism spread to the latter. Such a source would be the city of Philadelphia.<sup>17</sup> (See maps 1 and 2 on page 10 and 11).

Calder's work caused controversy, particularly his epigraphical interpretations that produced disagreements among specialists in the field. Debates by a succession of Montanist historians concerning whether the tombs using the "Christians to Christians" formula were Montanist or not took place for over 60 years.<sup>18</sup> The work of W.H.C. Frend in the 1950s and 1960s picked up where Calder left off but did not produce any greater illumination. Carroll, who agrees with Calder's Philadelphia theory, states that Calder's work was flawed by the using of epigraphy alone as well as his interpretive inaccuracies.<sup>19</sup> He attempts to confirm Calder's original assertion that Montanism originated from Philadelphia without falling into the pitfalls of his predecessors' poor methodology.

First, Carroll substantiates Philadelphia as an important city of commerce at the hub of the postal road system of both the Persians and, later, the Romans.<sup>20</sup> Second, he points to the fact that Philadelphia's geolocation was strategically positioned to influence

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 19-34.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 34-48.

other regions. It commanded a north-south pass connecting two valleys, the Hermos and the Maeander river valleys.<sup>21</sup> Philadelphia was also a “gateway” to the east.

There were three ways from the west to Phrygia. The first of these was a route from the northeast that travelled from Sardis through Satala to Phrygia. It went through the district of Lydia, which was a burned out volcanic region.<sup>22</sup> The second route was fifty miles southeast of Philadelphia. There another “gateway” led to the Phrygian plateau from the city of Laodiceia. Philadelphia itself was the third gate to Phrygia, commanding the Cogamos pass. It did not have the dangers and difficulties of the first route, nor did it have the greater distance of the second route. Any travel, commerce, or information from the west had to take one of these gateway routes and Philadelphia was the most desirable path to the Phrygian central plateau.<sup>23</sup>



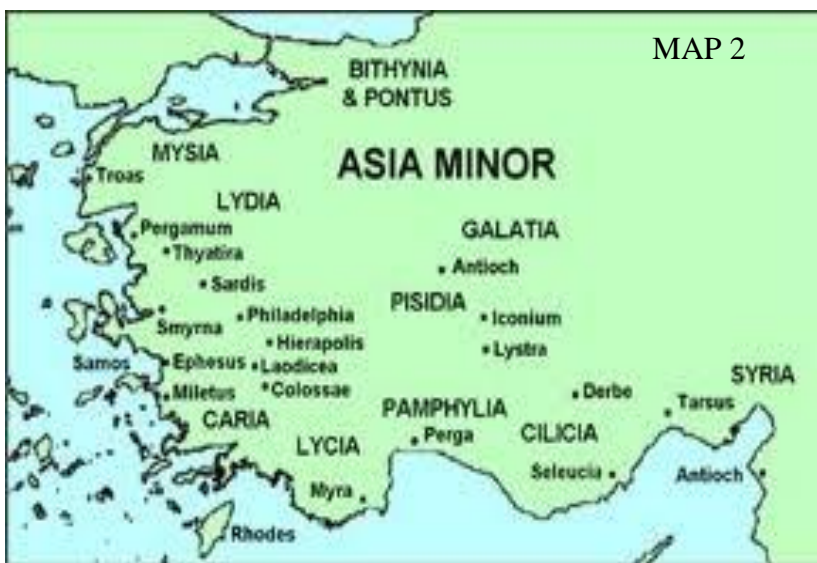
MAP 1

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 57.

Next, Carroll traces the roads leading out of the primary centers of Laodiceia and Philadelphia into Phrygia. There existed two out of the former going east, but four out



of Philadelphia. Using both biblical and local nomenclature, Carroll concludes that the fourth road from Philadelphia to Apameia connected with Pepouza, Eumenia, and Apameia, allowing the dissemination of Montanism from Philadelphia to northwestern Phrygia.<sup>24</sup> Situated on the secondary postal routes, the seven churches of Philadelphia functioned as junctions on the main imperial route from where a network of roads led out to the rest of Asia Minor. Paul based his first missionary journey in Ephesus spreading the gospel outward from there. The seven churches likewise were outposts of Christianity to the frontier.<sup>25</sup> Philadelphia was an evangelizing church that sent out missionaries. Due to its geography, the church at Philadelphia is the most logical choice for the evangelism of Phrygia.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 74-89.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 104-7.



ILLUSTRATION 2 Ruins of Philadelphia



ILLUSTRATION 3 Remains of Byzantine church columns in Philadelphia

So, what about the unidentified Ardabau? Carroll suggests the name could have been metaphorical. 2 Esdras 9:26 designates Ardab as the place where the heavenly Jerusalem would descend. Ardabau could have been a secret apocalyptic name the Montanists gave to the center of their movement.<sup>27</sup> Trevett agrees the name might have been a symbolic place name, meaning city or place of promise, similar to that found in the extra canonical text of 4 Ezra.<sup>28</sup> Both 4 and 5 Ezra are Chiliastic literature containing

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>28</sup> Trevett, 22-26.

parallels that can be useful for interpreting Montanistic teachings. Particularly interesting are the vision of Christ in female form and the practices of fasting and xerophagy, the strictest fast in the Eastern Church, usually observed during Holy Week.<sup>29</sup> This fast allowed only dry food to be consumed consisting of bread, salt, water, and vegetables. Meat, fish, dairy, oil, wine, and all seasonings could not be eaten.

Some historians have posed the theory that Ardabau is a corrupted name of an actual city. Ramsey believed it should be Kordaba or Kallataba. Herodotus wrote regarding Callatebus in the Cogamos valley while recording Xerxes' (the Persian king's) march north from the Maeander Valley up the Cogamos valley. He discusses the manufacture of honey from certain trees out of tamarisk syrup mixed with wheat flour. The tamarisk tree grows only in the area of Philadelphia and the farmland there is rich land that grows wheat. Carroll asserts that "if Ardabau is a corrupt form of Callatebus, then its location may well have been Philadelphia."<sup>30</sup> Identified by a series of archeological expeditions starting with the American Society for Archaeological Research in 1930, and continuing with the most recent work of Tabbernee in the late 1990s and early twenty-first century, Pepouza lies to the east of Philadelphia within Philadelphia's evangelistic district. Regardless of whether Philadelphia was the origin of Montanist dissemination, Phrygia became a hotbed of Montanist activity.

Prior to Christianity, the geographical region was a center for the worship of Cybele, the Syrian mother goddess, a mystery religion. She was considered to be a

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>30</sup> Carroll, 128-9.

personification of the earth, a goddess not only of cities but of everything the earth contains. Normally depicted riding a chariot drawn by lions, a turreted crown sat upon her head and a many-colored mantle adorned with animal figures clothed her. A scepter in her right hand and a key in her left signifying that the earth locks up all her treasures during the winter, Cybele bears a dignified and matronly air.<sup>31</sup> See illustration 4. Mountain summits housed her temples with Mount Dindymus in Galatia being prominent. Frenzy filled the sacred rites to honor her, including howling, cymbals, pipes, and cutting one's flesh with knives. The devotees regarded those so engaged with reverence and viewed them as possessing the gift of prophecy while ecstatic.<sup>32</sup> These behaviors informed the controversy over Montanism almost from its inception, particularly in regard to Montanus, a primary leader of the movement.



ILLUSTRATION 4 The Goddess Cybele

Montanus was a pagan priest who converted to Christianity. It has been claimed that he was a joint author of the Sibylline Oracles, speculating that he not only collected

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<sup>31</sup> Catherine Ann White, *The Student's Mythology: A Compendium of Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Assyrian, Persian, Hindoo, Chinese, Thibetan, Scandinavian, Celtic, Aztec, and Peruvian Mythologies In Accordance with Standard Authorities* (New York: The Baker and Taylor Co., 1923), 72.

<sup>32</sup> White, 73.

them but assisted in writing them.<sup>33</sup> Collections of supposed prophecies emanating from the sibyls or divinely inspired seeresses became widely circulated in antiquity.<sup>34</sup> Numerous volumes of such collections existed, the most important of which were kept in the pagan temples. What was probably referred to here was the Christian Sibyllines.

How did the Sibyllines transform from a pagan to a Christian instrument? The figure of the sibyl, a prophetic virgin, was not originally Greek but came from Asia, possibly the region of Persia. Early sibyls were pagan, predating Christianity, reflecting the beliefs of the various existing pagan cults. Around 500 B.C. Heraclitus wrote his famous citation: "By uttering things not to be laughed at, unadorned, unscented, the sibyl penetrates with her voice through the millennia with the aid of the godhead." Aristophanes next mentioned the sibyl in 421 B.C. Plato assumed the general knowledge of the sibyl. He took her and her oracles seriously. In the writings of Aristotle, the sibyl became a series of sibyls named after the sites of their oracles. Roman literature written by the historian Varro puts the number of sibyls at ten. Marpeessos and Erythrae in Asia Minor could boast of highly renowned sibyls living in their midst. The pagans were not alone. Jewish sibylline literature from a Greek speaking community dates from the third century B.C. forward and it borrowed much from its Greek models, though it produced

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<sup>33</sup> De Soyres, Book I, Sect. 31-32.

<sup>34</sup> Patrick Healy, "Sibylline Oracles." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 13 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912), 7 Dec. 2010 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13770a.htm>>.

new content.<sup>35</sup> The time of origin of this literature that eventually found its way to the Christian communities can be dated from 180 B.C. to the third Christian century.<sup>36</sup>

The Jewish sibyl was not of Jewish ethnicity. However, she was a propagandist for monotheism. A characteristic mark of the Jewish sibyl was a call to repentance along with prophecy regarding punishments to come and the last judgment. Unlike the pythia at Delphi and other pagan oracles, people did not come to consult with her for advice; she spoke of her own volition when moved by God. These texts became usurped or edited by Christians from the Jewish tradition, thus intermixing Christian themes with Jewish pre-existing ones. One such example is found in Book VIII of the sibylline literature. Predominantly Christian, it contains the famous acrostic “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior” cross. Eusebius claimed that emperor Constantine quoted it. Historian Wilhelm Schneemelcher provides an English translation of this book.<sup>37</sup> The shortest example, and totally Christian in content, is book VI, *Hymn to Christ*. Schneemelcher provides a translation of it as well.<sup>38</sup> In addition, Augustine cites this acrostic in his *City of God* (Book 18,c.23).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> William Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha* vol. II (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 653.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 654.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 668-680. (The acrostic appears on the bottom of page 673.)

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 663-4.

<sup>39</sup> St. Augustine, Marcus Dods, D.D. Tr., *City of God* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2010), 567.



After his conversion to Christianity, Montanus said God spoke through him directly and he claimed to be God's instrument of continuing revelation. He practiced ecstatic rites and claimed the age of miracles was not ended. A major assertion of his movement was that prophecy was a permanent endowment God gave the church until the end of history.<sup>40</sup> Eusebius wrote a description of Montanist religious services emphasizing the presence of intense emotions as a major feature. He stated the leader, Montanus, "was carried away in spirit and wrought up into a certain kind of frenzy.... raving and speaking strange things and proclaiming what was contrary to the institutions that had prevailed in the church as handed down....from earliest times."<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the ecstatic frenzies of Montanism were to become an important issue. Montanus' opponents claimed he was mad, that he led a disgraceful life, and that he ultimately committed suicide by hanging himself like Judas. An Asiatic bishop claimed he exhumed his remains and burned them. There are no historical proofs for any of these assertions.<sup>42</sup> Many historians, including James Edward McGoldrick, feel the prominence of women, ecstatic rites, and speaking in tongues in Montanism were all influences from Christianity's predecessor, Cybele's mystery religion.<sup>43</sup>

Priscilla and Maximilla were the prominent prophetesses in the first generation Montanist leadership. As did other women, they left their husbands to follow Montanus.

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<sup>40</sup> McGoldrick, 36-37.

<sup>41</sup> Eusebius as cited by McGoldrick, 36, n 1.

<sup>42</sup> De Soyres, Book I, 32-33.

<sup>43</sup> McGoldrick, 39.

The movement took a Pauline view of marriage. Although marriage was an acceptable Christian endeavor, Montanists viewed celibacy as more productive for prophecy and holiness. Once widowed, a second marriage was seen as serial polygamy and sinful. The martyrs Perpetua and Felicitas (d. 203) gained prominence as second generation Montanist adherents in Carthage, North Africa.<sup>44</sup> All four of these women claimed to have received the Holy Spirit, spoke in tongues, witnessed to their faith, and proclaimed a message of repentance and joy. They became revealers and interpreters of God's word to his people. Maximilla understood herself to be chosen by God to proclaim his covenant and promise to Christian people: "The Lord of this work and covenant and promise sent me as its elector and revealer and interpreter, as one who had been compelled willingly and unwillingly to learn the knowledge of God."<sup>45</sup>

Montanism's leaders claimed to receive revelation supplementary to that of Christ and his apostles. They believed particularly in a literal acceptance of the promise of the Paraclete who, as written in John's Gospel, "will lead you to the complete truth...and he will tell you of the things to come."<sup>46</sup> The movement revolved around the charismata of prophecy and a millenarist or chiliastic world view based on Johannine writings, which believed the eschaton, or return of Jesus Christ, was imminent. Central to its message was the hope of the imminent end of the world and the descent of the heavenly Jerusalem.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

<sup>45</sup> Maximilla as cited in Frederick C. Klawiter, "The Role of Martyrdom and Persecution in Developing the Priestly Authority of Women in Early Christianity: A Case Study of Montanism" in *Women in Early Christianity*, David M. Scholer, ed. (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1993), 106, n 4.

<sup>46</sup> John 16:13, The Jerusalem Bible.

Montanists firmly believed that every Christian's duty was to confess the name of Christ publicly in the midst of persecution by the empire.<sup>47</sup> To fail to do so was crucifying Christ over again.<sup>48</sup>

These intrinsic millenarist beliefs grew out of the apocalyptic literature along with a revelation of Christ that Priscilla had received in a dream: "Christ came to me in the form of a woman clothed with a long, gleaming, flowing robe, and placed wisdom in me and revealed to me that this place is sacred and that in this place the heavenly Jerusalem will descend."<sup>49</sup> Interpreting this apocalyptic hope as a political image, i.e. one that juxtaposed the worldly kingdom whose apex produced the corrupt persecuting Roman Empire against the relief and solace which would arrive with the entrance into the heavenly kingdom of God, it translates to a desire for not just martyrdom but voluntary martyrdom. This ideology was a central important feature of the Montanist movement.<sup>50</sup>

Two oracles of the New Prophecy voiced by Maximilla substantiate this point:

Be exposed to the public [publicaris]; it is for your good. For he who is not publicly exposed [publicatur] by humans is publicly exposed by God. Do not be confused; righteousness is drawing you forth into the midst [of humans]. Why are you confused since you are acquiring and showing forth glory? Power comes when you are seen by humans....<sup>51</sup>

Do not wish to die in bed or in miscarriages or gentle fevers, but in martyrdom in order that he who has died for you might be glorified.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> See the two oracles of Maximilla on the following page.

<sup>48</sup> Hebrews 6:6

<sup>49</sup> Priscilla as cited by Klawiter, 107, n 7.

<sup>50</sup> Klawiter, 107.

<sup>51</sup> Maximilla as cited by Klawiter, 107, n 8.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

Maximilla proclaimed these oracles or prophecies at a time when Roman policy towards Christians was changing. By order of Emperor Trajan Christians ceased to be deliberately sought out for persecution early in the second century, but open pursuit by provincial authorities became a reality by 175. The Montanist response became an embracing of the struggle, viewing it as the will of God publicly to witness and turn oneself over to the authorities voluntarily. In return there would be the reward of sharing in Christ's transcendent power and glory when his coming kingdom on earth became established.<sup>53</sup> Frederick C. Klawiter maintains it was this pivotal view, not unorthodox theology that led to Montanist rejection. He states that its stance on martyrdom was seen as "suicidal, irrational, and destructive to the church. Thus the extreme position of voluntary martyrdom distinguishes Montanism from its ecclesiastical opponents."<sup>54</sup> This opinion of Klawiter did not originate with him. It was the accepted viewpoint of the major historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries on the subject starting with De Soyres and incorporated throughout the body of research and literature presented for publication and assimilation that a cult of martyrdom led to the condemnation of Montanism.

A new body of research during the last two decades produced by two Montanist scholars, Christine Trevett and William Tabbernee, presents a different viewpoint, calling into question previous assumptions. Coupled with Trevett's exhaustive review of manuscripts and documentation, extensive epigraphical field work presented by Tabbernee brings a better clarity to the issue of martyrdom and the probability that

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<sup>53</sup> Klawiter, 107-8.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 108.

Montanism did not produce a martyr cult any more than did any other group within the early Christian Church. The evidence shows that all components of Christianity had martyrs just as willing to die for their faith. Trevett cites Ignatius of Antioch (d. c. 107-10) as a prime example of a Catholic Christian martyr, claiming his zeal for martyrdom “is unrivaled by any extant Montanist source.”<sup>55</sup> Trevett postulates that both the roles of prophecy and, in particular, the leadership roles of women within the Montanistic movement were responsible for its eventual demise. She states that the major clashes between Montanist and orthodox Christianity involved the nature of prophecy, the exercise of authority, and the interpretation of Christian writings.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Trevett, 126.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

PROPHECY, ECCLESIOLOGY, PNEUMATOLOGY, and MARIOLOGY:  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN'S ROLES

The Montanist Church exercised fully the charismatic gift of prophecy. Prophecy was not a new phenomenon; it was an ancient one. Prophecy, familiar both to Jews and pagans in the ancient world, played key roles in both worldviews. Pagans made use of sibyls and oracles from the most ancient of times. Jews, of course, had the Old Testament prophets. Numerous writings in the Early Christian church addressed the topics of prophets, prophecy, and discernment.

The *Didache*, an extra-canonical source written c. 60-70, addresses a community away from any large city or center of the faith.<sup>1</sup> Used for catechetical instruction, we know of no older written source material used by the very early Christian Church for preparing catechumens to receive baptism. A tool for instruction in the early church it and St. Paul's letter to the Galatians are similar in length. Divided into four sections, the first, called the "Tractate on the two ways," includes prohibitions and commandments for the way of life, rules for life in society, and the way of death, which includes a catalog of vices. This section provided the pre-baptismal instruction known as catechesis. Section two, titled "Instructions for Liturgy," gave instructions for the performance of the Rite of Baptism, fasting and prayer, as well as the Eucharist and Thanksgiving. The Rite of

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<sup>1</sup> Colman J. Barry, O.S.B., ed., *From Pentecost to the Protestant Revolt* Vol. 1 of *Readings in Church History* (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1960), 25.

Baptism is the same formula used in the major historical Christian churches today and the instructions for the Eucharist and Thanksgiving also reflect the liturgical forms used in the Catholic, Episcopal and Lutheran services of the present time.<sup>2</sup> The third section, “A Church Order,” addressed the reception of itinerant apostles and prophets as well as other travelers, instructions concerning those who wanted to stay and be a part of the community, the election of bishops and deacons, church discipline, the duties of support for teachers and prophets, and the Rite of Confession and Reconciliation. The final section, “Eschatological Epilogue,” concerned the end times as its title implies (eschatology being the study of final things). These included the three signs of truth, the appearance of the anti-Christ, the great apostasy and the preservation of the faithful, the appearance of false prophets, and the collapse of Christian community. It gave instructions for discernment between true and false prophets.<sup>3</sup> The *Didache*, compiled by a redactor thought possibly to be an orthodox bishop in Africa, made use of diverse extant materials.<sup>4</sup> Historian Kurt Niederwimmer places the date of its compilation around 300, much later than does Colman Barry, O.S.B.<sup>5</sup> Niederwimmer’s late date seems unlikely and is not the consensus among scholars today. Niederwimmer eventually contradicts himself by stating the predidachistic traditions from which the Didachist

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<sup>2</sup> Henry Bettenson, ed., tr., *The Early Christian Fathers: A Selection from the Writings of the Fathers From St. Clement of Rome to St. Athanasius* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1956, paperback 1969), 50-52.

<sup>3</sup> Kurt Niederwimmer, Linda M. Maloney, tr., Harold W. Attridge, ed. *The Didache: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-9, n47.

compiled his work “should probably be located in the first century”<sup>6</sup> and he places a hypothetical date of origin for the *Didache* itself at about 110-120 A.D.<sup>7</sup> This date places him closer to the opinion of Barry and in line with the consensus of the present time.

The *Didache*, written during a time of transition, did not claim to regulate the behavior of the entire church; it became used in local situations in an “effort to harmonize ancient and revered traditions of the church with new ecclesial necessities.”<sup>8</sup> It appears in Eusebius’ canonical list in his *Ecclesiastical History*, book three, along with the *Shepherd of Hermas* and other New Testament apocryphal books.<sup>9</sup> He called the *Didache* “The Institutions of the Apostles” and listed it among the “spurious” writings. It was not a canonical writing and Eusebius had doubts surrounding it, but he did not consider it heretical.<sup>10</sup> Augustine quotes from it in the *Commentary on the Psalms* and it became known in a wide Christian geographic spectrum including Syria and the Ethiopian Coptic tradition.<sup>11</sup>

In 2 Clement 2, another extra-canonical writing, there is further evidence of prophecy. This document is usually associated with Rome or Corinth. The two writings together suggest that prophecy was not merely an urban or local phenomenon in the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>10</sup> Rev. C.F. Crusé, M.A., tr., *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus Bishop of Caesarea, In Palestine* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1897), 99-100.

<sup>11</sup> Niederwimmer, 11-17.



church but was widespread. *The Shepherd of Hermas*, containing five visions, five commandments, and seven parables, is also concerned with the ability to discern false prophets. In addition, it gives warnings for future earthly catastrophes and admonishes Christians to prepare for them. This writing included as scripture in the fourth century Codex Sinaiticus, one of the oldest manuscripts of the New Testament,<sup>12</sup> eventually became excluded from the canon not because it was unorthodox, but because it had not been written by one of the original apostles.<sup>13</sup> Written by Hermas, brother of Pius, Bishop of Rome during the first half of the second century, it remained popular until the fifth century.<sup>14</sup>

Additional apocryphal writings well known in the second century were The Acts of Paul, The Acts of Paul and Thecla, and the Acts of John, Peter, Andrew, and Thomas. They all date from the period 160-225 and exalt Christian celibacy and virginity, promote various ascetical tendencies and attitudes, and give proof of women with spiritual gifts filling significant church roles.<sup>15</sup> Although approved for reading by baptismal candidates,<sup>16</sup> these books fell into the category of non-canonical. They appear in later canonical lists composed by Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria (296-373). Rufinas (a

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<sup>12</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make it into the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 250.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 192-5.

<sup>16</sup> Niederwimmer, 5.

third century apologist) also mentions them. In addition the writings of Clement (Bishop of Rome 92-99), Serapion of Thmuis (fourth century bishop of Thmuis, Egypt), and Origen (185-254, Africa), include references to the *Didache*, although scholars have divisions in their opinions regarding them. Latin witnesses begin with Cyprian (d.258, North Africa).<sup>17</sup> The Montanists were familiar with these writings. Historian Bart D. Ehrman states that these and other apocalyptic visionary texts were read by Montanists, and the Montanist revelations lost to us discuss the end of the world as we know it.<sup>18</sup>

In the first century Christian Church, St. Paul embraced prophecy, viewed as one of the major charisms given to the Church by the Holy Spirit. He wrote concerning the gift in his letters to the Corinthians.<sup>19</sup> In the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of I Corinthians, Paul states, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit....To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given....to another prophecy...”<sup>20</sup> A strong common role for prophecy existed in these ancient times and places.

In the early church, prophecy was a ministry accorded to women without hesitation. The New Testament provides the example of Philip’s prophesying daughters.<sup>21</sup> Paul gives the admonition that women should cover their heads when prophesying.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 6-9.

<sup>18</sup> Ehrman, 150.

<sup>19</sup> I Cor. 12-14.

<sup>20</sup> I Cor. 12:4, 7, 8a, 10a.

<sup>21</sup> Acts 21:9.

<sup>22</sup> I Cor. 11:45.

Montanism had numerous prophets and prophetesses. Following Paul's injunction, the prophetesses who were virgins either from birth or by virtue of post-baptismal abstention wore veils. The purpose of prophecy was to convey to the church, or the group, messages from God. In the Montanist community, prophecy was didactic, practical, addressing matters of everyday life such as fasting, sin, and marriage rules, not matters of faith. The rule of faith did not need improvement or change.<sup>23</sup>

Tertullian, a lawyer from Carthage, practiced in Rome and experienced Christian conversion from paganism in approximately 195. Fluent in Latin and Greek, learned in history, philosophy, and law, he studied the Christian literature. He returned to North Africa where he became an elder in Carthage. Tertullian viewed Christian righteousness as something that developed in stages, in God's timetable. Righteousness was rudimentary at first, followed later by the law, then the Old Testament prophets of the Jewish Covenant. Finally came the Gospel. He stated that the oracles of Montanism were the Paraclete's work in bringing the saints to maturity; practical issues dominated regarding how to live in holiness with fasting, sexual abstinence, and rigorous discipline under Christian persecution by the authorities. Tertullian wrote that "the Paraclete's administrative office is the direction of discipline, the revelation of Scripture, the reformation of the intellect, and the advancement toward the better things. . . .The

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<sup>23</sup> Stephen Benko, *The Virgin Goddess: Studies in the Pagan and Christian Roots of Mariology* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1993), 145.

Paraclete will be after Christ, the only one to be called and revered as master; for He speaks not from himself, but what is commanded by Christ.”<sup>24</sup>

Prophecy in the Montanist Church was problematic for the emerging hierarchical Church as it challenged its growing institutional power. The founders, Montanus, Maximilla, and Priscilla, did not adopt the biblical third person pattern of “thus saith the Lord” when they prophesied. Instead they spoke the Paraclete’s own words.<sup>25</sup> They saw themselves as the literal mouthpieces of the Paraclete. When Montanus spoke words such as “I am the Lord God, the Almighty dwelling in man” and “Neither angel nor envoy, but I the Lord God the Father have come,”<sup>26</sup> the hierarchical authorities saw it as a claim to be the incarnation of the Spirit. The Montanists, on the other hand, labeled as godless and secular those who did not recognize the oracles of the Holy Spirit.<sup>27</sup>

Pneumatology is the specific branch of theology that focuses on the person and workings of the Holy Spirit, also known as the Paraclete. A second problem between the hierarchy and Montanists centered on the Pneumatological understanding of the role of the Paraclete and when it began. Montanists stated that the Paraclete came when Montanus began to prophesy. They did not dispute the action of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost or in the lives of the Apostles. However, now the Spirit was the active member

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Henry Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient Society: From Galilee to Gregory the Great* ( New York: The Oxford University Press, Inc., 2001), 115.

<sup>26</sup> Ronald E. Heine, *The Montanist Oracles and Testimonia* (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1989), 3.

<sup>27</sup> Chadwick, 115.

of the Godhead in a new way. Using scripture once more, they pointed out that Jesus had promised the Paraclete would be sent after he, Jesus, went away and that the Paraclete would guide them into all truth and be with them forever.<sup>28</sup> Tertullian believed in the superiority of this revelation, writing that “If Christ abrogated what Moses commended because from the beginning it was not so. . . .why should not the Paraclete alter what Paul permitted?”<sup>29</sup> Tertullian is referring here to Jesus’ habit of challenging existing practice under the Mosaic Law. By extension, since both Jesus and the Paraclete are members of the Godhead, the Paraclete should also be able to challenge existing practice in the Church. Hippolitus (170-235 Rome), Philastes (a contemporary of Hippolitus), and Augustine (354-430) all condemned Tertullian’s statement as a belief that the advent of the Holy Spirit did not come with the apostles but rather with the Montanists themselves.<sup>30</sup>

A third problem regarding prophecy was its ecstatic nature. As seen in the first chapter, Eusebius defined Montanist prophecy as “raving.” A debate ensued over whether inspiration is conditional on a suspension of reason or whether it brings an enhancement of it. Tertullian wrote a lost tract *On Ecstasy*. In it he pinpointed the loss of mental control as the central issue between psychics and pneumatics. He defined psychics as natural Christians, those living good Christian lives but rooted in this world, and pneumatics as spiritual ones, those who set their sights more completely on the things

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<sup>28</sup> John 14:16.

<sup>29</sup> Tertullian as cited by De Soyres, Book II, sect. 58, f 2.

<sup>30</sup> De Soyres, Book II, sect. 59.

above, according to the meaning of the Greek used by Paul in I and II Corinthians.<sup>31</sup>

Tertullian, who embraced the prophecies of the Montanists, believed the total abandonment of the self to the movement of the Holy Spirit and the will of God practiced by the spiritual pneumatics necessitated loss of control. Epiphanius, an orthodox Christian, was the first to state that true prophecy had to be conscious and intelligent. This opinion became universally adopted by the developing hierarchical Church.<sup>32</sup>

The interpretation of scripture became one of the means by which women procured leadership roles in the Montanist movement. An example is the interpretation of the Apostle Paul's admonition in Galatians which states that in Christ there is no "male or female."<sup>33</sup> Montanists viewed the previously mentioned (chap.1) dream received by Priscilla as confirmation of this scripture since Christ appeared to her in female form. This "prophetic" vision was an underpinning for the justification of female leadership within the New Prophecy. Both women and men could prophesy and hold prominent ritual offices in the midst of the assembled faithful. In addition, women who were imprisoned waiting for martyrdom became confessors able to exercise the power of the keys (the ability to forgive sin) alongside their male counterparts. When released from prison, they continued to hold and exercise this confessor function.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Chadwick, 115.

<sup>32</sup> De Soyres, Book II, Sect. 66-8.

<sup>33</sup> Gal. 3:28.

<sup>34</sup> Klawiter, 105.

According to Klawiter it is “highly probable” that women were permitted to rise to ministerial status from the beginnings of Montanism as a result of their roles as confessor-martyrs.<sup>35</sup> He admits there are no extant texts from Montanism in Asia Minor giving definitive credence to this being the case. However, two important facts are known. Even when imprisonment and persecution ended, the confessor still retained the title of martyr and the power of the keys. Among the Christians in Rome there is the example (as early as 189-99) of one Callistus, a released confessor who was automatically given the title of “presbyter”. This avenue to the priesthood was part of the apostolic tradition of Rome. It is therefore logical to conclude that Montanist Christians also accepted such an avenue to attain ministerial rank.<sup>36</sup> In view of the Montanist interpretation of St. Paul, this would also logically include women. Further evidence of the power of the keys and its non-exclusivity can be discerned in the Acts of Perpetua and Felicitas. While incarcerated awaiting her martyrdom, Perpetua prayed for her brother, Dinocrates, who died of cancer at age seven as a pagan. She received a vision of him healed and baptized.<sup>37</sup> The early Church celebrated her as a martyr in both the orthodox and the Montanist communities. Today she remains on the Western Roman Catholic Church’s calendar of saints.

As theological perspectives congealed later in the development of what became the Roman Catholic Church, essential differences emerged between it and the Montanist

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 110-11.

<sup>37</sup> Patricia Wilson-Kastner, ed., *A Lost Tradition: Women Writers of The Early Church* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1981), 2, 23.

view of the priestly authority of women. The orthodox perspective stated that one received the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the way to actual martyrdom, which then gave authority. The Montanist view said that authority came from being baptized into Christ's suffering through imprisonment and this satisfied the requirement for baptism in the Spirit. Specifically in regard to women, the orthodox stance claimed a woman was "liberated" to become a minister as long as she was actively participating in Christ's suffering. When imprisonment did not result in martyrdom and she was set free, her role reverted to that of subordination to men and no longer held the authority of the keys with her male counterparts. Montanism, however, declared that the suffering of imprisonment "liberated" a woman and release did not mean a retreat to the prior role of subordination. The vision of the awaited "new creation" resulting from suffering was strong enough to continue beyond the persecution that produced it.<sup>38</sup> These differing viewpoints leading to dissension uphold Trevett's view that the exercise of authority became one of the three major clashes causing the pronouncement of anathema.

Although most of the early church writers, including Eusebius and Hippolytus, were hostile to Montanism by the beginning of the third century, Tertullian was not. Since he was a prolific writer, much can be learned from both his pre-Montanist and Montanist writings. An orthodox Christian, but ascetic and puritanical, Tertullian became alarmed by what he perceived as lax morals and lack of zeal among professing Christians. During the persecutions initiated against Christians in North Africa by the Roman Emperor Septimius Severus (193-211), the cowardice and compromise of

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<sup>38</sup> Klawiter, 115.



Christians with paganism to evade suffering disgusted him. He wrote a piece of literature entitled *The Crown* that reflected his sentiments regarding his perception of Christian laxity and cowardice reflected in his main character, the antithesis of these hated qualities. The line, “Obviously the next step for people who have rejected the prophecies of the Holy Spirit is to plan how to refuse martyrdom too,”<sup>39</sup> is evidence of his embrace of Montanism.

In 206 Tertullian considered and embraced Montanistic ideas that began appearing in his writings such as the one just referred to. By 212 he was a prominent member of the movement. He remained orthodox at the same time, affirming all the doctrinal teachings of the Church, yet hoping for a reform in accord with Montanist beliefs. When this did not occur, Tertullian and others organized their own episcopally governed church. Tertullian regarded the teachings of Montanus, Priscilla, and Maximilla as prophetic revelations from the Holy Spirit<sup>40</sup> and the office of prophet the highest order of the clergy.<sup>41</sup> Tertullian’s writings are important for serious study of Montanism since the majority of the extant writings available today were written by those whose hostile viewpoints toward Montanism became the final viewpoint of the emerging hierarchical Church. The authoritative orthodox Church burned and destroyed a great deal of material in an effort to eradicate its rival. Most of what we know from the fourth and early fifth

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<sup>39</sup> Tertullian, “The Crown” in *Documents in Early Christian Thought*, Maurice Wiles and Mark Santer, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 134.

<sup>40</sup> McGoldrick, 38-9.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

century, primarily gleaned from epigraphy, is the result of the painstaking work of William Tabbernee.

The final issue to be looked at in this chapter is the role of Mariology in Montanism. Such a discussion of necessity must return to the cult of Cybele, the great mother goddess. This cult, like other fertility goddess cults, likely included office holders known as cannophori. The cannophori were in charge of the proper performance of the first day's solemnities in the annual rituals. Whereas only men were permitted to be priests in other cults, the cult of Cybele admitted women to this group of functionaries which distinguished it from other cults.<sup>42</sup>

There were other similarities between the cult of Cybele and the Montanists. The ritual of initiation involved eating and drinking, which can be compared with Christian communion, particularly when taking into consideration numerous accounts that stated Montanists used cheese along with bread in the Eucharist, a definite influence of the fertility cult. Paul stated, "Is what we eat not the body and blood of Christ?"<sup>43</sup> Immersion in the blood of a bull brought an initiate into the cult of Cybele. Immersion in the waters of Baptism and being washed by the blood of Christ initiated a Christian into the Church. In addition, "Her [Cybele's] worship was characterized by communication other than intelligent speech, i.e. the expression of thoughts in articulate sounds."<sup>44</sup> The frenzied ecstasy from music and dancing produced a supernatural rapture conducive to

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<sup>42</sup> Benko, 74.

<sup>43</sup> I Cor. 10:16.

<sup>44</sup> Benko, 75-6.

proclaiming the divine will that included prophecy by both men and women.<sup>45</sup> Paul was born in Tarsus, familiar with the region and would have known much about the cult of Cybele.

John, who wrote the book of Revelation, was also from this same region and familiar with pagan and goddess imagery. The book of Revelation with its eschatological imagery was important to the Montanist movement, as we have already seen. Chapter twelve is the heart of the middle section of the book and takes prominence in this discussion. To proclaim his message, John used the cultural and sociological context of Asia Minor in which he was steeped. The material has both Jewish and pagan symbolism, creating a unique Christianity of the region. In the picture he creates, the pagan goddess, specifically Cybele, became replaced by the Christian goddess, Mary Queen of Heaven. The whore clothed in scarlet represents the pagan goddess. In Montanist scriptural interpretation, she also represents the fallen Eve. The woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, dressed in a robe (a specific reference to the significance of not just clothing but the change of clothing that represents the new person or new creation) stands in the vault of heaven. She represents the reunification of what had been separated. She further represents the redemption of Eve. This imagery targeted a Christian audience in a pagan culture in transition.<sup>46</sup> The significance of this imagery in the context of Montanism is that it provided the central key for its chiliastic fervor in asceticism, virginity, martyrdom, and its keen anticipation of the arrival of the New Jerusalem, for

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 77

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 83-130.

when the reunification happened and Eve was redeemed the end of days would also come to be.

The earliest Christian speculations on the motherhood of Mary, particularly in the biblical parallelism “Eva-Maria,” came from two theologians with Eastern Mediterranean roots who were exposed to Montanism: Justin Martyr (d. 165), born in Palestine to Greek-pagan parents, and Irenaeus (130-202). Justin Martyr’s writings also show strong theological eschatological motifs which, at that time, were emphasized primarily by the Montanists. Directly exposed to Montanism, Irenaeus shows some Montanist sympathies in his writings. A disciple of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, Irenaeus originally came from Asia Minor and became bishop of Lyons, where Montanism was causing dissension. When the brethren in Gaul sent a letter to bishop Eleutherus in Rome, Irenaeus was the ambassador. Both Justin Martyr and Polycarp (d. 156) suffered martyrdom for their faith.<sup>47</sup>

As the Canon of scripture formed, enough time had elapsed to cloud the understanding of the pagan references making the Book of Revelation problematic and almost excluded. Despite this, the familiar pagan goddess does transform into the Queen of Heaven in Catholic theology and Theotokis, the God bearer, in Eastern theology. Epiphanius was the first to identify the “woman clothed with the sun” with Mary, granting the interpretation long-standing authenticity.<sup>48</sup> The Eastern Church proposed a definite Mariological interpretation, beginning with the author Oecumenius, a Greek

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 168-9.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 132.

father in the Church.<sup>49</sup> Although many of the Latin Fathers called her “The Church,” St. Augustine’s works now attributed to his disciple Quodvuldeus (d. 455) identified the woman as Mary.<sup>50</sup> The Church Fathers carefully guarded these references to the woman as Mary until the medieval period, after the rivalry of pagan goddesses was gone. At that time they flourished.<sup>51</sup>

Montanism did not depart from the orthodoxy of the basic Christian doctrines regarding the person of Christ and sacramental theology. It arose and grew in antithesis to those who accepted the confession and penance of Christians who recanted under the duress of persecution by the empire allowing them to return to the midst of the Church. The Montanist worldview believed the return of Christ was immanent and to be ready to participate in the new vision it would bring required a stringent striving after holiness. Attention should be on the world to come, not this one. Therefore celibacy became the preferred norm instead of marriage. Dry fasts that excluded eating meat and dairy disciplined the body. These rigors, acceptable in moderation in orthodoxy became excessive in Montanism. The office of the prophet, paramount to Montanistic thinking, challenged the authority of bishops.

Galatians 3:28 and Mariological theology extracted from the Book of Revelation bolstered the roles of women allowed within Montanism that not only allowed women to prophesy but permitted them to exercise the office of the keys in the assembly and in

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 136.

hearing confessions. With the orthodox Christian Church growing and cementing its hierarchical and political infrastructure in the fourth century, change was about to happen.

## MONTANISM AND THE EMERGING CHRISTIAN CHURCH

The early Christian Church of the second century was not monolithic but pluralistic. It took until the Council of Nicaea in 325 to format the final foundational truths concerning what was and was not considered to be heretical. Dissension between Montanist and orthodox Christians was evident from the inception of the Montanist movement. In Asia Minor, where Montanism originated, Christian synods took place between 150 and 160. These early synods addressed disputes concerning the nature of prophecy and biblical interpretations of when the fullness of the Paraclete arrived. They arose from local concerns and condemnation of the Montanist adherents.<sup>1</sup>

By 177, Christians in Asia and Phrygia experienced division over Montanism. This schism forced Irenaeus, a priest and later bishop of Lyons, to intercede with Eleutherus, then Bishop of Rome, by means of a letter written by confessor-martyrs of the churches of Lyons and Gaul pleading for peace among the churches.<sup>2</sup> Although not what exists in modern times, there was communication between Lyons and Vienna in Gaul and the region of Phrygia and Asia Minor as there was between all regions of the Christian Church and most regions of the known world. Irenaeus sent letters from Gaul to Asia Minor describing the persecutions of orthodox and Montanist Christians in Gaul.<sup>3</sup> A physician named Alexander, a Phrygian by birth, had lived in Gaul many years and was

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<sup>1</sup> De Soyres, Book I, Sect. 51.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. C. F. Crusé, M.A., Tr., *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus...Tr. From the Greek, by the Rev. C. F. Crusé, M.A., With Notes Selected From the Edition of Valesius. Eusebius of Caesarea, Bishop of Caesarea, ca. 260-ca. 340.* (London: G. Bell and sons, 1897), 171.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

among the martyrs there.<sup>4</sup> These martyrs wanted peace in the church. They were merciful to those who fell away under persecution in contrast to the Novatians (with whom the Montanists later joined) who gave these fallen ones no hope of absolution.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the Christians in Gaul also wrote letters of correction presenting their judgment regarding Montanus and his followers. In addition they published letters of several martyrs put to death with them who were presumably Montanist. The Christians wrote those letters while in prison awaiting martyrdom and addressed them to Christians in Asia and Phrygia.<sup>6</sup> About 200, the Bishop of Rome (most likely Victor who presided over the 193 A.D. Council of Rome) sent another letter of peace to the churches in Asia and Phrygia recognizing Montanism. His successor Zephyrinus (199-217) reaffirmed it. However, it would be the last such letter of peace written because one called Praxeas changed the next bishop's mind.<sup>7</sup>

Praxeas, a theologian from Asia Minor, was the most vigorous opponent of Montanism in Rome. He convinced the bishop, Callixtus (217-22), and his advisors to reject Montanist teachings. Tertullian, who had also travelled to Rome for the purpose of persuading the bishop to accept Montanist views, saw Praxeas' actions as "the devil's work."<sup>8</sup> Praxeas himself was a member of the Alogi sect, that rejected the Logos Doctrine

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 170. (See especially n1.)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Klawiter, 106.

<sup>8</sup> McGoldrick, 40.



that established the divinity of Jesus and His place as the second person of the trinity, and the writings of St. John, particularly the Apocalypse, because they found them a strong bulwark for Montanistic claims.<sup>9</sup>

Several issues were the source of conflict between Montanist and orthodox Christians in the late second and early third centuries. Among them were issues of pneumatology, i.e. the nature and working of the Holy Spirit, and millenarianism (particularly the belief that a literal city of New Jerusalem would descend from heaven and at Pepouza not Jerusalem). Women's roles, views regarding marriage and celibacy, and asceticism found their place among them as well. Pneumatology and women's roles, addressed in chapter two, were the most problematic. Montanist prophets did not adhere to an Old Testament style of pronouncement with the classic formula "thus saith the Lord." There was much debate regarding when the Paraclete had come and whether a prophet must be lucid while prophesying. Ecstatic rites made orthodox Christians uncomfortable due to those rites' resemblance to pagan rituals. Although there does not seem to have been a formally issued statement by the Bishop of Rome, there was no longer any formal recognition of Montanism and the early synods were free to debate and issue formal declarations on the issues, later becoming part of the body of Canon Law.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, Montanist prophets produced controversy by claiming to have received revelation supplementary to that of Christ and his apostles. Tertullian believed in the superiority of this revelation, as discussed in chapter two. Recall that Tertullian wrote: "If

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<sup>9</sup> De Soyres, Book I, Sect. 50.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Christ abrogated what Moses commanded because from the beginning it was not so ... Why should not the Paraclete alter what Paul permitted?"<sup>11</sup> Tertullian saw the historic unfolding of the faith as revelation by stages, comparing it to ripening fruit or grain. The first stage of faith was the rudimentary fear of God present at the beginning followed by an infancy stage shown by the patriarchs. This infancy stage was, in his view, advanced through the Law and the prophets. He asserted the Gospel brought the faithful to the fervor of youth, and the advent of the Paraclete brought faith to the final stage of maturity.<sup>12</sup> A description Tertullian wrote in *The Soul* of the visionary experience of a female Montanist teacher gives evidence of his belief in ongoing special revelation.<sup>13</sup>

Seeing that we acknowledge charismata, or gifts, we too have merited the attainment of the prophetic gift. . . . We have now among us a sister whose lot it has been to be favored with sundry gifts of revelation, which she experiences in the Spirit by ecstatic vision amid the sacred rites of the Lord's Day in the church; she converses with angels and sometimes with the Lord; she both sees and hears mysterious communication; some men's hearts she understands, and to them who are in need she distributes remedies. Whether it be in the reading of the Scriptures, or in the chanting of Psalms, or in the preaching of sermons, or in the offering up of prayers, in all these religious services matter and opportunity are afforded her of seeing visions.<sup>14</sup>

In addition Tertullian wrote:

. . . the Paraclete's administrative office is the direction of discipline, the revelation of Scriptures, the reformation of the intellect and the advancement toward the better things . . . The Paraclete will be after Christ, the only one to be called and revered as master; for He speaks not from himself, but what is commanded by Christ.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., Book II, Sect. 58, n 2.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., Sect. 61.

<sup>13</sup> McGoldrick, 40.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Benko, *The Virgin Goddess: Studies in the Pagan and Christian Roots of Mariology* (New York, New York: E. J. Brill, 1993), 145.

The ideology of the Trinity was a doctrine in formation during this time period. Montanism was not the only variant on orthodox thinking; many sects espoused differing ideas on who and what the Holy Spirit was, the nature of Christ's humanity and divinity, and how these related to the Old Testament God of the Judaic world. Montanist views regarding the Trinity were never considered heretical. As the Church Fathers debated the theological implications, Montanist views became the front runner and eventually became the official accepted doctrine of the Catholic Church.<sup>16</sup> Bishop St. Gregory of Nazianzen in his oration at the first Council of Constantinople in 381 reflects this fact by mentioning those views found unacceptable and not mentioning Montanism which held acceptable views:

. . . neither like the Sabellians, assailing the Trinity in the interest of the Unity, and so destroying the distinction by a wicked confusion; nor, like the Arians, assailing the Unity in the interest of the Trinity, and by an impious distinction overthrowing the Oneness...but we...believe in the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, of one substance and glory;...acknowledging the Unity in the Essence and in the undivided worship, and the Trinity in the Hypostases or Persons (which term some prefer)."<sup>17</sup>

The assumption of leadership roles by women in the Montanist movement discussed in chapter two made orthodox Christians even more uncomfortable. Such behavior transgressed the normative roles of women in society in general during this period. In addition, it challenged the orthodox interpretation of Galatians 3:28 pertaining to baptism viewing it differently to justify Montanist female leadership roles. This verse states: "...and there are no more distinctions between. . . male and female..."<sup>18</sup> The

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., Sect. 72-76.

<sup>17</sup> Barry, 87.

<sup>18</sup> The Jerusalem Bible.

orthodox assertion, as seen in chapter two, that women held the power of the keys only while actually suffering in captivity awaiting martyrdom, and not after release clashed with Montanist thought and praxis. Ultimately, the orthodox Church ruled by Canon Law at the Council of Laodicea that women were prohibited from receiving ordination. This council took place late in the fourth century. Although its specific date is unknown, historian William Tabbernee provides a probable date between 343 and 381.<sup>19</sup>

Early Montanists, especially Maximilla, saw themselves as the last of the prophets, the heralds of Christ's imminent return.<sup>20</sup> Such millenarianism was generally accepted by and representative of orthodox Christians in the second century as well. Justin Martyr (100-65), Papias (70-155), and Irenaeus all accepted the idea of the imminent return of Christ.<sup>21</sup> However, after Maximilla's death in 180, other prophets appeared along with the spread of Montanism into Egypt and Northern Africa. This was problematic for Montanism's defense and lent credence to orthodox charges of false prophecy. Maximilla herself had stated in one of her oracles that there would be no new prophets after her.<sup>22</sup> As a body Montanists continued to embrace millenarianism even beyond the time frame of Maximilla's death. These accusations led to a widening of the gulf between Montanist and orthodox Christians to the point where they did not speak to each other even when being held simultaneously awaiting martyrdom. By the early third

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<sup>19</sup> Tabbernee, *Prophets and Gravestones*, 271, n 16.

<sup>20</sup> De Soyres, Book I, Sect. 37.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, Book II, Sect. 77-79.

<sup>22</sup> McGoldrick, 37.

century, historian John De Soyres states, Montanism was “disowned” but not officially condemned.<sup>23</sup> By the fourth century, millenarianism became unacceptable, viewed as a threat and a prediction of the ruin of the Roman Empire.<sup>24</sup> Christianity, once illegal, became legal when Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan in 313. The emperor became a patron of the Church and set a precedent for the ideal of a Christian emperor within the Christian Church. Another edict in 380 officially declared Christianity the state religion. A thrust to homogenize Christianity in order to preserve the unity of the empire began. There could only be one seat of power and the Emperor needed to put an end to rivals who saw the empire as temporary instead of “eternal.” Montanists became especially chided for their belief that the New Jerusalem of the Millennium would descend at Pepouza (first proclaimed by Montanus himself). Orthodox Christian millenarists believed it would descend on the site of ancient Jerusalem, as have millenarists since. Tertullian endorsed millenarianist views in his writings although he never refers to Pepouza or Jerusalem specifically.<sup>25</sup>

Montanist asceticism created a great deal of discussion and dissension among Christian apologists. Some ascetic practices were observed among orthodox Christians, particularly certain periods of fasting. Perceived Montanist excesses were considered objectionable. Apollonius, an anti-Montanist Greek ecclesiastical writer (180-210), wrote objecting to the extreme dry Montanist fasts along with fasting on The Lord’s Day and

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<sup>23</sup> De Soyres, Book I, Sect. 43.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., Book II, Sect. 78 & n.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

the dissolution of marriages for a preferred state of celibacy. Continued controversies reflected in such writings as those of Apollonius and others eventually led to the Council of Gangra (321-81). Regarding Montanism's rigorous emphasis on celibacy, Canon I of the Council stated that: "If anyone shall condemn marriage, or abominate and condemn a woman who is a believer and devout, and sleeps with her own husband, as though she could not enter the Kingdom (of heaven) let him be anathema." The Ancient Epitome says it even more simply: "Anathema to him who disregards legitimate marriage."<sup>26</sup> Canon IX stated: "If anyone shall remain virgin, or observe continence, abstaining from marriage because he abhors it, and not on account of the beauty and holiness of virginity itself, let him be anathema."<sup>27</sup> In refutation to the practice of Montanist women leaving their husbands Canon XIV proclaimed: "If any woman shall forsake her husband, and resolve to depart from him because she abhors marriage, let her be anathema."<sup>28</sup> Canon XVIII forbid fasting on Sundays.<sup>29</sup>

The Canons rebutted Montanist theology regarding second marriages, which Montanists viewed as sinful. Canon VIII of the First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea (325) reads: "If those called Cathari (Montanists) come over, let them first make profession that they are willing to communicate with the twice married, and to grant pardon to the

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<sup>26</sup> Schaff and Wace, 92.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 99.

lapsed.”<sup>30</sup> By the writings of Augustine, particularly *The Heresies*, the Roman Catholic Church used the forbidding of a second marriage, or likening it to fornication, as a mark of heresy.<sup>31</sup> St. Ambrose was very assertive in his *The Widows* stating: “We do not prohibit second marriages...” and St. Jerome, in even stronger language, wrote: “I do not condemn digamists, or even trigamists...”<sup>32</sup>

The reference “grant pardon to the lapsed” in Nicaea’s eighth canon refutes the Montanist unyielding refusal to grant pardon to those who lapsed under persecution due to lack of courage. Canon XI went on to say:

Concerning those who have fallen without compulsion, without the spoiling of their property, without danger or the like, as happened during the tyranny of Licinius, the synod declares that though they have deserved no clemency, they shall be dealt with mercifully. As many as were communicants, if they heartily repent, shall pass three years among the hearers; for seven years they shall be prostrators; and for two years they shall communicate with the people in prayer, but without oblation.<sup>33</sup>

Hearers were those who were only allowed to stand about the entrance of the church and listen. Prostrators were catechumens preparing for baptism. They sat together behind the place where the scriptures were read. The latter, allowed to be present for the mass, could not partake of the Eucharist or make any offerings.

Hippolytus (bishop of an unknown see, d. 236), Epiphanius (of Salamis d. 403), and Theodoret (393-457, bishop of Cyprus and theologian) all wrote about the strict Montanist dietary rules. Jerome (340-420) wrote describing the Montanist observation of

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 24.

three Lents, including Lent even after Pentecost because “the bridegroom is taken away.”<sup>34</sup> The orthodox Church saw these rigid ascetisms as contrary to the Apostle Paul’s concessions to the weakness of the flesh.<sup>35</sup> An orthodox reaction to the practice of Montanist dry fasts (bread, water, and vegetables) is implied by Canon XIV of the provincial synod held at Ancyra (314), the capital of Galatia. It reads: “It is decreed that among the clergy, presbyters and deacons who abstain from flesh shall taste of it, and afterwards, if they shall so please, may abstain. But if they disdain it, and will not even eat herbs served with flesh, but disobey the canon, let them be removed from their order.”<sup>36</sup> In addition, Canon II of the Council of Gangra stated: “If anyone shall condemn him who eats flesh which is without blood and has not been offered to idols or strangled, and is faithful and devout, as though the man were without hope (of salvation) because of his eating, let him be anathema.”<sup>37</sup>

Tertullian, however, wrote that abstinence from such things came not from a perspective of rejection, but from an attitude of deferment.<sup>38</sup> It is interesting to note that Tertullian’s viewpoint found acceptability further down the historical timeline, for rigid ascetic practices were prevalent in the monastic settings of the medieval period, lending

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<sup>34</sup> Jerome’s Commentary as cited by De Soyres, Book II, Sect. 80. (The Biblical quote is from Matt.: 9:15.)

<sup>35</sup> De Soyres, Book II, Sect. 79.

<sup>36</sup> Schaff and Wace, 69.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>38</sup> De Soyres, Book II, Sect. 81.



validity to Athenagoras' (133-190)<sup>39</sup> attestation that the principles of Montanism did not depart from the principles of Christianity.<sup>40</sup> De Soyres viewed this as a Catholic tendency to succumb to the "externalization" of religion; they anathematized the form of Montanism but unconsciously assimilated portions of its substance, which became the principles of the later ascetic movements of monasticism, including an overestimation of virginity by both Ambrose (340-397), bishop of Milan from 374-397, and Jerome. He stated that all developed from the Montanistic germ and were, at least in part, a product of a "Judaistic spirit,"<sup>41</sup> meaning a rigid external spirituality of the old Mosaic Law in opposition to the inner spirituality called for under the New Covenant of Christ's redemption. Although pockets of rigid external spirituality carried to extremes did exist, particularly in some monastic settings during the medieval period, such excesses never came to be a focus of the Catholic Church contrary to De Soyres viewpoint. From the first century New Testament writings forward there are clear indications of the Church refuting the "Judaisers" in Her midst beginning with Paul's admonishment of Peter.<sup>42</sup>

As pressures proceeded against Montanism and some Montanists sought to affiliate themselves with the orthodox, disputes arose regarding the legality of baptism. These disputes were not concerning the form of baptism. The issue concerned the

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<sup>39</sup> Not much is known regarding Athenagoras except that he was a second century Greek philosopher and a Christian convert, and a Christian apologist. Two of his writings have survived: *Apology* also known as *Embassy for the Christians* and a latter work *Treatise on the Resurrection*. (The Catholic Encyclopedia)

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, Sect. 85.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, Book III, Sect. 113.

<sup>42</sup> Galatians 2:11-14

legitimacy of the baptism based on whether Montanism was or was not heretical. The first examinations of the question by a synod took place during the early years of Firmilian's prelatey circa 230-5. Firmilian was bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia and died in 269. The same question arose again between Stephen, Bishop of Rome, and Cyprian, a bishop and martyr from Carthage, in 255-6. Two or three synods were held with the result that the Roman bishop declared Montanistic baptism to be valid. The Council of Nicaea passed over Montanists in silence, tacitly confirming Stephen's decision.<sup>43</sup>

Within a year after the close of the Council of Nicaea, Emperor Constantine I issued an edict that all sectarian churches and properties were to be handed over to the orthodox Church and their books burned. The Novationists, a Christian sect who believed once a Christian apostatized under persecution it meant permanent damnation, became excluded from this action in a second edict declared in the same year. This began a merger between Novationists and Montanists whose doctrines were both non-heretical and compatible. In this way, Montanists were able to keep their holdings a while longer.<sup>44</sup> Novatianism had a strong presence in Phrygia and adhered to the same type of rigorous asceticism as the Montanists. Some Novationists had become unhappy with a growing laxity within their own ranks and many wished to move the celebration of Easter to the observance of the Jewish Passover which was in line with Montanist practice. Along with

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<sup>43</sup> De Soyres, Book I, Sect. 51-52.

<sup>44</sup> William Tabbernee, *Prophets and Gravestones: An Imaginative History of Montanists and Other Early Christians* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 213, n 7.

Montanist rigorist ascetics, this fact was appealing and made a merger between the two practical.<sup>45</sup>

The Laodicean Synod (between 341 and 381 as previously mentioned), held in Phrygia Pacatiana, severed the last link between orthodox and Montanist Christians. Although the former seventh canon had stated no rebaptism was necessary, the eighth canon of the Laodicean Synod now mandated it, stating "...that those who return from the heresy of the so-called Phrygians, even if they belonged to its clergy, and were the most distinguished, yet must be carefully catechized, and baptized by the bishops and presbyters of the Church." They would be received as pagans.<sup>46</sup> The Ecumenical Synod of Constantinople endorsed this condemnation in 381. This synod's seventh canon reads:

The Montanists or Phrygians, and the Sabellians, we receive as we do pagans, namely, the first day we make them Christians, the second catechumens, the third day we exorcise them by breathing thrice into their face and ears, and make them continue a good while in the church and hear the scriptures, and afterwards we baptize them.<sup>47</sup>

The same Council of Laodicea forbade the ordination of women in canon eleven.<sup>48</sup> In the sixth century, the bishops of Gaul issued a letter forbidding the practice of women to assist in the administration of the Eucharist just as in the "horrenda Secta," translated as "horrible Actor," a probable reference to Montanists and the orthodox view that those not validly ordained are merely actors and horrible, meaning sacrilegious, ones at that.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Tabbernee, *Montanist Inscriptions and Testimonia: Epigraphic Sources Illustrating the History of Montanism* (Macon Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997), 347-48.

<sup>46</sup> De Soyres, Book I, Sect. 51-2.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>49</sup> Benko, 150.

The Montanistic Movement did not last long in Western Europe. It was not successful in Rome from an early date. Perhaps this was due to how closely orthodoxy and Montanism resembled one another. It gained a solid foothold in Northern Africa for a time with Tertullian's promotion. It survived much longer in Phrygia. This lengthy survival can possibly be attributed to a fuller emphasis on its differences from and denunciations of corruption within the orthodox Christian body. Montanists claimed the Church had lost the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.<sup>50</sup>

The final death throes for Montanism occurred in Pepouza, Phrygia, where it all began. It had spread to Rome and then to North Africa, but here is where the last remaining remnants made their final stand four centuries later in 550. Prior to Emperor Constantine, persecution of Montanists occurred conjointly with other Christians as a part of a general persecution against Christians. After Constantine, Montanists became sought out for persecution for being Montanist. Other non-orthodox Christians were likewise persecuted. Constantine's motivation was a desire to preserve the *Pax Dei* (peace of God) and keep his empire intact. Along with this political motivation, Constantine also saw it as his responsibility to God to rid the empire God had entrusted him with of heretics. He feared if he did not, God would destroy the empire. Subsequent emperors continued the practice with the same motivation to keep the *Pax Dei*. The Theodosian Code stated that "what is committed against divine religion is effected to the injury of all persons" and

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<sup>50</sup> McGoldrick, 41.

both Arcadius (383-408) and Honorius (393-428) made participation in certain heresies, including Montanism, a public crime.<sup>51</sup>

John of Amida (505-585) became known later as John of Ephesus. A monk ordained to the diaconate in 529, he functioned as a historian. Eventually he became consecrated to the priesthood by the Bishop of Ephesus. Under orders from the Constantinian Emperor Justinian, he began hunting for Montanism's "holy grail" – the tomb of Montanus, Priscilla and Maximilla —in 546. He found it in Pepouza in 550 under the Montanist basilica surrounded by candles and vigilant elders. The soldiers with John unsealed the tomb and torched the mummies inside. The basilica itself underwent an exorcism and became rededicated as an orthodox basilica. The New Prophecy, as it called itself, was no more; its remaining adherents converted by force.<sup>52</sup> The justification for these actions and the demise of the Montanists can be found in the Theodosian Code. To comprehend the social impact and irrevocable nature of this Code, a discussion of the evolution of Roman law both secular and sacred and the enmeshment of the two is necessary.

The early Roman Empire imposed law by custom. Jurisprudence became a subject of study and over time a sophisticated system developed. When a capital of the empire moved to Constantinople, the east finally began to be a seat of jurisprudence as well. From the time of Hadrian to Alexander Severus legal schools had precedence. After the

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<sup>51</sup> William Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy and Polluted Sacraments: Ecclesiastical and Imperial Reactions to Montanism* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007), 308-12.

<sup>52</sup> Tabbernee, *Prophets and Gravestones*, 297-303.

death of Severus, however, subsequent emperors decided matters that had once been given to lawyers. The Imperial Constitutions became the dominant Roman law. During the time of Constantine, lawyers again became prominent, with an active law school at Beirut in Syria. Lawyers collected the Imperial Constitutions or Edicts, both those from Hadrian to Constantine (collected by one Gregory) and a supplement by Hermogenes.<sup>53</sup>

At this same time, there existed attempts to collect the ecclesiastical canons giving rise to both civil law and Canon Law at the same time. The Theodosian Code called for by Theodosius the Younger was the first official collection and contained in addition all the Imperial Constitutions published since the collections of Gregory and Hermogenes. Subsequently accepted by the reigning Western Emperor, Valentinian II, it arose in the East in 438.<sup>54</sup>

The Justinian Code of 529 abrogated the previous collections and promoted simplicity and consistency. Often looked at as the originator of Canon Law in the mid-sixth century John of Antioch, surnamed Scholasticus, worked as a lawyer. He was apocrisiarius (a formal representative) of the Church of Antioch at Constantinople. Later he became the patriarch of that see, ruling from 564 until his death in 578. He wrote the *Collection of the Canons of the Councils* while he was still only a priest. Other historians see Sabinus, Bishop of Heraclea in Thrace, as the original Canon Law author at the beginning of the fifth century. It is clear, though, that the code existed prior to John of

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<sup>53</sup> Schaff and Wace, xxix.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

Antioch because he frequently quotes from it without naming the authors.<sup>55</sup> Although Canon Law did not carry the weight of civil law until a much later period of history, its beginnings are here. After Constantine, Christian emperors took it into consideration.

Justinian was one of those emperors. Article I, section three of the Theodosian Code states:

. . . All, however, who dissent from the communion of the faith of those who have been expressly mentioned in this special enumeration shall be expelled from their churches as manifest heretics and hereafter shall be altogether denied the right and power to obtain churches in order that the priesthood of the true Nicene faith may remain pure, and after the clear regulations of Our (sic) law, there shall be no opportunity for malicious subtlety (30 July 381).<sup>56</sup>

According to historian James McGoldrick, what eventually became the Catholic Church did not object so much to the principle of “continuing special revelation” as to the strange practices it engendered such as rigid asceticism and ecstatic frenzies. He asserts the late twentieth century Catholic Charismatic Renewal attests to this non-objection.<sup>57</sup> However, the Charismatic Movement, cannot be defined as “special revelation,” which contains an essential doctrinal emphasis that does not pertain to the individual experience of a personal charism. Perhaps McGoldrick is making a link between the ecstatic frenzies of the Montanists and the speaking in tongues of the modern movement which many today find discomfiting just as the ancients found Montanist ecstasy discomfiting. McGoldrick does correctly state that “the Catholic Church never denied the possibility of

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., xxx.

<sup>56</sup> Barry, 142.

<sup>57</sup> McGoldrick, 41.

direct subjective revelation.”<sup>58</sup> This is a more accurate statement and can be evidenced not only in the Charismatic Renewal but in the accepted revelations to the saints and Marian visitations.

It is worth stating again that the Catholic Church did disapprove of ecstatic frenzy, rigorous asceticism and other strange practices peculiar to Asia Minor, particularly because Montanists taught that an ascetic lifestyle was critical for obtaining salvation. Orthodox Christians saw this as erroneous doctrine. It is interesting to note, however, that the Montanist practice of asceticism (as well as views on marriage and celibacy) influenced the later monastic movement characteristic of the medieval church.<sup>59</sup> Although rigors such as celibacy and fasting, along with the strangeness of frenzied prophesying, were objectionable to some, Athenagoras attests that the doctrinal assertions of Montanism did not depart from those of Christianity.<sup>60</sup> The Johannine writings ultimately became accepted into the canon of scripture, and the Montanist view of the Doctrine of the Trinity became the official doctrine of the Catholic Church.

Montanism was not a “sect” that arose outside the established parameters of perceived orthodoxy; it grew from within the church, not outside it. In the early period, leading writers and thinkers were fearful of approving extravagant forms but were also unwilling to censure principles in conformity with doctrinal teachings. A slow process of separation evolved from the later turning point of Praxeas’ intervention at Rome.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 42.

<sup>60</sup> De Soyres, Book II, Sect. 85.



Ultimately, it was the continuing claims of prophetic spiritual insight that doomed Montanism to expulsion. These claims were antagonistic to the new ecclesiastical organization based on the theory of finalism, which makes the assertion that once a matter has been explored and a conclusion reached in a legitimate council of the Church body it becomes Canon Law, the final word, and deviation from it is not acceptable to be orthodox. After the Council of Nicaea, any new doctrinal statement was *ipso facto* heretical. Government is not possible if the leadership is subject to the continuous checks imposed by Montanistic prophecy. Therefore the hierarchy deemed it necessary, to discredit the orthodoxy of the Montanists even though they were not unorthodox. They blamed Montanist Prophecy on an evil spirit instead of the Paraclete. This became the grounds for rebaptism as heretics by the Synod of Constantinople. This action suppressing the prophetic function in the Church restricted Irenaeus' outspokenness in support of prophecy. Now only manifestations acknowledged by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, performed or witnessed by the orthodox, became accepted miracles and visions.<sup>61</sup>

Christine Trevett suggests the possibility that the rivalry between orthodox and Montanist Christians can possibly be attributed to a rivalry between Jewish and gentile or pagan influences. She theorizes that Montanism was a more ancient and Jewish form of Christianity in opposition to a monarchical episcopacy derived from a more Hellenistic

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., Book III, Sect. 114-16.

form.<sup>62</sup> She quotes from Adolf Von Harnack, a German liberal theologian and church historian (1851-1930), as she states that the Church “marched through the open door into the Roman State” and then she goes on to say “and Montanism was among the forces (the ‘warning voices’) raised against secularizing tendencies. In turn, it (Montanism) fell prey to arrogance and legalism.”<sup>63</sup> In Trevett’s view, the defeat of both Gnosticism and Montanism allowed the Catholic Church to flourish and become the dominant voice of Christian orthodoxy.<sup>64</sup>

St. Cyprian of Carthage wrote *On the Unity of the Church* in 251. He drew on Christ’s teaching that He and the Father were one and that the Church was likewise to be in unity with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and its members with each other. He admonished that the Church was not to be divided by the clash of “discordant wills.” He wrote that to do so was not to keep the law of God, and individuals so acting would lose both life and soul.<sup>65</sup> Constantine wished to keep a unified empire and began a process to bring about an end to strident factions within Christianity and promote the *Pax Dei*. The emerging ecclesial hierarchy also wished for peace among all Christians as Christ taught. Constantine fought for the life and soul of the empire and the Church Fathers fought for the life and soul of the Christian Church.

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<sup>62</sup> Trevett, Christine, *Montanism: Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6-7.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Barry, 64.

## CHARISMATIC RENEWAL: A RESURGENCE OF MONTANISM?

A phrase often heard is “history repeats itself.” This is not a sentiment most historians would find themselves in agreement with. Every event in history is unique to its own time and place, influenced by its own set of geographic, cultural, sociological, and ideological circumstances. What can be discerned in the historical timeline in any given discipline is the evocation of repetitive patterns. To the untrained, these patterns appear to be a reprise of what occurred previously; yet they are not. At times, the more recent event does find itself influenced by the former. Significant events frequently do build upon the foundations of earlier events. There always occurs, first and foremost, however, a specific response to a specific cauldron of factors producing a specific catalyst for action or reaction that then becomes a piece of the puzzle of historical patterns.

Even when past events and ideas recede deep into the dark annals of unrecorded time, historical influences continue to vibrate with a resonance barely perceptible; but perceptible nonetheless in the tidewaters of future historical unfolding. Even when something seems obsolete, or appears left behind to accommodate changing values, it does not disappear into a vacuum from which it can never be retrieved. This is particularly so in regard to the intangible human thought processes that give birth to philosophy, ideology, theology, and the like. A study of the history of ideas makes clear the repetitive pattern of a swinging pendulum that acts, reacts, and acts again in response to the strains and restraints of sociological demands. Human nature demands of itself to look both behind and forward, borrowing from what worked before, adding the new that

seems right and good, and always questioning and refining. History, never stagnant as a result, can be seen as amazingly alive.

It would seem from all that has been said to this point that Montanism died with the desecration of the founders' tomb and the re-consecration of the church building in 550. Formally, in respect to the tangible movement of Montanism that subsequently crossed the line into heresy, this is true. Father Joe Gile, director of the graduate program of theological studies at Newman University, Kansas, teaches his students that heresy does seem to crop up from time to time in new forms throughout the history of the Church. Two movements which arose in the wake of Vatican II display the earmarks of Montanism. This chapter looks at the first of these movements: the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. The final chapter presents the Catholic Feminist movement as its focus.

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal arose as a result of the newfound freedom perceived in the changes brought about by the Second Vatican Council. The following passage from the document *Lumen Gentium* accepted the validity of charismata and encouraged them to continue in the Church.

It is not only through the sacraments and Church ministries that the same Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the people of God and enriches it with virtues. Allotting his gifts to everyone according as he will (I Cor. 12:11), he distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts he makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks or offices advantageous for the renewal and upbuilding of the Church, according to the words of the Apostle: "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit" (I Cor. 12:7). These charismatic gifts, whether they be the most outstanding or the more simple and widely diffused, are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation, for they are exceedingly suitable and useful for the needs of the Church.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Lumen Gentium* (n12).

These words, while not endorsing the charismatic experience per se, did officially sanction by the Council the operation of charismata in the contemporary Catholic Church. The Council also encouraged ecumenism: Catholics no longer saw other Christians as enemies or heretics; they were “separated brethren” sharing a common commitment to Jesus.<sup>2</sup> This allowed more contact with each other both in theological and sociological contexts. A trans-denominational neo-Pentecostal movement emerged in the historic denominations beginning in 1960. This movement, which did not share classical Pentecostalism’s sectarianism, began to spread into the Roman Catholic Church in the United States in 1967. In its infancy the movement remained orthodox although theologically diverse.<sup>3</sup> The characteristic that identified and unified those who participated in the movement became the experience of speaking in tongues, called the “baptism of the Holy Spirit,” and the subsequent charismata that included prophecy and interpretation. The movement grew quickly. A Charismatic Renewal conference held in January 1971 claimed four thousand registered participants. One fourth of these registered as priests and nuns. Two years later, in June 1973, an eastern regional conference held at Notre Dame University reported twenty-two thousand in attendance.<sup>4</sup>

Richard Quebedeaux defines the Charismatic Renewal as: “a celebration in our generation that God has not forgotten his promises, that he is, in fact and deed, a living

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<sup>2</sup> Ralph Martin, *Fire on the Earth: What God Is Doing in the World Today* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Word of Life, 1975) 27-28 [Vatican II document “Decree on Ecumenism”]

<sup>3</sup> Richard Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1976) 2.

<sup>4</sup> James Likoudis, *The Penecostalism Controversy* (St. Louis, MO: Central Bureau Press, 1973) 7-8.

God, totally committed to work in *evidential* ways through the lives of those committed to him.”<sup>5</sup> In “Nature of Renewal,” Quebedeaux posits Christ as having anticipated three needs the Spirit would satisfy: confirm faith, bring joy in the midst of suffering, and assure, guide, and teach those who would choose to follow Christ.<sup>6</sup>

Some feared this new movement and wrote intensely in opposition to it: James Likoudis, Father Ronald Knox, and John Hardon, S.J., among others. In an address given at an annual conference for clergy in the Archdiocese of New York, Hardon stated he personally believed “latter-day Pentecostalism is in the same essential stress (sic) with Gnosticism, Montanism, and Illuminism...” He stated this necessitated a “prudential judgment on an ideology,” an ideology that he maintained constituted a spirituality incompatible with Catholic doctrine and traditional Catholic spirituality.<sup>7</sup> Father Knox, author of *Enthusiasm*,<sup>8</sup> considered the movement dangerous. Some theologians, including Richard M. Hogan, have called Montanism a “movement of enthusiasm” since it “enthusiastically exaggerated some Christian teachings.”<sup>9</sup> According to Hogan, Christian movements seem to emphasize particular aspects of the Church’s faith in their beginnings. Pope Zephyrinus (199-217) saw the Montanists in a favorable light. In the end the declaration of anathema came, but it was not heretical doctrine that produced it.

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<sup>5</sup> Quebedeaux, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Quebedeaux, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Likoudis, 11-12.

<sup>8</sup> Ronald Knox, *Enthusiasm* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961).

<sup>9</sup> Richard M. Hogan, *Dissent From The Creed: Heresies Past and Present* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 2001), 54.

In addition to Montanism's challenge to authority and the illicit roles of women, the "exaggeration," to use Hogan's word, of Christian truths led to its demise. Things deemed good by the Church such as fasting, celibacy, etc., the Montanists insisted should be done in excess.<sup>10</sup> The question then bears repeating: should The Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church be considered a resurgence of Montanism?

Father Robert Wild, a protagonist for the renewal, wrote an article entitled "Is the Charismatic Renewal in the Church a New 'Montanism'?" which appeared in the December 1972 issue of *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*. In that article he writes:

It would be true to say that most of these unhealthy tendencies (fundamentalist interpretation of Scripture, para-clericalism, and a divisive moral rigorism) exist in varying degrees in the charismatic renewal today, just as they existed in various degrees in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Whether any of them will assume unnatural proportions and lead to deeper aberrations—sects and heresies unnamed—only time will tell. The current literature is very much aware of the danger.<sup>11</sup>

Pope Paul VI was cautious about the Renewal. An episcopal commission appointed by the Roman Catholic bishops of the United States presented a positive report in 1969 which stated the movement had legitimate reasons for existence and cited its strong biblical basis. Indeed, the movement justified itself using Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, Acts 1:5, 2:16-18, 38, 10:44-48, 19:6 and Ephesians 4:12.<sup>12</sup> The Committee on Doctrine concluded the movement should be allowed to develop with proper episcopal supervision. The committee admonished bishops to remember their pastoral responsibilities to oversee and guide the movement, to avoid "the mistakes" of classic

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Likoudis, 15.

<sup>12</sup> Quebedeaux, 165.

Pentecostalism, to protect doctrine so that experience did not become a substitute for it, and to involve prudent priests.

Virtually all historians attribute the decline of ecstatic prophecy in the early Church to the formation of the institutional Church, which brought about the evolution of canonical theology and the closed canon. A closed canon meant no further revelation. Adolph Von Harnack's *History of Dogma 2*, translated and published in London in 1896 states: "The New Testament, though not all at once, put an end to a situation where it was possible for any Christian under the inspiration of the Spirit to give authoritative disclosures and instructions." Harnack believed the Montanist "crisis" brought the idea of the New Testament to final realization and created the concept of a closed canon. This thesis reappears in the works of J.N.D. Kelly, Arnold Ehrhardt, Henry Chadwick, Hans Von Campenhausen and Jaroslav Pelikan, all mid-twentieth century historians.<sup>13</sup> However, James L. Ash disagrees since the idea of a closed Canon was the culmination of a three-century-long process determining which writings had canonical status and which ones did not. This process began in the mid-second century long before Montanism became persecuted. Therefore, ecstatic prophecy must have declined for other reasons.

Another theory for the decline of ecstatic prophecy involved dispensationalism. Dispensationalism is a post-Reformation Protestant theological system that interprets the history of Judeo-Christian faith using time periods during which God used distinct

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<sup>13</sup> James L. Ash, Jr., "The Decline of Ecstatic Prophecy in the Early Church" *Theological Studies*; June 1976 Vol.37 Issue 2, (Portland, OR: Oregon State University) 227-253.



devices in each period to bring about His purposes, and then those devices ceased functioning. This theory views the charismata of the Holy Spirit as a device used by God in the early Church in order to establish and grow the Christian Church. Dispensationalism asserts that around the third century, with the Church firmly established, the charismata of the Holy Spirit, including ecstatic prophecy, ended. However, Ash claims those who assert dispensationalism ignore sources such as the anti-Montanist tract quoted by Eusebius. Although the Church Fathers held that the ecstatic pagan-like frenzy of Montanistic prophecy was objectionable, this tract states: “For the prophetic gift must continue in the whole church until the final coming.”<sup>14</sup> The post conciliar Popes reaffirmed this declaration. According to Ash there is no evidence of a dispensationalist theology in the writings of the Church Fathers. Those who claim otherwise confuse the meaning and intent of a document known as the Muratorian Fragment that places an emphatic closure on the Old Testament Canon and its number of prophets.<sup>15</sup>

Ash posits a different reason for the disappearance of ecstatic prophecy in the early church. The word used by Harnack and overlooked by most is “authoritative.” The Pauline view of prophecy became the norm as the idea of an imminent eschaton faded. Paul counted prophets among the highest church officials second only to apostles.<sup>16</sup> He

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>16</sup> I Corinthians 12:28.

told the people of Thessalonika not to quench the Spirit and not to despise prophesying.<sup>17</sup>

In I Corinthians 12:14 Paul presents prophecy as one of the gifts of the Spirit—an imperfect gift given until the perfect comes, which is when full knowledge and understanding would be imparted. This can be taken as a reference to the return of Christ. As that day “was gradually pushed into the distant future by Christian leaders of the first three centuries,...the Pauline view of the charismata became more significant; for it meant that prophecy was affirmed as proper to the whole Christian age and therefore could never be dismissed *a priori* as inauthentic.”<sup>18</sup>

The letters of Ignatius (circa 110) do not mention prophets. Ignatius refers only to bishops, priests, and deacons. He himself appears to prophesy. The epistle to the Philadelphians 7, 1f reads:

I cried out while I was with you, I spoke with a great voice—with God’s own voice, ‘Give heed to the bishop, and to the presbytery and deacons.’ But some suspected me of saying this because I had previous knowledge of the division of some persons; but he in whom I am bound is my witness that I had no knowledge of this from any human being, but the Spirit was preaching, and saying this, ‘Do nothing without the bishop....’<sup>19</sup>

With Ignatius’ cry to “do nothing without the bishop,” there begins a metamorphic shift in the structure of the Church. The Didache 15,1 reflects this. It recommends the appointing of bishops and deacons who “also administer to you the ministry of the prophets and teachers.” Ignatius was not the only prophesying bishop. Ash mentions Melito of Sardis, a second century bishop described by Polycrates and considered a

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<sup>17</sup> I Thessalonians 5:19.

<sup>18</sup> Ash, 232.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 235.

prophet by the later Montanists.<sup>20</sup> From this point on, the “office of prophet” which the Montanists clung to in opposition to developing Church authority began to be unknown except in later Montanist and Tertullian circles. As Church hierarchical structure developed, the bishop became the pivot point for ecclesiastical authority—only he could speak with God’s voice. The prophetic gift was a somewhat forgotten tool until the Montanists brought it once more to the forefront, insisting the office of prophet was imperative. Although this was an embarrassment to the monarchical episcopacy, it was the office of prophet itself that produced the objection, not prophecy per se. Toward the close of the second century, Marcion rejected ecstatic prophecy completely. Irenaeus lists the Marcionite view in his catalogue of heresies:

“And others do not admit the gifts of the Holy Spirit and reject from themselves the charism of prophecy, being watered whereby, man bears fruit of life to God. And those are the ones spoken of by Isaias; for they shall be, he says as a leafless terebinth and as a garden without water. And such men are of no use to God, in that they can bear no fruit.”<sup>21</sup>

Irenaeus was a respected bishop who venerated the charisma of prophecy in a strong and unambiguous way with these words that he wrote shortly before the emergence of the Montanist controversy. Prophecy was still considered “necessary to the life of the church.”<sup>22</sup> This allowed the Montanist movement not to only arise, but experience great success. Again, it was the Montanist excesses that were condemned, not prophecy itself. In the late fourth century, Epiphanius wrote an anti-Montanist polemic claiming: “But the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 236 [Irenaeus Against Heresies 2, 11, 9 Ante-Nicene Fathers 1, 429]

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 236.

gift [of prophecy] is not inoperative in the holy Church, far from it!”<sup>23</sup> The use of scripture and Pauline criteria by both Montanists and anti-Montanists, including Tertullian’s firm embrace of the emerging concept of canon, refutes the thesis by Harnack and others previously referred to that the development of canonical theology led to the demise of ecstatic prophecy. Instead it lends itself to the more recent view of late twentieth century historians that it was the institutionalization of the early Church that caused the phenomenon to disappear gradually. The office of prophet became assumed by the office of the bishop and only he could give the authoritative prophecy sent from God. Ignatius was the early indication of this episcopal absorption of the prophetic role. One hundred fifty years later Cyprian, bishop of Carthage became the culmination of this shift. He venerated ecstasy and had visions or revelations himself that he recorded in oracles and ordered them circulated for all to read. He could do all the Montanists could do, but as bishop he had the authority to condemn the Montanists, which he did—not because of ecstasy but because “they have separated themselves from the Church of God...where the elders preside.”<sup>24</sup> This statement becomes a key criterion when assessing the orthodoxy of the Charismatic Renewal.

Ash’s final assessment is that the early Church did not resolve the dispute over ecstatic prophecy by adopting an assertion of a theology of dispensationalism, but by the emerging structuralization of the episcopacy. Episcopal authority flowed from continuity

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 239. [Panarion 48, 1]

<sup>24</sup> Alexander Roberts, D.D. & James Donaldson, LL.D., eds., “Cyprian, Epistle 74, 7”, *The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325: Ante-Nicene Fathers* Vol. 5, (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers), 392.

with earliest Christianity established by faithful adherence to canonical norms of scripture and the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit in the bishop himself. Continuity with the apostolic age through both Scripture and Spirit became the hallmark of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>25</sup> This provided an arena for twentieth century phenomena.

Edward O'Connor, professor of theology at University of Notre Dame, defines the Catholic Charismatic Renewal as a movement, qualifying it as follows:

The term movement...implies that numbers of people have joined forces in more or less concerted effort on a common project. This supposes a goal that is aimed at and a deliberate pursuit of that goal.

The Renewal, however, did not begin with any deliberate adoption of a goal. It arose unexpectedly and spread spontaneously. As Connor says, "most of those who were involved in it at the beginning found themselves taken quite by surprise."<sup>26</sup> Although trans-denominational at the beginning, the movement emphasized Christian unity and what is authentically Christian; not doctrinal changes in any church body. Therefore, a Catholic Charismatic Renewal can be referred to with legitimacy. Catholics view the Charismatic experience as a renewal of what happened previously in the sacraments of water baptism and confirmation. This embrace of traditional Catholic sacramental theology helped to keep the movement free of doctrinal error.

As one might recall, of four thousand registrants at the first conference, one thousand of them were priests and nuns. This top-down phenomenon led to an easier acceptance of the Charismatic Renewal by the Church hierarchy. Influenced by the

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<sup>25</sup> Ash, 251-2.

<sup>26</sup> Quebedeaux, 5-6.

Cursillo Movement, a program to deepen the spirituality and mission of the lay person in the Church, Charismatics were determined to remain Catholic and avoid excessive idiosyncrasies found in classical Pentecostalism. This kept the movement in line with the Church's Pauline standard of everything being done "decently and in order."<sup>27</sup> There was no duplication of the early Montanistic frenzied ecstatic prophecy objected to by Eusebius and other Church Fathers, nor was there any departure from St. Paul's criteria for the proper exercise of the prophetic gifts. Leadership roles filled by academics and ordained clergy gave the movement an aura of "respectability." Lay leaders tended to have formal higher education, were financially stable, and were full participants in the life of the Church rather than separatists or those who cause division.<sup>28</sup>

The challenge to hierarchical authority was non-existent in the Charismatic movement. Lay leaders did not attempt to usurp the preaching and teaching roles more appropriately expected of the Charismatic priesthood.<sup>29</sup> George Martin, a Catholic lay participant in the movement, reflected the predominant sentiment:

It is clear that the Charismatic ministries do not replace the ordained ministry; priests need not worry about becoming obsolete...Christian communities cannot be formed by the work of either clergy or laity alone...<sup>30</sup>

Ralph Martin viewed the first seven years of the Renewal as an apologetic stage "patiently establishing relationships with the hierarchy and explaining the renewal that

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<sup>27</sup> I Corinthians 14:40.

<sup>28</sup> Quebedeaux, 84.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 108.

helped Catholics recognize its validity.”<sup>31</sup> In 1975 an international conference of Catholic Charismatics took place in Rome attended by ten thousand pilgrims. Having initially been very cautious, Pope Paul VI now addressed the conference expressing appreciation for the movement.<sup>32</sup> As a result of the growth and acceptance of the movement, the secretariat for promoting Christian unity of the Roman Catholic Church engaged in an official five-year ecumenical conversation with both classical Pentecostal denominations and participants in charismatic renewal in the historical Protestant churches along with those of the Anglican and Eastern Orthodox. Unlike the division produced by the Montanists, the Renewal was encouraging unity.<sup>33</sup>

A reverence for scripture developed among Catholic Charismatics. Participants began bringing their Bibles and reading scripture at their prayer meetings. They became the first “Bible toting Catholics.” They did not embrace *sola scriptura* as the source of authority. Authority coincided with the Church’s teaching of scripture and tradition. It was the existential understanding of the Word of God that believes revelation continued after the canon was closed. Charismatics saw spiritual authority as resting both with the ongoing activity and teaching of the Holy Spirit and scripture.<sup>34</sup> Nor did they embrace other fundamentalist attitudes; they remained Catholic in their appreciation for scriptural context, cultural settings, and the literary forms used at the time of writing. At the same

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<sup>31</sup> Martin, 39

<sup>32</sup> Quebedeaux, 67

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 110-113.

time they embraced a utilization of scripture to bring about adherence to a higher standard for personal behaviors and attitudes. This did not create Montanistic excess. The hierarchy saw the movement as making better Christians who more fully participated in the life of the Church.<sup>35</sup>

The Montanists believed marriages should not be celebrated and that those married should leave their spouses. They viewed these bonds as the strongest bonds holding men and woman to this world rather than the world to come, which was considered to be imminent.<sup>36</sup> In contrast, the Renewal supported a restoration of healthy Christian families. This they considered the core foundational principle of the Church.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, the Renewal was evangelistic in nature. The movement found its goal in being both reformist in character—looking not to build new structures but to revitalize what already existed in the church—and seeking to bring others into relationship with Christ.<sup>38</sup> This call to action aligned with the goals of Vatican II and fell in line with the Church’s “New Evangelization” designed to revitalize the faith of those who had fallen away from the ranks of the faithful.

Pope John XXIII opened the Second Vatican Council with a prayer for a new Pentecost, praying “Renew your wonders in our time, as though for a new Pentecost...”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Martin, 69.

<sup>36</sup> Hogan, 53.

<sup>37</sup> Martin, 66-7.

<sup>38</sup> Quebedeaux, 5.

<sup>39</sup> Pope John XXIII, *Humanae Salutis*



The moment in history ripe for a fuller theology of the Holy Spirit known as Pneumatology, only in its infancy at the time of Montanism, produced one of those “amazingly alive” moments. On the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Charismatic Renewal, Pope John Paul II addressed the Council of the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Office. He called the emergence of the Renewal “a particular gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church.”<sup>40</sup> The Pope gave the council a strong admonition to “seek increasingly effective ways...[to] manifest *complete communion of mind and heart with the Apostolic See and the College of Bishops...*”<sup>41</sup> He charged the Renewal to play a significant role in defending life, fostering the growth of solid spiritual lives based on the sacraments and tradition, in deepening their Catholic identity, and contributing to “genuine ecumenical dialogue.”<sup>42</sup> In the year 2000, Pope John Paul II gave a message to the World Meeting of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal held in Rimini. He sanctioned the many communities of various types that had arisen from the Renewal, stating that “In this flourishing she [the Church] recognizes the work of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>43</sup> It came with an exhortation of the Church’s expectation for “the mature fruits of communion and commitment.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> His Holiness Pope John Paul II, *Address of His Holiness John Paul II to the council of the “International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Office”* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992), 1.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>43</sup> His Holiness Pope John Paul II, *Message Of the Holy Father John Paul II to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000), 3.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

Pope Benedict XVI maintained continuity with his predecessors when he addressed a meeting of bishops who accompanied Communities of the Catholic Charismatic Movement in 2008. He stated:

...the Ecclesial Movements and New Communities which blossomed after the Second Vatican Council, constitute a unique gift of the Lord and a precious resource for the life of the Church. They should be accepted with trust and valued for the various contributions they place at the service of the common benefit in an ordered and fruitful way.<sup>45</sup>

He went on to say:

What we learn in the New Testament on charism...is not a historical event of the past, but a reality ever alive....We can, therefore, rightly say that one of the positive elements and aspects of the Community of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is precisely their emphasis on the charisms or gifts of the Holy Spirit and their merit lies in having recalled their topicality in the Church.<sup>46</sup>

Like his predecessors, he also strongly reminded them to “safeguard the Catholic identity of Charismatic Communities and to encourage them to maintain a strict bond with the Bishops and with the Roman Pontiff.”<sup>47</sup>

There were numerous reasons why the hierarchy did not view the Catholic Charismatic Renewal as schismatic. One of the most relevant is the fact that the movement did not attempt to re-establish an “office of prophet” and did not challenge the Church’s authority. It was essentially a prayer movement that led participants to works of love and service. Those who participated, clergy and laity alike, were fully engaged in the life of the Church, remaining faithful to the teachings and traditions of the Church. It resulted in the founding of numerous covenant communities that go beyond a superficial

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<sup>45</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Participants in a Meeting Organized by the Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2008).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

sense of togetherness to a sense of Community reflecting the same manifestation of the Church as the body of Christ seen in the New Testament. The movement fostered spiritual renewal, ecumenical growth and development, the diversity of shared gifts, and a clear call to conversion. These are intrinsic ethical values of the Catholic Church reinforced by the Church's centrality of prayer and the mandates of Vatican II for relevancy in the modern world, by Pope John Paul II's ecumenical leadership, and by an ongoing deepening theology of the Holy Spirit.

## THE CATHOLIC FEMINIST MOVEMENT

If the Second Vatican Council opened a door for fresh air to rush through in the form of the Holy Spirit, it also provided an opportunity for Pandora's Box to be opened. Feminism had been on the rise in the form of a battle for equality and women's rights since the late nineteenth century. Now it was about to infiltrate the ranks of Catholic women in the modern day twentieth century Church. Women envisioned this ideal as their struggle for equality. It was not something new, however, not even in clerical circles. Feminist concepts of equality and Church reform can seldom be found compatible with the Church's understanding of equality between the sexes. The Church's understanding cannot be separated from diversity of roles. The root of correct understanding for the role of Christian women in the Church begins with the Old Testament and the Jewish world view. Pope John Paul II addresses this point in his Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*.<sup>1</sup> God endowed both male and female made in the image and likeness of God with the dignity of human personhood. The two are to complement and be a help to each other. They are equal in dignity and personhood but have distinctively different roles. There is no place here for a theological exhortation; the interested reader can read the rather lengthy document itself. Suffice it to say that it is impossible to understand the *a priori* reasoning of the Church's Magisterium regarding

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<sup>1</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter Mulieris Dignitatem of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II on the Dignity and Vocation of Women on the Occasion of the Marian Year* ([http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_1508...](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_1508...)) accessed 3/21/2014

women's roles and women's ordination without comprehending this deeply creationist and relational spirituality.

The early mid-twentieth century proponents for change in the roles of women in ecclesial realms came from Jewish women as well as Christian. JoAnn Hackett comes from among the former. In her "In the Days of Jael: Reclaiming the History of Women," she theorizes that women tend to have more power or status when the public and domestic spheres are not widely separated, when important decision making is done in or near the home.<sup>2</sup> She asserts that women have never been dominant in any known society and claims that local, nonhierarchical institutions are more open to women's participation than centrally structured ones. Hackett looks at sociological factors such as rural vs. urban areas, the traditional roles of motherhood that kept women out of the public and political arenas for the most part, and times of chaos during which women were necessarily pushed out to fill positions vacated by absent men.<sup>3</sup> Using the Old Testament book of Judges, Hackett uses the examples of women such as Deborah and Jael who had status in the community. Although some small pockets of urbanization existed, the geography of the land remained primarily rural and agrarian. A lack of tranquility existed with social upheaval produced by threats from outside. Typically, only ad hoc leadership existed in local affairs; no central administration was in play. Such a scenario is the

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<sup>2</sup> JoAnn Hackett, "In the Days of Jael: Reclaiming the History of Women." Clarissa W. Atkinson, Constance H Buchanan, and Margaret R Miles, Ed., *Immaculate & Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1985) 17-18.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

antithesis of a centralized, hierarchical and dynastic monarchy. Hackett is quick to point out that these circumstances still did not equate to female domination over men.<sup>4</sup>

These same constructs can be used to assess the rise of women in Montanism during the second and third centuries. Montanism arose in a predominantly rural country with only small pockets of urbanization that formed a circuit for evangelization. Chaos existed from the persecution and martyrdom of Christians which in turn opened up leadership vacancies to be filled. The ecclesiastical development of the Church authority structure, not yet centralized, allowed excesses to occur that would not later be tolerated. Even so, voices raised in opposition to roles assumed by women properly reserved only for men caused their sectarian communities to be anathematized in the end. Some complained of women who even presided over semblances of a Eucharistic meal, often a type of bread offering to Mary the mother of God. These woman found themselves reminded by the ecclesiastical authorities that women could not be priests—seen as the more important point of correction rather than that of worshipping Mary. Hippolytus (d. 235) in his *Apostolic Tradition* states “A virgin is not to be ordained;”.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, in the directive for widows he states:

When a widow is appointed she is not to be ordained....Thus a widow is supposed to be appointed only with words; then she is to join the rest of the [group]. She is not to be ordained, since she does not offer the gift and has no liturgical ministry. The ordination of clergy takes place in respect to the liturgy. The widow is appointed for prayer....<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 22-3.

<sup>5</sup> Anne Jensen, *God's Self-Confident Daughters: Early Christianity and the Liberation of Women*, trans. O.C. Dean Jr. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992, English translation 1996) 23.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 24.

In praxis women were already serving in such capacity, which is why the controversy existed in the first place. Eusebius does not specifically mention deaconesses, but he certainly showed an interest in the controversy of extant praxis. A deaconess as servant to the bishop participated in the catechesis and baptism of women, since at that time the whole body was anointed prior to entering the baptismal water. The writings of Sozomen and Theodoret, two early Church historians, include the mention of seven different women in their writings who had the title of deaconess, six of them by name. Two women are recorded anonymously since an eighth woman refused the position offered. Deaconesses of this type can be found directly in the *Didascalia*, an old Church discipline that instructs bishops to take on deacons as helpers: "...a man for the administration of the many necessary concerns and a woman for service to the women." This included instruction and most of the baptismal ritual.<sup>7</sup>

Hippolytus' adamant direction that women were not to be ordained for liturgical service hints that such was already in practice.<sup>8</sup> In addition only men could preach; laymen could preach but both Origen and Eusebius were against women preaching.<sup>9</sup> The First Ecumenical Council (Council of Nicaea, 325) stated in the canons:

"Deaconesses and in general all those who are in the canonical register are to be processed the same way. In regard to deaconesses who hold this position, we are mindful that they have no ordination (cheirothesia) of any kind but are to be counted among the laity in every respect."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 58-9; 63-68.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 61.

The Fifteenth Canon of the Great Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451), the fourth ecumenical council, declared:

Only a woman who is over forty may be ordained a deaconess, and then only after thorough examination. If, however, she marries after ordination (cheirotonia) and a long period of ministry, she has scorned the grace of God and shall be excommunicated, along with her partner.<sup>11</sup>

Cheirotonia and cheirothesia were interchangeable during this historical period and referred to the laying on of hands. Eventually a distinction came to be made between ordination and blessing. Deaconesses were clergy; they had special ecclesiastical status but did not receive ordination. The Church Fathers understood virgins and widows also listed “in the canonical register” to be laity with no share in the priestly ministry. A true female diaconate developed only in the Eastern Byzantine Church, not in the Western tradition.<sup>12</sup>

Many American feminist theologians consider the “virgins and widows” of Montanism and other sects of the early Church as a prototype of an early women’s movement. Titles such as *The Lady Was a Bishop*, *Chastity as Autonomy*, and *Women in the Early Christian Movement* reflect this thinking. The Christa inspiration discussed below came from Priscilla’s dream of the female Christ. Perpetua and Felicity became role models in some Christian Feminist circles, particularly among Catholics since they remained on the Western Calendar of Saints, and both Montanists and modern feminists

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 62.



believed they held the office of the keys on the way to their martyrdom. The litany of late twentieth century Christian feminists includes the names of women such as Carol P. Christ, Judith Plaskow, Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Mary Daly, and Rosemary Radford Ruether. These women wrote treatises that clearly put them outside the realm of orthodoxy. As did the Montanists, Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza justifies her arguments with Galatians 3:27-29. She claims that women saints prove that feminine vocations are not confined to “the sacrifice of one’s life for the career of a husband and the total devotion of one’s time to diapering babies or decorating one’s living room.”<sup>13</sup> In her chapter entitled “After the Death of God the Father,” Mary Daly and the Christian feminists represented by her summarily dismiss both the authority of scripture and that of Church tradition in one fell swoop.<sup>14</sup> Such a dismissal of authority places such thinking in opposition to Christian orthodoxy just as the Montanist challenge to authority produced the same results.

After trying to create change within the Church body without the desired results, Ruether exited the orthodox circle and became a part of “Woman Church,” a non-Catholic worshipping community by and for women. Many of these early Christian feminists migrated to this organization. A prolific writer, Ruether authored numerous works that line library shelves. In her book *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, Ruether makes an outright statement in the first

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<sup>13</sup> Carol P. Christ, and Judith Plaskow, eds., *Woman Spirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (San Francisco, California: Harper & Row, 1979), 140.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

paragraph of the preface regarding the book's purpose: "to fill a growing need for a more exact idea of the role of religion, specifically the Judeo-Christian tradition in shaping the traditional cultural images that have degraded and suppressed women." She does not merely equate the degradation and suppression with a type of being left out or ignored; she calls it misogyny.<sup>15</sup>

Catholic feminism arose within Catholics' own faith tradition. It was not a second wave origin. Outside exposures existed for sure, but the changing nature of Catholicism itself produced a more significant impact. Vatican II created the catalyst that ignited the Catholic feminist movement in the United States. Some women became enraged and others exhilarated. Historian Mary J. Henold calls Vatican II an "overtly sexist event."<sup>16</sup> Once "Pandora's Box" had been unlocked, it proved to be impossible to relock it, let alone repack all that had come out of it. As Henold explains, "Catholic feminists needed to make complicated choices about what to love, believe, challenge, and abandon in their religion."<sup>17</sup> The intrinsic problem that asserts itself, however, is the fact that one cannot abandon elements of faith and doctrine and still be considered "Catholic." One can challenge in appropriate ways—there is always a place for sound theological questioning and debate, but one cannot simply abandon or cease to believe without serious implications. The National Coalition of American Nuns (NCAN), a radical group of

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<sup>15</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974), 9.

<sup>16</sup> Mary J. Henold, *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of The American Catholic Feminist Movement* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 4

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

women religious, declared in 1972, “We affirm Jesus and His Gospel as our life focus.”<sup>18</sup>

This assertion is a vital link between faith and feminism for Catholic feminists, albeit a dangerous one. The popular piety that asks: “what would Jesus do?” discounts the centuries of careful scriptural exegesis by scholars, and Christian tradition regarding faith and morals that assists one to stay within the realm of the orthodox. Most items of discord are not the conflict many feminists would make them to be. Mostly misperceptions due to lack of instruction in theological context they could be resolved. When inflexibility reigns, however, sacramental demands end up crossing the line. Henold states, “Catholic feminists claimed their own knowledge and understanding of Catholicism, and they rarely believed it was contingent on institutional affiliation.”<sup>19</sup>

The feminist movement scoffs at Canon Law. No longer just a challenge to authority, this manifests itself as a blatant dismissal of authority. Clara Maria Henning in her article “Canon Law and the Battle of the Sexes” states:

“Canon Law” elicits an awesome reverence from most of us, even though it has in many quarters fallen into such disrepute that many will scoff at its very existence and negate its usefulness *in toto*. It is so much identified with strictures, prohibitions, and pretentious authority that it has discouraged lay people in general from making a serious study of canonical science.<sup>20</sup>

One must question the accuracy of her statement. Henning does not produce any statistics to back up her use of “lay people in general” or “many quarters.” Her pages reflect an angry attitude that precludes accessibility for reasoned debate. The Code of Canon Law is

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 1, 6.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>20</sup> Ruether, 267.

discounted as “the past” and “compilations of many hundreds of years ago.” These statements dismiss out of hand the historical veracity of the Roman Catholic Church.

Henning refers to two ancient sources of Canon Law, the *Didascalia Apostolorum* and the *Apostolic Constitutions*. She states, “Without engaging in an academic discussion of their true origin, let us just accept that the *Didascalia* is a pseudo apostolic collection....”<sup>21</sup> The absence of real academic discussion in the Feminist movement can be viewed as problematic. In its place there exists a smoldering undercurrent of anger over perceived wrongs that ultimately translate into an “I will make my own rules without historical ‘baggage’” mentality. Henning further states, “The study of Canon Law is not the healthiest undertaking for women...”<sup>22</sup> This, in and of itself, is a “sexist” statement the likes of which, these women claim, debases them. It implies the study of Canon Law is okay for males but, beware, it might damage a woman. One could ask, how can a woman rightly interpret what she has not studied?

The Magisterium of the Catholic Church has stated that there can never be female ordination to the priesthood. This has been set as irrevocable doctrine for all time. The Church sees itself as having no authority to depart from what Christ instituted. Pope Paul VI commissioned the Congregation For the Doctrine of the Faith to write *Inter Insigniores* to clarify, one more time, the teaching of the Church reiterated at Vatican II on women’s ordination. The document states, “...the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith judges it necessary to recall that the Church, in fidelity to the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 268.

example of the Lord, does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination.”<sup>23</sup> It points out the Church’s constant tradition stating the fact that only “a few heretical sects in the first centuries...entrusted the exercise of the priestly ministry to women: This innovation was immediately noted and condemned by the Fathers, who considered it unacceptable in the Church.”<sup>24</sup> Under the heading “The Attitude of Christ,” the document discusses the fact that not only did Christ not give the apostolic charge to any women, he did not even invest his mother Mary with it. This then led the Fathers to present Mary as an example of Christ’s will on women and ordination. The document quotes Pope Innocent III from the early thirteenth century, “Although the Blessed Virgin Mary surpassed in dignity and in excellence all the Apostles, nevertheless it was not to her but to them that the Lord entrusted the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.”<sup>25</sup>

The Church sees the immutability of its stance of male ordination as a matter of fidelity, not an attitude steeped in archaism.<sup>26</sup> It furthermore views this practice of the Church as normative: “...the fact of conferring priestly ordination only on men, it is a question of unbroken tradition throughout the history of the Church, universal in the East and in the West, and alert to repress abuses immediately.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Sacred Congregation For the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration Inter Insigniores on the Question of Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood*, page 2 ([http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19...](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19...)) accessed 3/21/2014.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. page 3.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., page 6.

The document *Inter Insigniores* does not neglect to address the favorite scripture used by the Montanists and the twentieth century feminists, Galatians 3:28. To recall, this verse states there is no longer any male or female in Christ. The reader is reminded that this verse is not about ministries in the Church; it is about the equal status of men and women in Christ through the sacrament of baptism.<sup>28</sup> There are further theological reasons for a solely male priesthood that are beyond the scope of a historical treatment of the topic.

*Inter Insigniores* along with the detailed response to it produced by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith did not diminish the growing insistence on priestly ordination among Catholic feminists. In an attempt to settle the issue with finality, and to attempt to prevent the lid from blowing off the pressure cooker, Pope John Paul II wrote the concise and direct Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*. Only three pages long, including the footnotes, the Pope was succinct and did not mince words. He ended the document:

Wherefore, in order that all doubt may be removed regarding a matter of great importance, a matter which pertains to the Church's divine constitution itself, in virtue of my ministry of confirming the brethren (cf. Lk 22:32) I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful.<sup>29</sup>

On October 28, 1995 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued *Responsum Ad Propositum Dubium*. It stated the *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* had been set forth infallibly

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., page 8.

<sup>29</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter Ordinatio Sacerdotalis of John Paul II To the Bishops of the Catholic Church On Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, May 22, 1994) page 2-3.

and was to be held “always, everywhere, and by all, as belonging to the deposit of faith.”<sup>30</sup> The Prefect, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and the Secretary, Archbishop Emeritus of Vercelli Tarcisio Bertone, S.D.B. signed the *Dubium*.

The Vatican documents did not dissuade those who would follow the feminist trail to the end. Feminist Catholic women founded an organization called Womenspriests Church in 2002. On June 29, 2002, Romulo Antonio Braschi, founder of a schismatic community, attempted to ordain seven women. A *Monitum*, a formal canonical warning, was published by the Vatican on July 10, 2002. It reiterated that valid ordinations did not exist, that what had taken place was a simulation of the Sacrament making the action null and void. If the women did not repent by July 22, 2002 they would be excommunicated.<sup>31</sup> These women, even while giving interviews and acting as priests, sought through proper channels in the Roman Curia to receive a revocation of the excommunication. They made requests on August 14, 2002 and again on September 27, 2002. They received word on October 21, 2002 of an affirmative answer for submission of the requests to the competent authority. The *Sessione Ordinaria* of the Congregation examined the request on December 4 and 18, 2002. Those participating made a collegial decision to confirm

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<sup>30</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Responsum Ad Propositum Dubium Concerning the Teaching Contained in “Ordinatio Sacerdotalis”* ([http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19...](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19...)) accessed 3/21/2014.

<sup>31</sup> Document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Monitum: Vatican on a simulated ordination of women priests* (<http://catinfo.com/en/zenit/es/?p=27565>) accessed 3/21/2014.

the Decree of Excommunication.<sup>32</sup> There was no recourse, for the Decree was issued from a Dicastery of the Holy See acting in the name of the Supreme Pontiff.<sup>33</sup>

The movement that emulated the women of the early Church Montanist Movement now became, like them, anathema. The seven illicitly “ordained” women became the nucleus of the new Womenspriests Church organization that has continued to grow. The January 6, 2013 issue of *Our Sunday Visitor* published an apologetics article on the issue of women’s ordinations and discussed “ordinations” that took place in 2007 and 2008. The Womenspriests Church at the time of the article’s publishing claimed to have a hundred female priests serving in twenty-nine states. Any woman seeking ordination and any who attempt to ordain them incur automatic excommunication by the Vatican.

Just as Montanism ultimately posed a challenge to the Church’s authority, so has the Catholic feminist movement. Along with changing societal roles for women, Vatican II opened a new door for exploration, expression, and increased theological education for women. Feminist women ran faster with their newfound freedom than their male counterparts responsible for updated catechetical materials. Vatican II left a vacuum while awaiting a new catechism, an updated RCIA program and clear interpretations of the council documents with which to instruct the laity. These women took advantage of the times and refused to let the door dislodge their feet holding it open. Over time, they

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<sup>32</sup> Document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Decree of the Congregation For The Doctrine of the Faith on the Attempted Priestly Ordination of Some Catholic Women* (<http://www.wf-f.org/CDFOrdination.html>) accessed 3/21/2014.

<sup>33</sup> Document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Decree of Excommunication* (([http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20...](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20...)) accessed 3/21/2014.



tried to push the door wider and wider until the end result was condemnation. The Church clearly stated that the Church was not analogous to a secular society and could not be governed in the same manner.<sup>34</sup>

In the beginning of the post-conciliar reforms, Catholic feminist women leaders began cautiously experimenting with ritual prayer forms in the midst of women's activities that did not counter orthodoxy. Some inclusive language and forms of female imagery were among them. Eventually bolder moves included the use of a "Christa," a female form on the crucifix instead of male, which became popular in some circles. This author personally experienced some of these rituals while studying in Berkeley, California. The "Christa" development reflected the same use of Galatians 3:28 as had the Montanists and at times made reference to Priscilla's dream previously mentioned.

When the Church began to reprimand the movement formally by the production of Church documents reiterating Church thought and doctrine, it fell onto deaf ears. What began as a movement in the Church, just as Montanism did, stepped over the line into erroneous sacramental theology that insisted on the ordination of women, moving them to the status of heresy like those before them.

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<sup>34</sup> Congregation For The Doctrine Of The Faith, *Inter Insigniores*, 8. ([http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19...](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19...)), accessed 3/21/2014.

## CONCLUSION

The early Christian Church underwent a process through its first five centuries of existence that took it from an assortment of dissenting theological groups to what became known as Christendom. Heresy defined many of those dissenting groups. Sometimes a movement arises within the parameters of orthodox doctrine, faith, and practice to bring about reform and renewal. At times such a movement crosses a boundary departing from the beginning ideal intentionality to become a schism. Montanism can be considered an example of this in the early Church. It began as a genuine concern for what it perceived as a laxity in the Christian Church. As the hierarchical ecclesiastical Church continued to grow and centralize its base of authority, Montanism became a challenge to that authority. No longer could just anyone claim a revelation from God applicable to the whole Church; the office of the prophet who spoke for God firmly resided in the office of the Bishop by the middle of the fifth century. Church authorities used scripture and the prevalent Christian tradition, recognized by synods and councils, to determine acceptable pietistic behaviors. Montanist pagan-like prophetic frenzies, excessive fasting, disdaining of marriage, and women exercising the office of the keys could no longer be viewed as orthodox or tolerable.

Recent scholars and archeological evidence, especially the work of both Christine Trevett and William Tabbernee, negate various theories for the demise of Montanism suggested by earlier scholars in the field. The suggestion that Montanism died out because of a cult of martyrdom cannot be sustained. All Christians in the early Church, regardless of the doctrinal sect, came under the imperial hammer of persecution and

supported one another in the prisons during the second and third centuries. Montanism eventually declared anathema, not because of error in the basic Christian tenants of doctrinal faith, ceased to exist because of its challenge to hierarchical Church authority and its perceived millenarist threat to the stability and unity of the political empire.

As happens throughout history, the late twentieth century produced a reprise. The resulting atmosphere of freedom and change in the Roman Catholic Church brought about two movements containing reminiscent Montanistic behaviors and theological thinking. Both of them arose within the Church but as these two movements unfolded one of them, like Montanism, stepped over the line.

The Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church found its acceptability by remaining Catholic. The authority of the Magisterium did not become challenged. Although the prophetic gifts flowed in prayer meetings they maintained the characteristic of private revelations through Church history to the saints. Priests, nuns, and lay people carefully courted and treasured their relationships with the bishops who exercised authority over them. The Renewal accentuated the sanctity of the Sacraments, the importance of the family, the balance between scripture and tradition, an enthusiastic evangelism, and full participation in the life of the Church community. Vatican II laid down the reaffirmation of the validity of the various phenomena of the Holy Spirit and their importance to God's work in the midst of the Church. Three popes, Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI gave the movement their blessing after carefully watching and guiding the movement to ensure its orthodoxy.

The feminist movement, posing a challenge to the Church from the beginning, crossed the line from being a voice for the full integrity and equality of women within the Church to a heretical departure from established Canon Law. Borrowing from the images produced by Montanism, feminists held prayer rituals with a female corpus on the crucifix, interpreted Galatians 3:28 in a manner to promote female priesthood, and attributed the early Church's condemnation of female leaders to misogyny.

When feminist women did not get Rome's approval for ordination to Holy Orders they began to debate Cannon Law and the Tradition of the Church. Ultimately these women, supported by a schismatic bishop, took matters into their own hands despite warnings from Rome. The result was excommunication as schismatic heretics. They began as a movement to reform but crossing the line took them from the inside to the outside.

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