

The Chalice & The Blade  
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Chapter 9  
The Other Half of History  
Part II

Almost two thousand years ago on the shores of Lake Galilee a gentle and compassionate young Jew called Jesus denounced the ruling classes of his time—not just the rich and powerful but even the religious authorities—for exploiting and oppressing the people of Palestine. He preached universal love and taught that the meek, humble, and weak would some day inherit the earth. Beyond this, in both his words and actions he often rejected the subservient and separate position that his culture assigned women. Freely associating with women, which was itself a form of heresy in his time, Jesus proclaimed the spiritual equality of all.

Not surprisingly, according to the Bible, the authorities of his time considered Jesus a dangerous revolutionary whose radical ideas had to be silenced at all cost. How truly radical these ideas were from the perspective of an androcratic system in which the ranking of men over women is the model for all human rankings is succinctly expressed in Galatians 3:28. For here we read that for those who follow the gospel of Jesus, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Some Christian theologians, such as Leonard Swidler, have asserted that Jesus was a feminist, because even from the official or "sacred" texts it is clear that he rejected the rigid segregation and subordination of women of his time.<sup>1</sup> But feminism has as its primary aim the liberation of women. So to call Jesus a feminist would not be historically accurate. It would seem more accurate to say that Jesus' teachings embody a gylanic [social system based on equality of men and women] view of human relations.

This view was not new and was, as we have noted, also contained in those portions of the Old Testament congruent with a partnership society. But it was obviously most forcefully—indeed, in the eyes of the religious elites of his time, heretically—articulated by this young carpenter from Galilee. For although the liberation of women was not his central focus, if we look at what Jesus preached from the new perspective of cultural transformation theory, we see a startling, and unifying, theme: a vision of the liberation of all humanity through the replacement of androcratic with gylanic values.

#### Jesus and Gylany

The writings in the New Testament attributed to disciples who had ostensibly known Jesus, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, are generally considered the best source on the "real" Jesus. Although they too were written years after Jesus died, and were undoubtedly heavily edited, they are probably still a more accurate reflection of Jesus' teachings than other portions, such as Acts or Corinthians.

Here we find that the cornerstone of dominator ideology, the masculine-superior / feminine-inferior species model is, but for a few exceptions, conspicuous by its absence. Instead, permeating these writings is Jesus' message of spiritual equality.

Even more striking—and all-pervasive—are Jesus' teachings that we must elevate "feminine virtues" from a secondary or supportive to a primary and central position. We must not be violent but instead turn the other cheek; we must do unto others as we would have them do unto us; we must love our neighbors and even our enemies. Instead of the "masculine virtues" of toughness, aggressiveness, and dominance, what we must value above all else are mutual responsibility, compassion, gentleness, and love.

When we look closely, not only at what Jesus taught but at how he went about disseminating his message, time and time again we find that what he was preaching was the gospel of a partnership society. He rejected the dogma that high-ranking men—in Jesus' day, priests, nobles, rich men, and kings—are the favorites of God. He mingled freely with women, thus openly rejecting the male-supremacist norms of his time. And in sharp contrast to the views of later Christian sages, who actually debated whether woman has an immortal soul, Jesus did not preach the ultimate dominator message: that women are spiritually inferior to men.

Whether Jesus ever actually existed has long been debated. The argument (very well documented)

is that there is absolutely no corroborating evidence of his existence in documents other than highly suspect Christian sources. Analysts also note that practically all the events of Jesus' life, as well as many of his teachings, appear in the lives and utterances of mythical figures of other religions. This would indicate that Jesus was manufactured from borrowings from elsewhere to serve the purposes of early church leaders. Curiously, perhaps the most compelling argument for the historicity of Jesus is his feminist and gylanic thought and actions. For, as we have seen, the overriding requirement of the system has been the manufacture of gods and heroes that support rather than reject androcratic values.

It is thus hard to see why a figure would have been invented who, as we read in John 4:7-27, violated the androcratic customs of his time by talking openly with women. Or whose disciples "marveled" that he should talk at all with women, and then at such great length. Or who would not condone the customary stoning to death of women who, in the opinion of their male overlords, were guilty of the heinous sin of having sexual relations with a man who was not their master.

In Luke 10:38-42, we read how Jesus openly included women among his companions—and even encouraged them to transcend their servile roles and participate actively in public life. He praises the activist Mary over her domestic sister Martha. And in every one of the official Gospels we read about Mary Magdalene and how he treated her—presumably a prostitute—with respect and caring.

Even more astonishing, we learn from the Gospels that it is to Mary Magdalene that the risen Christ first appears. Weeping in his empty sepulcher after his death, it is Mary Magdalene who guards his grave. There she has a vision in which Jesus appears to her before he appears in visions to any of his much-publicized twelve male disciples. And it is Mary Magdalene whom the risen Jesus asks to tell the others that he is about to ascend.<sup>2</sup>

It is not surprising that in his time the teachings of Jesus had—as they still have—great appeal to women. Although Christian historians rarely refer to this, even in the official scriptures or New Testament, we find women who are Christian leaders. For example, in Acts 9:36 we read of a disciple of Jesus called Tabitha or Dorcas, conspicuous for her absence from the well-known, official count of twelve. In Romans 16:7 we find Paul respectfully greeting a woman apostle named Junia, whom he describes as senior to himself in the movement. "Greet Mary, who bestowed labor on us," we read. "Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kin and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me" (emphasis added). Some scholars believe that the New Testament epistle Hebrews may actually have been written by a woman named Priscilla. The wife of Aquila, she is described in the New Testament as working with Paul, with her name usually mentioned before that of her husband.<sup>3</sup> And as the historical theologian Constance Parvey points out, in Acts 2:17 we find the explicit designation of women as prophets. Here we read, "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (emphases added).

So, clearly, despite the very strong social pressures of that time for rigid male dominance, women took leading roles in the first Christian communities. As the theologian Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza points out, this is further confirmed by the fact that so many meetings of early Christians mentioned in the New Testament were in women's houses. In Colossians 4:15, for example, we read of the church in the house of Nympha. In 1 Corinthians 1:11 we read of the church in the household of Chloe. In Acts 16:14, 15 and 40 we read that the church in Philippi began with the conversion of the businesswoman Lydia. And so on and on.<sup>4</sup>

As already noted, in this same New Testament we keep reading about Mary Magdalene. She is discredited as a prostitute—a woman who has violated that most fundamental androcratic law that she should be the sexual chattel of her husband or master. However, she is clearly an important member of the early Christian movement. In fact, as we shall see, there is compelling evidence that Mary Magdalene was a leader of the early Christian movement after Jesus died. Indeed, she is portrayed in one suppressed document as sharply resisting the reimposition within some Christian sects themselves of the kinds of rankings Jesus challenged—evidence that would obviously not be included in the scriptures the leaders of these sects were to put together as the New Testament.

To the androcratic mind the idea that Jesus was involved in a gylanic counterrevolution is inconceivable. To paraphrase the parable, it would seem easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for such a notion to enter the minds of fundamentalists whose cars today bear bumper stickers exhorting others to "get right with Jesus." To begin with, why would Jesus have concerned

himself with the elevation of women and feminine values from their subservient place? To them it would seem obvious that, being who he was, Jesus would have been consumed by far more important concerns—which, by conventional definition, rules out anything that could be called women's issues.

It is, in fact, remarkable that Jesus taught what he did. For Jesus was himself an androcratic product, a Jew born into a time when Judaism was still rigidly male dominant. This was a time when, as we read in John 8:3-11, women were still regularly stoned to death for adultery, in other words, for violating their husband's or master's sexual property rights. It is in this instance most revealing that Jesus not only prevented such a stoning but in so doing defied the scribes and Pharisees who deliberately set up this situation to trap him into revealing himself as a dangerous rebel.

There is, however, a way in which Jesus' gylanic teachings are not so remarkable. Jesus has long been recognized as one of the greatest spiritual figures of all time. By any criterion of excellence, the figure portrayed in the Bible displays an exceptionally high level of sensitivity and intelligence as well as the courage to stand up to established authority and, even at the risk of his life, speak out against cruelty, oppression, and greed. So it is not surprising that Jesus should have been aware that the "masculine" values of dominance, inequality, and conquest he could see all around him debasing and distorting human life must be replaced by a softer, more "feminine" set of values based on compassion, responsibility, and love.

Jesus' recognition that our spiritual evolution has been stunted by a way of structuring human relations based on violence-backed rankings could have led to a fundamental social transformation. It could have freed us from the androcratic system. But as in other times of gylanic resurgence, the system's resistance was too strong. And in the end the church fathers left us a New Testament in which this perception is often smothered by the superimposition of the completely contradictory dogmas required to justify the Church's later androcratic structure and goals.

#### The Suppressed Scriptures

The reality of old masterpieces has often been revealed by art restorers, who must scrape away layer upon layer of distorting overpainting, grime, and old shellac. In the same way, the gylanic Jesus is now being revealed by the new scholarship of theologians and religious historians probing beneath and beyond the New Testament.

To gain a better understanding of the real nature of early Christianity we have to go outside the official scriptures contained in the New Testament to other ancient Christian documents, some of which have only recently been found. Of these, the most important—and revealing—are the fifty-two Gnostic gospels unearthed in 1945 in Nag Hammadi, an outlying province of Upper Egypt.<sup>5</sup>

Elaine Pagels, a professor of religious studies at Princeton, writes in her book *The Gnostic Gospels*, that "those who wrote and circulated these texts did not regard *themselves* as 'heretics.'"<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, much of what has been previously known about such "heretic" scriptures came from the men who attacked them—which would hardly be calculated to give us an objective view.

In fact, the men who starting about 200 C.E. took control of what later was called the "orthodox," or only true, church ordered all copies of such texts destroyed. But, as Pagels writes, "Someone, possibly a monk from the nearby monastery at St. Pachomius, took the banned books and hid them from destruction—in the jar where they remained buried for almost 1600 years."<sup>7</sup> And due to a series of events that read like a detective story, it took another thirty-four years after the discovery of these suppressed Gnostic gospels before scholars completed their study and Pagels's book at last brought them to public attention in 1979.

According to Professor Helmut Koester of Harvard University, some of these recently discovered sacred Christian writings are older than the Gospels of the New Testament. He writes that they date to "possibly as early as the second half of the first century (50-100)—as early as, or earlier, than Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John."<sup>8</sup>

The Gnostic gospels were thus written at a time when androcracy had already been the Western norm for a very long time. They are not gylanic documents. And yet, what we find in them is a powerful challenge to the norms of a dominator society.

The term gnostic derives from the Greek word *gnosis*, or knowledge. This is in contrast to the still widely used term *agnostic*, for one who believes such knowledge cannot be known with certainty, or is unknowable. Like other mystical Western and Eastern religious traditions, Gnostic Christianity held the seeming unheretical view that the mystery of higher or divine truth is knowable to all of us

through religious discipline and moral living.

What then was so heretical about Gnosticism that it had to be banned? Specifically, what we find in these Gnostic gospels is the same idea that caused the Hebrew priesthood to revile and seek to do away with Jesus. This is that access to the deity need *not* go through a religious hierarchy headed by a chief rabbi, high bishop, or pope. It is, rather, available *directly* through gnosis, or divine knowledge—without having to pay homage or tithes to an authoritarian priesthood.

What we also find in these scriptures that were suppressed by the "orthodox" Christian priesthoods is the confirmation of something long suspected both from a reading of the official scriptures and from Gnostic fragments discovered earlier. This is that Mary Magdalene was one of the most important figures in the early Christian movement.

In the *Gospel of Mary* we again read that she was the first to see the risen Christ (as is also recorded in passing in the official Gospels of Mark and John).<sup>9</sup> Here we also read that Christ loved Mary Magdalene more than all the rest of the disciples, as is also confirmed in the Gnostic *Gospel of Philip*.<sup>10</sup> But just how important a part Mary may have played in the history of early Christianity only comes to light in these suppressed scriptures. What we read in the *Gospel of Mary* is that after the death of Jesus Mary Magdalene was the Christian leader who had the courage to challenge the authority of Peter as the head of a new religious hierarchy based on the claim that only he and his priests and bishops had a direct line to the godhead.<sup>11</sup>

"Consider the political implications of the *Gospel of Mary*," comments Pagels. "As Mary stands up to Peter, so the gnostics who take her as their prototype challenge the authority of those priests and bishops who claim to be Peter's successors."<sup>12</sup>

There were other related, and equally fundamental, doctrinal differences between the emerging and increasingly hierarchic church headed by Peter and other early Christian communities, such as most Gnostics and sects like the Montanists and Marcionites. Not only did these sects, in contrast to the men now described as the fathers of the church, honor women as disciples, as prophets, and as founders of Christianity; as part of their firm commitment to Jesus' teachings of spiritual equality, they also included women in their leadership.<sup>13</sup>

To even further emphasize the basic gylanic principle of linking and to avoid permanent rankings some Gnostic sects chose their leadership at each meeting by lot. This we actually know from the writings of such enemies of Gnosticism as Bishop Irenaeus, who supervised the church in Lyons circa 180 C.E.<sup>14</sup> "At a time when the orthodox Christians increasingly discriminate between clergy and laity," writes Pagels, "this group of gnostic Christians demonstrated that, among themselves, they refused to acknowledge such distinction. Instead of ranking their members into superior and inferior 'orders' within a hierarchy, they followed the principle of strict equality. All initiates, men and women alike, participated equally in the drawing: anyone might be selected to serve as *priest, bishop, or prophet*. Furthermore, because they cast lots at each meeting, even the distinctions established by lot could never become permanent 'ranks.'"<sup>15</sup>

For the androcratic Christians who were everywhere seizing power on the basis of rank, such practices were horrible abominations. For example, Tertullian, who wrote circa 190 C.E. for the "orthodox" position, was outraged that "they all have access equally, they listen equally, they pray equally—even pagans if they happen to come." He was similarly outraged that "they also share the kiss of peace with all who come."<sup>16</sup>

But what outraged Tertullian most—as well it might, since it threatened the very foundation of the hierarchic infrastructure he and his fellow bishops were trying to impose in the church—was the equal position of women. "Tertullian protests especially the participation of 'those women among the heretics' who shared with men positions of authority" notes Pagels. "They teach, they engage in discussion; they exorcise; they cure"—he suspects that they might even baptize, which meant that they also acted as bishops"<sup>17</sup>

To men like Tertullian only one "heresy" was even greater than the idea of men and women as spiritual equals. This was the idea that most fundamentally threatened the growing power of the men who were now setting themselves up as the new "princes of the church": the idea of the divine as

female. And this—as we can still read in the Gnostic gospels and other sacred Christian documents not included in the official or New Testament scriptures—was precisely what some of the early followers of Jesus preached.

Following the earlier, and apparently still remembered, tradition in which the Goddess was seen as the Mother and Giver of All, the followers of Valentinus and Marcus prayed to the Mother as the "mystical and eternal Silence" as "Grace, She who is before all things," and as "incorruptible

Wisdom."<sup>18</sup> In another text, the Trimorphic Protennoia (literally translated, the Triple-Formed Primal Thought) we find a celebration of such powers as thought, intelligence, and foresight as feminine — again following the earlier tradition in which these powers were seen as attributes of the Goddess. The text opens as a divine figure speaks: "I am Protennoia the Thought that dwells in the Light She who exists before the All. . . . I move in every creature. . . . I am the Invisible One within the All. . . . I am perception and Knowledge, uttering a Voice by means of Thought. I am the real Voice."<sup>19</sup>

In another text, attributed to the Gnostic teacher Simon Magus, paradise itself—the place where life began—is described as the Mother's womb.<sup>20</sup> And in teachings attributed to Marcus or Theodotus (circa 160 C.E.), we read that "the male and female elements together constitute the finest production of the Mother, Wisdom"<sup>21</sup>

Whatever form these "heresies" took, they clearly derived from the earlier religious tradition when the Goddess was worshiped and priestesses were her earthly representatives. Accordingly, almost uniformly divine wisdom was personified as female—as it still is in such feminine words as the Hebrew *hokma* and the Greek *sophia*, both meaning "wisdom" or "divine knowledge," as well as in other ancient mystical traditions, both Eastern and Western.<sup>22</sup>

Another form these heresies took was the "unorthodox" way they depicted the holy family. "One group of gnostic sources claims to have received a secret tradition from Jesus through James and through Mary Magdalene," reports Pagels. "Members of this group prayed to both the divine Father and Mother: 'From Thee, Father, and through Thee, Mother, the two immortal names, Parents of the divine being, and thou, dweller in heaven, humanity, of the mighty name,'"<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, the teacher and poet Valentinus taught that although the deity is essentially indescribable, the divine can be imaged as a dyad consisting of both the female and the male principles.<sup>24</sup> Others were more literal, insisting that the divine is to be considered androgynous. Or they described the holy spirit as feminine, so that in conventional Catholic Trinity terms, out of the union of the Father with the Holy Spirit or Divine Mother, came their Son, the Messiah Christ.<sup>25</sup>

#### The Gylanic Heresies

These early Christians not only threatened the growing power of the "fathers of the church"; their ideas were also a direct challenge to the male-dominated family. Such views undermined the divinely ordained authority of male over female on which the patriarchal family is based.

Biblical scholars have frequently noted that early Christianity was perceived as a threat by both Hebrew and Roman authorities. This was not just because of the Christians' unwillingness to worship the emperor and give loyalty to the state. Professor S. Scott Bartchy, former director of the Institute for the Study of Christian Origins at Tübingen, West Germany, points out that an even more compelling reason the teachings of Jesus and his followers were perceived as dangerously radical was that they called into question existing family traditions. They considered women persons in their own right. Their fundamental threat, Bartchy concludes, was that the original Christians "disrespected" both the Roman and the Jewish family structures of their day, both of which subordinated women.<sup>26</sup>

If we look at the family as a microcosm of the larger world—and as the only world a small and pliable child knows—this "disrespect" for the male-dominated family, in which father's word is law, can be seen as a major threat to a system based on force-backed ranking. It explains why those who in our time would force us back to the "good old days" when women and "lesser men" still knew their place make a return to the "traditional" family their top priority. It also sheds new light on the struggle that tore apart the world two thousand years ago when Jesus preached his gospel of compassion, nonviolence, and love.

There are many interesting similarities between our time and those turbulent years when the

mighty Roman Empire—one of the most powerful dominator societies of all time—began to break down. Both are periods of what "chaos" theorists call states of increasing systems disequilibrium, times when unprecedented and unpredictable systems changes can come about. If we look at the years immediately before and after the death of Jesus from the perspective of an ongoing conflict between androcracy and gylany, we find that, like our own time, this was a period of strong gylanic resurgence. This is no great surprise, for it is during such periods of great social disruption that, as the Nobel-Prize-winning thermodynamicist Ilya Prigogine writes, initially small "fluctuations" can lead to systems transformation.<sup>27</sup>

If we look at early Christianity as an initially small fluctuation that first appeared on the fringes of the Roman Empire (in the little province of Judaea), its potential for our cultural evolution acquires new meaning and its failure an even greater poignancy. Moreover, if we look at early Christianity within this larger framework, which views what happens in all systems as interconnected, we may also see there were other manifestations of gylanic resurgence, even within Rome itself.

In Rome, for example, education was changing so that aristocratic girls and boys were sometimes offered the same curriculum. As the historical theologian Constance Parvey writes, "within the Roman Empire the first century A.D. many women were educated, and some were highly influential and exercised great freedom in public life."<sup>28</sup> There were still legal restrictions. Roman women had to have male guardians and were never given the right to vote. But, particularly in the upper classes, women increasingly entered public life. Some took up the arts. Others went into professions such as medicine. Still others took part in business, court, and social life, engaged in athletics, went to theaters, sporting events, and concerts, and traveled without being required to have male escorts.<sup>29</sup> In other words, as both Parvey and Pagels note, there was during this period a movement toward the "emancipation" of women.

There were other challenges to the androcratic system, such as slave rebellions and rebellions of outlying provinces. There was the Jewish uprising under Bar Kokhba (132-135 C.E.) that was to mark the end of Judaea.<sup>30</sup> But as androcracy's force-based rankings were challenged, as early Christians espoused nonviolence and spoke of compassion and peace, Rome became even more despotic and violent.

As the excesses of its emperors (including the Christian Constantine) and the famous circuses of the Roman Empire all too hideously reveal, the gylanic challenge to this bloody dominator society failed. Indeed, even within Christianity itself, gylany was not to succeed.

#### The Pendulum Swings Back

"Despite the previous public activity of Christian women" Pagels observes, "by the year 200, the majority of Christian communities endorsed as canonical the pseudo-Pauline letter of Timothy, which stresses (and exaggerates) the anti-feminist element in Paul's views: 'Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men: she is to keep silent.' . . . By the end of the second century, women's participation in worship was explicitly condemned: groups in which women continued on to leadership were branded as heretical."<sup>31</sup>

As Pagels further writes, "Whosoever investigates the early history of Christianity (the field called 'patristics'—that is, study of 'the fathers of the Church') will be prepared for the passage that concludes the Gospel of Thomas: 'Simon Peter said to them (the disciples): Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of Life.' Jesus said, 'I myself shall lead her, in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit, resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.'"<sup>32</sup>

Such an outright exclusion of one half of humanity from being worthy of life—even more ironically, the half from whose body life itself comes forth—makes sense only in the context of the androcratic regression and repression that now set in. It serves to verify what so many of us have known deep inside without being able to pinpoint just what it was: something went terribly wrong with Christianity's original gospel of love. How otherwise could such a gospel be used to justify all the torture, conquest, and bloodletting carried out by devout Christians against others, and against one another, that makes up so much of our Western history?

For in the end, there was in the Western world an unpredictable and dramatic systems change. Out

of the chaos of the breakdown of the classical world of Rome, a new era took form. What began as a minor mystery cult became the new Western religion. But although its continual message was of the transformation of both self and society, instead of transforming society this "peripheral invader" was itself transformed. Like others before it and most since then, Christianity became an androcratic religion. The Roman Empire was replaced by the Holy Roman Empire.

Already by 200 C.E., in this classic case of spirituality stood on its head, Christianity was well on its way to becoming precisely the kind of hierarchical and violence-based system Jesus had rebelled against. And after Emperor Constantine's conversion, it became an official arm, that is, the servant, of the state. As Pagels writes, when "Christianity became an officially approved religion in the fourth century, Christian bishops, previously victimized by the police, now commanded them."

According to Christian histories, it is said that in 312 C.E., on the day before Constantine defeated and killed his rival Maxentius and was proclaimed emperor, he saw in the setting sun a divinely sent vision: a cross inscribed with the words *in hoc signo victor seris* (in this sign you will be victor). What Christian historians usually fail to report is that it is also said that this first Christian emperor had his wife Fausta boiled alive and ordered the murder of his own son Crispus.<sup>34</sup> But the bloodshed and repression that ushered in the Christianization of Europe was not confined to Constantine's private acts. Nor was it confined to his public acts and those of his Christian successors, such as later edicts that heresy to the Church was now a treasonous act punishable by torture and death.

It was now to become standard practice for Church leaders themselves to command the torture and execution of all who would not accept the "new order."<sup>35</sup> It was also to become standard practice to methodically suppress all "heretical" information that could conceivably threaten this new androcratic hierarchy's rule.

Rather than being pure spirit and both mother and father, God was now explicitly male. And, as Pope Paul VI was still to assert nearly two thousand years later, in 1977, women were barred from the priesthood "because our Lord was a man."<sup>36</sup> At the same time, the Gnostic gospels and other texts like them, which had circulated freely in the Christian communities at the beginning of the Christian era, were denounced and destroyed as heresies by those who now called themselves the orthodox, that is, the only legitimate, church.

As Pagels writes, all these sources—"secret gospels, revelations, mystical teachings—are among those *not* included in the select list that constitutes the New Testament collection. . . . Every one of the secret texts which gnostic groups revered was omitted from the canonical collection, and branded as heretical by those who called themselves orthodox Christians. By the time the process of sorting the various writings ended—probably as late as the year 200—*virtually all the feminine imagery for God had disappeared from orthodox tradition.*"<sup>37</sup>

This branding as heretical by Christians of Christians who believed in equality is particularly ironic in view of the fact that in the early apostolic communities women and men had lived and worked as Jesus had commanded, practicing *agape*, or brotherly and sisterly love. It is even more ironic if we consider that many of these women and men who lived and worked hand in hand had gone to their death as Christian martyrs. But for the men who were now everywhere using Christianity to establish their rule, Christian life and Christian ideology had to be made to fit into the androcratic mold.

As the years went by, the Christianization of Europe's heathens became the excuse for once again firmly reinstating the dominator tenet that might makes right. This not only required the defeat or forceful conversion of all who did not embrace official Christianity; it also required the systematic destruction of "pagan" temples, shrines, and "idols" and the closing of the ancient Greek academies where "heretic" inquiry was still pursued. So successful was the Church's proof of "moral" right by might that until the Renaissance, over a thousand years later, any artistic expression or pursuit of empirical knowledge that was not "blessed" by the Church was practically nonexistent in Europe. And so thorough was the systematic destruction of all extant knowledge, including the mass burning of books, that it even spread outside of Europe, to wherever Christian authority could reach.

Thus, in 391 C.E., under Theodosius I, the now thoroughly androcraticized Christians burned the great library in Alexandria, one of the last repositories of ancient wisdom and knowledge.<sup>38</sup> And aided and abetted by the man who was later to be canonized Saint Cyril (the Christian bishop of Alexandria) Christian monks barbarously hacked to pieces with oyster shells that remarkable

mathematician, astronomer, and philosopher of Alexandria's school of Neoplatonic philosophy, Hypatia. For this woman, now recognized as one of the greatest scholars of all time, was according to Cyril an iniquitous female who had even presumed, against God's commandments, to teach men.<sup>39</sup>

In the officially sanctioned writings, Paulist—or as scholars are increasingly discovering, pseudo-Paulist—dogmas authoritatively reasserted that woman and all that is labeled feminine is inferior and so dangerous that it must be strictly controlled. There were still a few exceptions, notably the writings of Clement of Alexandria, who still characterized God as both feminine and masculine and wrote that

"the name 'humanity' is common to both men and women."<sup>40</sup> But in the main, the model for human relations proposed by Jesus in which male and female, rich and poor, Gentile and Jew are all one was expurgated from the ideologies as well as the day-to-day practices of the orthodox Christian Church.

The men in control of the new orthodox Church might in ritual raise the ancient Chalice, now become the cup of Holy Communion filled with the symbolic blood of Christ, but in fact the Blade was once again ascendant over all. Under the sword and fire of the alliance of Church and ruling class fell not only pagans, such as Mithraists, Jews, or devotees of the old mystery religions of Eleusis and Delphi, but also any Christian who would not knuckle under and accept their rule. They still claimed their goal was to spread Jesus' gospel of love. But through the savagery and horror of their holy Crusades, their witch-hunts, their Inquisition, their book burnings and people burnings, they spread not love but the old androcratic staples of repression, devastation, and death.

And so, ironically, Jesus' revolution of nonviolence, in the course of which he died on the cross, was converted into rule by force and terror. As the historians Will and Ariel Durant noted, in its distortion and perversion of Jesus' teachings, medieval Christendom was actually a moral setback.<sup>41</sup> Rather than being any longer a threat to the established androcratic order, Christianity became what practically all this earth's religions, launched in the name of spiritual enlightenment and freedom, have also become: a powerful way of perpetuating that order. Nonetheless, the struggle of gynancy against androcracy was far from over. At certain times and places during the dark centuries of androcratic Christianity—and the despotic kings and popes who ruled Europe in its name—the gynanic urge to resume our cultural evolution would reemerge. As we shall see in the chapters that follow, this continuing struggle has been the major unseen force shaping Western history and is once again in our time coming to a head.



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1. Leonard Swidler, "Jesus was a Feminist," *The Catholic World*, January 1971, 177-83.
2. See, e.g., John 20:1-18.
3. Interview with Professor S. Scott Bartchy, in "Tracing the Roots of Christianity," *The UCLA Monthly* 11 (November-December 1980): 5.
4. See, e.g., Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "Women in the Early Christian Movement," in Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds. *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), 91-92; EUse Boulding, *The Underside of History* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1976), 359-60. Fiorenza's *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad, 1983) is a major work of New Testament scholarship from a feminist perspective.
5. James Robinson, ed.. *The Nag Hammadi Library* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977). This is by no means to say that these ancient Christian gospels are not androcratic documents. It is difficult to judge to what extent this is the function of the various translations they underwent. For instance, the last translation, from Coptic to English, was the work of the Coptic Gnostic Library Project of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity. But the prevailing imagery of the language clearly shows that these are documents written in a time when men and masculine conceptualizations of deity were already dominant. However, there is also no question that one of the major heresies of these gospels is that a number of them contain a return to the preandrocratic conception of the powers that rule the universe in feminine form, with references to the creative powers and wisdom of the Mother. (See, e.g.. Gospel of Thomas, 129; Gospel of Philip, 136-42; The Hypostasis of the Archons, The Sophia of Jesus Christ, 206; The Thunder, Perfect Mind, 271; The Second Treatise of the Great Seth, 330). Perhaps the salient heresy that runs through all these rather diverse gospels (which draw from a variety of philosophical and religious traditions) is that they challenge the tenet that ranking is divinely ordained. Even beyond such gylanic motifs as the symbolization of divine power as female and references to Mary Magdalene as Jesus' most beloved and trusted companion is the fact that we here find the outright rejection of the notion that gnosis, or knowledge, can only be obtained through the church hierarchy—through the popes, bishops^ and priests—which became, and still is, the hallmark of orthodox Christianity. 6. Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979), xix.
7. *Ibid.*, xix. Note that Constantine's Edict of Milan was in 313 C.E. marking the beginning of the alliance of the Christian Church and the Roman ruling classes.
8. Imut Koester / "Introduction to the Gospel of Thomas," *The Nag Hammadi Library*,
9. Mark 16:9-20; Robinson, ed., *Na^ Hammadi Library*. 471-74; Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 11.
10. Robinson, ed.. *Nag Hammadi Library*, 43, 138. For an excellent analysis of these passages' see Pagels *The Gnostic Gospels*, chap. 1.
11. See Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 11-14.
12. *Ibid.*, 14. Some of the official Christian scriptures still contain traces of this gylanic message. See, e.g., John 8:32: "and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."
13. *Ibid.*, chap. 3.

See more of The Chalice and The Blade on Facebook. Log In. or. Create New Account. See more of The Chalice and The Blade on Facebook. Log In. Forgotten account? The Chalice and the Blade (ISBN 0062502875) is a 1987 book by Riane Eisler that purports to explain the origin of "patriarchy" as the result of Bronze Age era military campaigns in Eastern Europe. It went on to become part of the body of wonderlore that "informs" Dan Brown's The Da Vinci Code. Human societies in prehistoric antiquity were of two kinds, according to Eisler. One was a "gylany", Eisler's neologism for a society in which relationships between the sexes are an egalitarian partnership. This The Chalice and The Blade: Our History, Our Future is a 1987 book by Riane Eisler. The author presents a conceptual framework for studying social systems with particular attention to how a society constructs roles and relations between the female and male halves of humanity. Eisler highlights the tension between what she calls the dominator or domination model and the more naturally feminine partnership model. Eisler proposes tension between these two underlies the span of human cultural evolution