

**“OVIDIUS” UNIVERSITY, CONSTANȚA  
ORTHODOX THEOLOGY COLLEGE  
DOCTOR’S DEGREE  
NEW TESTAMENT**

**ARGUMENT  
THE MORAL AND SOCIAL ROLE OF THE WOMAN  
BY THE NEW TESTAMENT**

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**2012**

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**Key words:**

a) Christianity b) Virgin Mary c) Christian archetype, d) equality e) the contribution of women.

The present work emerges from a desire to provide the readers with plenty of information on the status, role and contribution of women to the spreading of Christian teaching and to the forming a society based on moral and religious values.

In order to give a more detailed view of the condition of women, we considered the information contained in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, which are the main ways of preserving and transmitting Divine Revelation. Unlike pagan sources, the Scripture answers many existential questions such as: what are the main causes for which the woman has lost her dignity I the old times, how she regained her due rights, which is the great role that women played in the history of salvation and how should a woman be, in order to contribute to the welfare of mankind.

Because the past has always had an important role in understanding the many issues arising over time, there will be presented information in the field of ancient history in order to emphasize the distinction between the status of the pagan woman and the status of the Christian woman.

The materials used from the field of psychology are designed to help readers better understand what is feminine. Also, the data collected from the field of law have highlighted the most important aspects of European women's rights and responsibilities.

This study includes other information, also from the field of medicine, to give readers as much information on the negative consequences arising from committing sins such as abortion, pornography, prostitution and fornication (cohabitation), all of these having a huge impact on the health and life of women.

This work on "*The moral and social role of woman by the New Testament*" is composed of three parts, each containing several chapters and subchapters.

The first part is "The condition of women before the rise of Christianity" and contains two chapters: "Status of pagan women in antiquity" and "Status of Women by the Old Testament".

Since the beginning, the first chapter shows the most important and impressive aspects on the status of women in the more civilized peoples of antiquity, such as Greeks, Romans and Egyptians. Thus, in Greece (Athenians) the woman was married very early, and she was not granted any right or freedom. In Rome, she was married in the patrimonial system, in which the man prevailed as the protector, having the right of life and death over her, as well as over the children and the slaves. In ancient Egypt, the woman never had a better social status, because there were moments where polygamy was accepted and women had to endure even incest, thus becoming an instrument of delight for the senses.

As for the people with a higher or lower degree of civilization, the situation of women was also lamentable. Thus the Babylonian women were sold in an auction, for a certain amount of money, to the delight of the senses, and the Indian woman was under the absolute authority of parents, husband or relatives. In other countries it was the custom that, when the husband died, the woman was burnt alive with the body of her husband or buried alive by her husband.

The second chapter of the first part is based on numerous information from the history of the Hebrew people. Also, the materials based on the interpretations of scriptural passages of the Old Testament gave an overview of the initial situation of women and of the verses, which explains why she has fallen, reaching, later on, to the state of degradation. The same chapter provides readers details on the status of women in the Hebrew people, thus being presented the wonderful lives and works of female biblical

personalities who have distinguished themselves by faith, pure life, wisdom, the divine commandments, by skill and courage.

Unlike the other nations, the Hebrew woman's situation was better, she enjoyed a positive assessment and having an improved social situation. However, due to influences from neighboring pagan peoples, Hebrew woman has also suffered to some extent. This was due to the polygamy in the bosom of Israel and man's right to divorce women. Also levirat marriage and other laws affected the condition of the Hebrew women.

The first chapter of the second part, called "*Regaining dignity of women through the incarnation of God in the Virgin Mary*" shows the personality of the Virgin Mary, who, by her obedience to God, contributed to the salvation of women from the bondage of sin, for as father archimandrite Arsenius Papacioc confesses "the greatest man to represent us in heaven is a woman", that is the Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, of all saints, the highest honor is given to the Virgin Mary because she was chosen by God to be Mother of his Son.

By the Most Blessed Virgin, called *full of grace*, who "was able to bear the Son of God and for which *all nations will bless her*" (Luke 1, 48), Christianity has raised woman to the highest honor that she never knew in history, to no people and no religion".<sup>1</sup>

The name given to the Virgin Mary, that of *the new Eve* is symbolic and prophetic. Mary was so named because she is "a beginner to new life" in which "the Christian woman is the one who receives God's gifts and who ceases to be humiliated"<sup>2</sup>.

Because of her holy life, The Holy Mother of God "has become the *archetype* of Christian woman. She became a role model, especially for Christian women. But since she was the Mother of God and ever a Virgin, before, in and after birth, she cannot be overtaken by any woman. She remains an ideal for the truly Christian women, but it cannot be reached again."<sup>3</sup>

Through motherhood, "The Mother of God transfigured the woman, in general, and the mother, in particular, linking the image of the Heavenly Son the maternal

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<sup>1</sup> Pr. Lect. Univ. Leon Arion, *The famili in th Holy scriptures*, în „BOR”, nr. 1-6, 1995, p.222

<sup>2</sup> IPS Teodosie Petrescu, *The woman, between Eve and Mary*, Conferința susținută la Constanța, 18 august 2011

<sup>3</sup> Pr. Nicolae Streza, *Biblical women and a model of priestess*, ed. Credința strămoșească, Iași, p. 61

womb"<sup>4</sup>. Even if the Son of God "comes into the world as a man, the woman does not remain in the background, for she shall be given the great role of being His mother. The one and highest human authority, to whom He behaves with gentle reverence, that no one could answer the question: who is more precious in the eyes of God, man or woman?"<sup>5</sup>.

The second chapter 'The condition of woman by the Gospels' contains interpretations of great and holy fathers, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose of Milan, Justin the Martyr and philosopher, Gregory of Nazianzen, Cyril of Alexandria, who explain the words of the scriptures, reveal the virtues of women during the earthly life of Christ.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God incarnate, redeemed from the bondage of sin all people regardless of nationality, gender or any other social condition because "no one is Jew or hellene, neither slave nor master, male or female, because we all are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. III, 28). He raises the woman to "the highest moral dignity" throughout his life and work, leaving no trace of any inferiority of woman to man, showing that before God there is no difference between male and female.

The Gospels contain various passages in which "the words, acts and gestures of Jesus are evidence of the fact that he was not affected by the social-cultural context of his time. His deeds and words can be considered a protest against the existing social order and also an act of taking the woman and placing her as an equal to men"<sup>6</sup>.

In those days there was "a harsh formality that forbid public relations between the sexes. Men did not bend to talk to women in public. Our Lord Jesus Christ did not take into account this prejudice and openly had a conversation with the Samaritan woman"<sup>7</sup>. The Saviour talks about "the living water" (John 4.4 to 25) to this woman of another nation. Jesus Christ confesses to this woman that He is the Messiah.

In another pericope in the Gospel of John is presented the case of a woman caught in adultery and brought by the Pharisees and scribes before Jesus Christ, which He

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<sup>4</sup> Pr. Leon Dură, *The family in the light of the New Testament*, în „ST”, nr.1-2, 2003, p. 129

<sup>5</sup> Pr. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ and the restauration of man*, ed. IBMBOR, Sibiu, p. 156-157

<sup>6</sup> Pr. Dr. Mircea Basarab, *The socio-cultural dimension and its importance in understanding the female issues in the Orthodox Church*, în „Revista Teologică”, nr.3-4, Sibiu, 2000, p.112

<sup>7</sup> Pr.Gh. Perva, *The woman in the light of Christianity*; ed. Diecezana, Arad, 1940, p. 10

defends, saving her from death by stoning by talking to the crowd that was present: "He without sin among you, let him cast the first stone at her" (John 8.7).

Another woman that Jesus Christ made worthy of great honor is a sinful woman who washed Jesus' feet with tears and anointed them, and to whom He said: "Your faith has saved you!" (Luke 7, 50). Our Savior has also paid special attention to sick women, healing them and praising them for their strong faith. One of these cases is the Cananean woman, whose demon-possessed daughter Jesus healed. Jesus said to her: "Oh, woman, great is your faith!" (Mt. 15.24).

Among other virtuous women that the Gospels tell us about, there are: Martha and Mary, sisters of Lazarus raised from the dead. "Martha is the type of woman who serves Jesus Christ by devoting her life to serving the neighbour, and Mary is the type of monastic woman who hears the word of God, praying and living with God"<sup>8</sup>. From this Gospel story we can understand that being a true Christian woman, it requires both the service of your neighbour and the embracing of Christ through faith, love and prayer.

Another example of virtuous women are the "anointed women", the prudent women who found the empty tomb and saw Jesus Christ risen from the dead. They are Christ-bearers who ran "with fear and great joy" to the disciples to give them the big news. Savior has welcomed the Christ-bearing women telling them: "Rejoice!", "Go and tell my brethren" (Matt. 28, 8) what they have seen, thus making them worthy of being the "first witnesses and heralds of the Resurrection of Christ "<sup>9</sup>.

The third chapter, called "Women in The Apostles' deeds", includes information on the presence of the Virgin Mary and other women in the first community of Christians, and the presentation of female biblical personalities who have contributed to spreading the word of God. Thus in this chapter we can see the contribution women have made to the moral and religious education and the development of early Christian communities.

In the fourth chapter, entitled "The role and mission of Christian women by the Holy Letters", the woman will be exposed in all her aspects: virgin, wife and mother.

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<sup>8</sup> G. Chastand, Chastand, G., *Portraits évangélique*, Paris, éditeurs 136, Boulevard Saind Germain, 1925, p. 46

<sup>9</sup> Pr. prof. dr. Ion Bria, *Dictionary of Orthodox Theology*, ed IBMBOR, București, 1994, p. 172



Here, the moral and social role of Christian women is revealed, mentioning the conduct, the clothes, the Christian woman's place with the Church and in society, equal rights between men and women, and the first institutions of service for women. The same chapter highlights the contribution of the Christian women to the spread of Christian teaching in the world, these women being examples worthy of imitation by all Christians.

The Apostle of the Peoples calls the Christian women who helped him in his missionary work, "fellow workers" with him "in Christ Jesus" (Rom.16, 3). He mentions the names of women who are worthy of honor: "Lydia, a trade woman with the fear of God and an "open heart to the words of Paul ", the hospitable Priscilla from Corinth, Aquila, the tent weaver's wife, Phoebe from Cenchrea on Tryphaena and Tryphosa " the ones working for the Lord" , Persida, Rufus' mother, Lois, Timothy's grandmother and his mother, Eunice, Julia, Nereus's sister, Claudia, Chloe, Maria, a Christian from Rome, Euodia and Sintihi. These names are proof that women were valued for their zeal, for their love and faith in God, and they were receptive to Christian teaching.

Also from the Apostles' Epistles we learn that Christian women, wives and mothers, were fully engaged in the life of the Church, therefore in its evangelical mission, some of them even worthy to be deaconesses (Rom. 16, 1, I Timothy 3, 11), their most important mission being the initiation of women in the Christian faith and their preparation for baptism.

Apostolic women fulfilled the divine commandments even at the cost of their lives. Famous in this respect is the mother of the Maccabees, that St. John Chrysostom praises: "I will bring before you a woman by nature, but who touched Heaven by the strength of her wise life: Mother Maccabees. She was crowned two times seven. If you want, bring in the best soldier, the most fierce in battle, the most full of manhood, the bravest one, and you will see this woman rise above all these, as it is the heaven above the earth. For a soldier even the best, if he received those wounds, he only had one fear: swift death caused by the wound. But she stood as a rock, suffering patiently, for each of her children, worse pain than those tortures which the soldiers received in their chests "<sup>10</sup>. By these words, the great holy father generally praises the Christian woman in general, who,

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<sup>10</sup> John Chrysostom, *Catechesis of marriage - marriage sermons*, ed. „The Army of God”, Sibiu, 2006, p. 95

by faith and love for Christ and for her neighbors, can reach perfection equally as the Christian man.

Today, the Christian woman has the power to continue the mission of apostolic women, because by faith and love, she becomes like a man, managing to overcome every temptation in the way, and, due to her sensitivity, she has the power to get closer to God, to bear Him in her heart and to share Him with everyone she meets.

As a mother, the Christian woman, like the Virgin Mary, accepts Christ because "in every child there is an unseen Christ" as Lord Himself testifies: "Whoever shall accept in my name one of these children, shall accept Me, and whoever accepts Me, accepts not Me but Him who sent Me" (Mark 9.37). Called forth to "the dignity of fellow-workers of God (I Corinthians 3:9)"<sup>11</sup>, the Christian mothers have the important mission to send life on earth, to bring the Spirit of Christ into their families, and to answer the suffering and the spiritual needs of the people today, the mother being the mistress and queen of life, the Holy Scripture naming her "the mother of all living"

The mother's role in the world was well noted by Napoleon Bonaparte who, after conquering all Europe, defeating three kingdoms at a time, noticed at some point that in his own country there were insufficient methods of education the people. << What is missing? >> he asked the council. "The mother", someone said. "Indeed, the brave commander said, the mother represents a whole educational system, the safest and most valuable one. Find a way of creating good and true mothers, and then most major problems will be solved"<sup>12</sup>.

The Christian Mother is unlike all other women because, by love, faith, devotion and sacrifice, she is "Mother of good sons of God"; she "gives birth" to Christ in the souls of all those she shares her Christian life with, the first teacher of her children towards Christ.

The fifth chapter, called "*Scriptural misinterpretations of some New Testament verses on the Status of Women*", offers both men, and especially women, an overview of the correct interpretation of Pauline verses like: "The woman shall fear her husband"

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<sup>11</sup>Pr. Prof Dr. Petre Semen, *The attitude of the Church to infanticide, divorce, child abandonment, drugs and homosexuality, justified by the Holy Scripture*, in „Theology and Life”, nr 7-12, 1999, p. 82

<sup>12</sup>Prof. T. Bodogae, *Images of Christian Mothers*, in „Religious guide”, Sibiu, 1967, p. 182-183

(Eph 5, 33), "As the Church obeys Christ, so shall women obey entirely to their husbands" (Eph 5, 24) "Wives, be subject to your husbands as to the Lord" (Eph 5, 22), "the man is the head of the woman" (I Corinthians 11, 3), "and you are the chosen people, royal priesthood, holy nation, God's gathered people to carry to the world the goodness of Him who called you out of darkness into the marvelous light" (I Peter 2, 9). These interpretations are meant to acknowledge women and men on their equality before God and the mutual respect that both must have. The Orthodox Church condemns misogyny and violence against women as "contempt for women is a clamant sin. When we diminish or demean God's creature, the creation of his hands, because she is a woman, we raise against the very Creator and thereby show that God made a mistake and created an imperfect creature"<sup>13</sup>.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who brought the law of love to the world, taught people to love one another the way He loved us. In this respect, the great Apostle of the Peoples also advises Christians to give up their pride, strife, anger, bad word, conceit and selfishness, and this is also true for the couple (Philippians 2:3); "Now, therefore, abandon all these: anger, wrath, malice, slander, word of shame in your mouth" (Col. 3:8), "Husbands, love your wives and do not be mean to them" (Col. 3.19), "Obey each other into the fear of Christ" (Eph 5, 21), "no one should look to his own, but each to the neighbor's" (I Corinthians 10, 24) or "But each of us must try to please his neighbor or what is good for edification" (Romans 15, 2).

On male violence against women, it is well known that a slap given by a man to his wife, does not make him more powerful or the woman more obedient. It is known from the ancestors that do good, and good will find you, or do ill, and ill will find you; and such a negative attitude of violent men will not benefit the harmed wife or the aggressor. A man hitting and shouting does not show that he is stronger, but on the contrary it shows he is weak and is unable to communicate with his wife. Violence only highlights the poor nature of people, their inability to control themselves. The strength of a man is his ability to self-control in tense situations and to love even his enemies.

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<sup>13</sup> Pr. Savatie Baştovoi, *Why do we suffer in love?*, <http://www.razboiulnevazut.org/articol/10/De-ce-suferim-din-dragoste>

The strength of a man, therefore, lies in becoming a good Christian, following the supreme model of our Lord Jesus Christ, who addressed everyone like this: "Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:29). So, the whole Christian teaching contains many commandments, advice, exhortations to Christians, for them to find a way to live in peace, love and understanding, and not in violence, anger, envy, malice, selfishness and pride.

From the content of the last chapter emerges the idea that women's ordination is not biblical. If there were such a basis, then Miriam, Aaron's sister, could have played an important role; Elizabeth, mother of St. John the Baptist, but especially Mary, the chosen one, was no apostle, she was not part of the 70 ones, nor was she deaconess; but remained in her vocation of the Virgin Mother and protector of life.

The last part called "Contemporary Women 'contains three chapters:' The modern woman ", " Degradation of woman's dignity " and "The European woman ". This part shows that prostitution, violence, abortion, and pornography are serious sins that can place man lower than animals, because in these situations the man does not obey the laws of nature, but is guided by instincts, distorting the image of God in him. Also from committing these sins, most times, the woman is the one who suffers numerous and serious consequences, losing their dignity given by God and thus salvation. Thus, to avoid dehumanizing and immorality leading to spiritual and material death, it is absolutely necessary to understand, each of us, that the real "key of our dignity and becoming is the obedience to God"<sup>14</sup>.

Studying the information material of European legislation it can be observed that the man did not enjoy his due rights from the very beginning; so in Europe there were cases of slavery, people were sentenced to death, some people did not have citizenship; there were cases of discrimination on grounds of nation, race, gender or other social factors. For this reason the United Nations General Assembly adopted the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" which eliminated discrimination of any form. Introducing the principle of equality between people, women received equal rights and thus was now free from any discrimination, at the same time being given the opportunity to excel in all

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<sup>14</sup> IPS Teodosie Petrescu, *The woman, between Eve and the Virgin*, Conference at Constanța, 18 august 2011

fields: political, economic, cultural, social, civil, etc. and to have equal chances of success as men.

Apart from the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights", which brought many benefits to the people, in Europe there have been adopted other conventions, and we have mentioned: "The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women", "The Convention for the Suppression of Trafficking in human beings and of Exploitation of prostitution of others", "The Convention on consent to marriage". Thus, in Europe, due to Christianity, women gained equal rights, removing all traces of old prejudices. European countries were deeply concerned with the question of women, as they realized that the full development of a country, the social progress and welfare of the world as well as the good understanding among nations are all marked by the full participation of women on equal terms with men, in all areas of life.

The Christian woman must be thankful to God for His kindness, because He freed her from slavery and suffering, bringing her to the dignity before the Fall. Therefore, the woman can thank her Savior by obeying Him and by educating the children in the spirit of love, brotherhood, dignity and mutual respect, so that they can grow up to be creators of a world of peace, love, harmony and to fight that these values rule the world.

In conclusion, any Christian woman must know that, as long as she is doing the special mission entrusted by God, she will be respected and loved. Following the examples of female biblical personalities, Christian woman will have the power to promote moral and religious values and thus change the world for the better. In this respect there are worth mentioning the words of Carmen Sylva: "The Future of the Nation is woven by a woman", or the words of St. John Chrysostom: << Give me a good Christian mother's generation and I will change the world! >>.

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