

Guidiccioni would not be the man to write it. His contemporary George Herbert could have done it beautifully. But he would have found little to inspire him in Pope Urban VIII.

- 1 Lelio Guidiccioni, *Latin Poems, Rome 1633 and 1639*, Edited with Introduction, Translation and Commentary by John Kevin Newman and Frances Stickney Newman, Hildesheim: Weidmann, 1992.
- 2 I have become nervous about any wholesale contrast between Hebrew thought and literature and those of Greece after reading some of the work of Professor James Barr, most particularly and most recently his *The Garden of Eden and Human Immortality*, Fortress Press and S.C.M.Press, 1992.
- 3 The editors comment: "She is *incesta* because the divorce with Catherine was not recognised by the Pope, and because her daughter, later Elizabeth I, was conceived before she was nominally married" (p. 233). But I wonder whether *incesta* has not a more specific reference to incest: Henry VIII claimed to have conscientious scruples about his marriage to Catherine of Aragon on the grounds that she had previously been betrothed to his elder brother Arthur, and marriage to the spouse of a sibling was incestuous, i.e., within the prohibited degrees. However, Anne's elder sister had been a mistress of Henry's before Anne herself, and this in the eyes of canon law would have made his liaison with Anne equally incestuous—an irony of the situation which would not have been missed in Counter-Reformation circles.

The Mysterious Affair at Mâcon: The Bishops and the Souls of Women

Michael Nolan

The decree of the Council of Mâcon (585 AD) that women do not have a soul has the honoured place in liberal demonology given to historical events that never happened. It is a tale to treasure. As the eponymous wine is sipped at elegant tables, the misguided deeds of bishops can be recalled, and the only regret must be that no Synod of Brie or Council of Camembert offers occasion for further mirth. On these occasions, facts become such skimble-skamble stuff as puts men from their dreams.

For the Council, of course, never decreed any such thing, if only for the persuasive reason that some of the bishops may themselves have

been married.¹ The penalties applied to a bishop who decrees that his wife does not have a soul are not recorded in canon law presumably as surpassing male imagination. The decrees do indeed contain stuff to fuel fires: the fifteenth requires laymen to doff their hat to a cleric the sixteenth forbids the widow of a sub-deacon to marry on pain of being confined to a convent. But neither the word 'woman' nor the word 'soul' occurs even once in the decrees.²

One does not hope ever to be free of the myth—but it may be interesting to trace its history, which is complex. Briefly: in the late seventeenth century some Dutch publications alleged that the Council had *debated* whether women are human; this was linked in nineteenth-century France with earlier satirical literature from Italy which claimed to 'prove' from the Bible that women do not have a soul, and the upshot was the allegation that the Council had issued a decree to this effect. The allegation was refuted by scholars but persisted as a myth which later reached England first, and then Ireland, where it flourishes today.

But the story begins in Germany in the late sixteenth century where a young scholar from Brandenburg, Valens Acidalius (1567-1595), was teaching at Neisse, near Breslau, the capital of Silesia. His first book, a critique of the Roman historian Quintus Curtius, had failed to sell, and his publisher was complaining of money lost. At that time a certain Faustus Socinus (1539-1604) was living in Cracow, not far from Breslau. There he had become the leader of a church centred at Raków which denied the Trinity and held that Christ was divine by office rather than by nature.³

The Socinians were known for interpreting the bible literally. Interpretation of this sort lends itself to ready mockery. Circulating in Silesia was a pamphlet satirising the Socinians by showing that a literal interpretation of the Bible leads to ridiculous 'proofs'—such as a 'proof' that women are not human. The 'proof' seems to have depended on taking the Latin '*homines*' sometimes to mean 'human beings' and sometimes to mean 'adult males'. Acidalius was thought to have polished up the pamphlet to make it 'very diverting'—it was called it a '*disputatio perjucunda*'—and to have published it anonymously. If he was the author, and some say he was not,⁴ he found the joke went sour. Theologians were less than amused and the work was vigorously attacked. Simon Geddicus (Gedik), a Lutheran scholar from the neighbouring city of Magdeburg published a *Defensio sexus muliebris* (*A Defence of the Female Sex*) in which he proposed to show "forcefully and step by step, the weakness in each and every one of the arguments of the " anonymous author." ("*Singula anonymi argumenta distinctis thesibus proposita viriliter enervantur.*" One wonders at the choice of

the word 'viriliter'.) Readers will learn, with regret or satisfaction as the case may be, that soon afterwards Acidalius had a seizure and died. The work, whether by Acidalius or not, was published in various European countries in the next half-century, often bound with the critique of it by Geddicus. Very likely it was this work, translated into Italian, that was published at Lyons in 1647 under the pseudonym Horatio Plato. A M. de Vigneul-Merville (a pseudonym of Bonaventure d'Argonne, 1634-1704) gives the title as *Che le donne non habbino anima e che non siano della specie degli huomini, e vienne comprobato da molti luoghi della Scrittura santa* (*Women do not have a soul and do not belong to the human race, as is shown by many passages of Holy Scripture*). He notes that "the Ladies of Italy took this system very differently: some were vexed to have no souls. Others were pretty indifferent about the matter, and looking on themselves as mere machines, hoped to set their springs so well agoing as to make the men stark mad."⁴⁵

The vexed soon counterattacked. Angelica (or more splendidly, Arcangela) Tarabotti produced *Che le donne siano della spetie deggli huomini. Difesa delle donne* (*Women do belong to the human race: a defence of women*) under the pseudonym Galerana Barcittotti. One way or another, the offending book caught the attention of Pope Innocent X. Readers will learn, with renewed regret or satisfaction, that he placed it on the Index. (Decree of 18 June 1651).

This then is the story of the first part of the myth that the church taught that women are not human and do not have a soul. As soon as it appeared in Germany it was attacked by a Lutheran theologian and as soon as it appeared in Italy it was formally condemned by the Pope. One admires the creative imagination that takes this as evidence that it formed part of church teaching.

It remains to be seen how the Council of Mâcon, held a thousand years earlier, was brought into the story. For this we turn to Johannes Leyser (1631—1685), a Lutheran pastor from Hessel who had changed the tedium of teaching for the excitement of life as a *Feld-prediger* in the Danish army. The opportunities afforded by soldiering seem to have sharpened his zest for feminine variety, for in Frankfurt in 1676 he published his *Polygamia Triumphatrix* (*The Triumph of Polygamy*), a title that suggests paramilitary rather than military exertions. He republished it at Amsterdam in 1682, possibly for the attention of William of Orange. The work was dedicated "humbly and respectfully, to all those opposed to polygamy throughout the world, whether in lands, islands, villages or towns, trusting they would come to see the merits of a plurality of wives". What the current punishment was for upsetting Teutonic matrons I do not know—something lingering, with boiling oil

in it, I fancy—but with the prudence of his predecessors Leyser published his work under the pseudonym Theophilus Aletheus (the God-loving man of truth).

As with Voltaire, who chose a similar pseudonym, this was a clear sign of the intention to deceive, which he duly did. Seeking support for his arguments for polygamy, he decided to misrepresent the doings of the Council of Mâcon. He wrote: “Among so many holy Fathers, there was one who insisted that women cannot and should not be called human beings (*homines*). The matter was thought so important that it was discussed publicly and in the fear of God. Finally, after many arguments on this vexed question, they concluded that women are human after all.”⁶

What had actually happened at Mâcon was quite different. The main source for the history of Gaul at the time of the Council is the *History of the Franks*, by Gregory, the Bishop of Tours.⁷ It is a work that contains not a single condescending word about women. Gregory’s puckish humour is reserved for princes, clerical and lay, and for himself. It is curious that it should be an episode described by him that, more than a thousand years later, was misrepresented and used for the making of the myth.

Some 43 bishops attended the Council⁸ The proceedings were in Latin, though the everyday language of the people was Frankish and some spoke what Gregory calls Gallo-Roman.⁹ Gregory was interested in words, as writers are, and was curious when one of the bishops raised a question about the use of the word ‘*homo*’. Thorpe in the Penguin Classics (p. 452) translates Gregory as follows:

There came forward at this council a certain bishop who maintained that woman could not be included under the term ‘man’. However, he accepted the reasoning of the other bishops and did not press his case: for the holy book of the Old Testament tells us that in the beginning, when God created man, ‘Male and female he created them, and called their name Adam, which means earthly man; even so He called the woman Eve, yet of both he used the word ‘man’. Similarly our Lord Jesus Christ is called the Son of man, although He was the son of the Virgin, that is to say of a woman...They supported their argument with many other references, and he said no more.¹⁰

It is important to note the exact words Gregory uses, for the myth misinterprets them: “*Extetit . . . quidam ex episcopis qui dicebat mulierem hominem non posse vocitari.*” Thorpe, as we have seen, translates this as “a certain bishop...maintained that woman could not be

included in the term ‘man’”, and Dalton in the Oxford edition as “there was a certain bishop who defended the opinion that women could not be included under the general description ‘man’.” The French translation is clearest: “*un des évêques se leva pour dire qu’une femme ne pouvait être dénommée homme.*”¹¹

So it is obvious that the bishop’s question was about the use of a word, not about the substance of things. Indeed Gregory attributes to him the uncommon word ‘*vocitare*’, which translates as ‘to call by the name of’.¹² Its meaning is well illustrated in Cicero: “*has Graeci stellas Hyadas vocitare suerunt*”—“the Greeks were wont to call these stars the Hyades.”¹³ Dalton comments appositely: “The bishop asked whether the word *homo* could be properly applied to a woman, and the Council replied that Holy Writ sanctioned such application...The Council never approved any such idea as that women have no souls.” Latouche agrees: “*la difficulté n’était pas d’ordre philosophique, mais linguistique.*”

(Gregory himself followed classical usage. He would write of Queen Ingeborg as ‘*homo valde cordata*’—‘a woman of great wisdom’;¹⁴ and tell too of a woman who after a stroke, could only groan like an animal. “*Non vocem ut homo poterat emittebat*”, he wrote.¹⁵ Obviously the woman’s problem was not that she could not produce the voice of a man but that she could not produce a *human* voice.)

So that is all. A single bishop queried the meaning of a word. The others felt there was no substance to his problem, and he accepted their views. There was no debate as to whether women are human, much less a decision that they do not have a soul.

To achieve his misinterpretation, Leyser introduces a number of distortions. For ‘*vocitari*’ (to be called by the name of) he substitutes ‘*vocari*’ (to be called) and after ‘*non posse*’ (cannot) he adds ‘*nec debere*’ (nor should). For ‘*mulier. . . homo*’ he substitutes ‘*mulieres... homines*’. He speaks of “many arguments on this vexed question” yet the questioner received no support. But, worst of all, he slips from saying the bishops debated whether a woman was included under the word ‘*homo*’ to saying they debated whether she is ‘*homo*.’ He begins with ‘*vocari homines*’ and ends with ‘*sint homines*’. This is known as telling lies.

Pierre Bayle, a Dutch Calvinist with a marked distaste for the Catholicism to which he had once adhered, used Leyser’s account of the Council to justify an expression of horror at its doings. “What I think yet more strange is to find that in a Council it has been gravely proposed as a question whether women were human creatures, and that it was not determined in the affirmative till after a long debate.”¹⁶ This, as we have seen, was not what the discussion was about and the immensely-learned

Bayle must have known it. But the destruction of Catholicism *vaut bien un mensonge*.¹⁷

Bayle was avidly quarried over many years for material with which to mock catholicism. In the early 19th century a M. Aimé-Martin was moved to write a touching book on *l'Education des mères de famille* in which he reflected sorrowfully that “*On va jusqu'a mettre en doute l'existence de leur âme*”. Politicians, as is their way, saw an opportunity, and the *Assemblée Nationale* deplored the church's insult to women.¹⁸

But how did the myth reach the wilder shores of darker Dublin? A literary city it may be, but one may doubt whether pamphlets in sixteenth century Latin or seventeenth century Italian were ever avidly passed from hand to hand. Some may have known of the antics in the French Assembly, but again one has doubts. A more likely—and fitting—source would be the magazine *John Bull*, founded by the fraudster Horatio Bottomley, which carried the pseudo-story in one of its editions.¹⁹ One way or another, the myth reached Dublin, where it flourishes. It will no doubt be retailed as enthusiastically in the future as it has been in the past. If the first casualty of war is the unwelcome truth, the first tool of revolution is the welcomed lie.

- 1 Legislation from the period indicates that some bishops were in fact married, though of course they were obliged to live with their wife as with a sister. Cf. note 8 below.
- 2 There is a summary in Hefelé-Leclercq, *Histoire des Conciles*, t. III, pt.1, p. 208-214. The full text is in Mansi, *Conc. amplis. coll.*, t. ix, col.947. The latest edition is Munier, *Concilia Gallica, Corpus Christianorum*, Series Latina, 148.
- 3 *New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v.
- 4 *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, s.v., holds that Acidalius was not the true author: “er als angeblicher Verfasser einer antisozialen, scherzhaften, aber als solcher verkannten Flugschrift . . . ausgesetzt war .
- 5 *Mélanges d'Histoire et de Littérature*, p. 16. Cited by Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, s.v. Geddicus.
- 6 Cited by Bayle, *Dictionnaire critique*, s.v. Geddicus.
- 7 *Historiae Francorum*, cited here as H. F. See *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*, W. Arndt and B. Krusch ed., Vol I, Hanover, 1885; Migne *Patrologia Latina*, PL 71. There are recent translations by O.M. Dalton, Oxford, 1927; L.Thorpe, Penguin Classics, 1972; Latouche, Paris, 1963.
- 8 HF, VIII, 20. Gregory does not state that any of the bishops was in fact married, but such bishops did exist in the region. He mentions Domnola, “the daughter of Victorius, the Bishop of Rennes” (HF, VIII, 32) and Bodegisil, Bishop of Le Mans, “a very savage shepherd of his flock. . . his wife was even fiercer than he was.” (HF, VIII, 39).
- 9 HF, VIII, 1.
- 10 HF, VIII, 20.
- 11 Thorpe, p. 452; Dalton, II, p. 345; Latouche, II, p. 151.
- 12 *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, s.v.
- 13 *De natura deorum* 2, 43, 111.
- 14 HF IX, 26.
- 15 *Miracula S. Martini*, II, 30.

- 16 *Dictionnaire*, s.v. Geddicus.
- 17 The editio princeps of Gregory's *History* had been published in Paris in 1512: Josse Bard, *B.Gregori Turonesis episcopi Historiarum precipue gallicarum. Lib.X.*
- 18 *Dictionnaire de archéologie chrétienne*, s.v. 'Femme'.
- 19 Ibid.

Elegy for an 11th-Century Croatian Church Deliberately Demolished

Sanja Matesic

A church stood here once.
Adopted by the earth and hugged by the sky
for its humility,
it soaked up the sun of nine hundred summers,
each stone permeated with prayer
and the sighs of generation upon generation
of simple, pious women clad in black.
Its air was thick with the wings of angels
carrying comfort and rest.
It was holy and wholesome,
like a loaf of home-made bread
offered freely
to every passing stranger.

But the strangers who came
to claim the soil and the sky
took the gift and broke it
and trampled it underfoot.
And in its place they left
a wound.