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PAPERS

"BOLD AND HAVING NO SHAME:" AMBIGUOUS WIDOWS, CONTROLLING CLERGY, AND EARLY SYRIAN COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

An examination of the church order the Didascalia *and its successor The* Apostolic Constitutions *illustrates different strategies early churches used to regulate Christian widows. These documents represent attempts by Christian leaders to resolve the widow's ambiguous status in early Christianity and to consolidate the clergy's power. They provide an important witness to the institutionalization of early Christian communities and the solidification of hierarchies based on divisions between men, women, clergy, and laity.*

[1] Throughout antiquity, early Christianity communities vacillated between helping widows and regulating widows' power and behavior. Early Christian leaders saw widowhood as an honored

position that needed support, yet widows were also a potential threat to the church that needed to be controlled. Early Christian writings simultaneously portrayed widows as respected members of the church and subversive elements prone to misconduct;[1] they spoke of the power of a widow's prayer, but then claimed widows were not different from any other church member;[2] some considered widows to be part of the clergy, others argued that widows were lay members and should never be ordained;[3] church leaders constantly battled over the very definition a widow and, once identified, how properly to regulate her behavior.[4]

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[1] For "pro-widow" depictions and demands for support see Ignatius, *Polyc* 4 (SC 10:174); Polycarp, *ep.* 6 (SC 10:212); *Herm* Sim. 9.27 (SC 53); Justin, *1 apol.* 44.67 (Justin, "Apologia," in E.J. Goodspeed [ed.], *Die Ältsten Apologeten* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht] 56–7); *Barn* 20 (SC 172); *Apoc. Petr.* 9.7 (Dennis D. Buchholz, *Your Eyes Will Be Opened: A study of the Greek (Ethiopic) Apocalypse of Peter*, ed. Charles Talbert [Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 97; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988] 212); *A. Paul et Thec* 4 ("Acta Pauli et Theclae," in R.A. Lipsius [ed.], *Acta apostolorum apocrypha 1,1* [Leipzig: Mendelsohn, 1891] 238); *A. Petri* 7.21, 28–9, 8.29 ("Acta Petri cum Simone," in R.A. Lipsius [ed.], *Acta apostolorum apocrypha 1,1* [Leipzig: Mendelssohn, 1891] 53–5); *A. Thom* 6.59 ("Acta Thomae," in M. Bonnet [ed.], *Acta apostolorum apocrypha 2,2* [Leipzig: Mendelssohn, 1903] 108–9); Tertullian, *Ad uxor* 1.8 (CCh 1:382); *Hom. Clem.* 3.71 (GCS 42:82); *Clem. ep.* 8.5 (SC 167:114); Eusebius, *h.e.* 6.43.6 (SC 55). For concerns of misconduct and demands for regulation see 1 Tim 5:3–16; Polycarp, *ep.* 4 (SC 10:174); *Hom. Clem.* 3.71 (GCS 42:82); *Trad 10* (SC 11:66).

[2] *Trad.* 10 (SC 11:66); *Trad.* 25 (Armenian, Ehtiopic, Syrian, and Greek versions) (Gregory Dix, *The Treatise on The Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome* [Ridgefield: Morehouse Publishing, 1992; reprint, 1992] 44).

[3] For those considering widows as part of the clergy see Clement of Alexandria, *paed.* 3.12 (GCS 12:284–5); Tertullian, *Monog* 11 (CCh 2:1242–1246); Tertullian, *De exhortatione castitatis* 13 (CCh 2:1033–5); Origen, *or.* 28.4 (GCS 2:377); Origen, *hom. in Lc.* 17 (GCS 9:111–21); Origen, *comm. in Mt.* 15.22 (GCS 10). Cf. *Trad* 10 (SC 45:66).

[4] For example 1 Tim 5:3–16; Tertullian, *Virg. Vel.* 9 (CCh 2:1219); *Trad.* 10 (SC 11:66); *Apostolic Church Order* 21 (J.P. Arendzen, "An Entire Syriac Text of the 'Apostolic Church Order'," *Journal of Theological Studies* 3 [1901]: 70).

[2] The most coherent picture of the early Christian widow was her incoherence. The ancient Christian widow fit neither contemporary categories of gender nor the division of clergy and laity. Although female, widows were not sexually active or under the patriarchal control of marriage. As long as she was unmarried, the widow remained in a liminal state-maintaining the potential for future marriage and sexual activity. The church's efforts to have the widow either quickly remarry or vow perpetual chastity partially resolved this ambiguity. Yet even the enrolled widow, unmarried and gaining some power through her position and ministries, disrupted the late antique division of male (active) and female (passive). Of even greater concern was the widow's challenge to the distinction between clergy and laity. The widow took on many characteristics usually reserved for the clergy: she had special responsibilities to the congregation, she engaged in social ministry, her prayers were particularly powerful, she had to meet specific membership requirements, and at times she even had a special seat in the church.[5] Challenging traditional gender roles and the church's division of laity and clergy, widows were an obstacle to the institutionalization of early Christian communities and the clergy's consolidation of power.

[3] The connection between the fate of early Christian widows and the rise of internal hierarchies is most apparent in the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, a third-century Syrian church order. In two chapters devoted to discussing widows, the *Didascalia* defines who is eligible to be enrolled as a widow, describes good and evil widows, determines how and under what conditions widows will receive financial support, decides what is required of the church's widows, and mandates that specific activities be prohibited. An examination of these control strategies indicates that because of her ambiguous status, the early Christian widow became a focal point in a battle for greater clerical power and a more rigid social hierarchy.

STRATEGIES OF CONTROL: THE DIDASCALIA

[4] The *Didascalia* is the largest of the early church orders. Twenty-seven chapters outline the duties and positions of bishops,

[5] E.g. 1 Tim 5:3–16; Clement of Alexandria, *paed.* 3.12 (GCS 12:284–285); Tertullian, *Virg. Vel.* 9 (CCh 2:1219); *Trad.* 25 (Dix 44); *Apostolic Church Order* 21 (Arendzen 70).

deacons, deaconesses, presbyters, widows, orphans, lay men and women, visitors, catechumens, and the excommunicated. It also discusses "orthodox" belief and ethics, the distribution of funds, liturgy, martyrdom, repentance, and other topics regarding the church's structure and function. A polemic against "heresy" and a fear of Jewish influences frame the work and underlies many of its discussions.

[5] All but a few lines of the original Greek are lost, but numerous Syriac manuscripts fully preserve the *Didascalia*. A late fourth-century palimpsest contains about two-fifths of the text in Latin. The *Didascalia*'s definitive authorship is unknown; according to its prologue, Paul and the twelve disciples gathered in Jerusalem to write it (7.22–8.7).[6] In reality, the work is clearly pseudonymous, and a strong scholarly consensus believes that the *Didascalia* was written in third-century Syria.[7] Because of its focus on ecclesiology, some scholars have suggested that a Syrian bishop wrote the *Didascalia*.[8]

[6] An even more fundamental question regards the descriptive value of this work: is it *descriptive* or *prescriptive*? Does the *Didascalia* describe a specific, perhaps atypical, Christian community or is it the musings of some third-century armchair anthropologist forwarding his vision of an ideal church? This question, common to all early church orders, has been virtually ignored by modern scholars.[9] While such a noncritical acceptance of the *Didascalia* is clearly problematic, even if the *Didascalia* is solely the work of a single third-century idealist, the content still reflects the move toward an institutionalized church and strategies for greater centralized control. The *Didascalia*, in any case, remains an

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[6] Citations are by page and line of Vööbus' English translation: Arthur Vööbus, *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac* (CSCO 402, 408; Louvain: CSCO, 1979). The Syriac text can be found in Arthur Vööbus, *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac* (CSCO 401, 407; Louvain: CSCO, 1979).

[7] Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 88; Bonnie Bowman Thurston, *The Widows: A Women's Ministry in the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989) 97; S.J. Galtier, "La Date de la Didascalie des Apostres," *Revue D'Histoire Ecclesiastique* 42 (1947): 315–51; Vööbus, 402.23.

[8] Bradshaw, *Search for the Origins*, 88.

[9] Ibid., 107–9 and Methuen (below) are exceptions.

important source for reconstructing the role of widows in early Christianity. Fortunately, the *Didascalia*'s rapid translation and dissemination, incorporation into later works, emendation and complex textual history, attention to realistic details, assumptions that readers would be familiar with the material, and the many corresponding similarities to other early Syrian works, suggest that the *Didascalia* provides at least some reflection of historic reality. Although some of the details remain questionable, the *Didascalia* clearly shows that widows were key players in the changing social dynamics of early Christian communities.

[7] Although the *Didascalia* dedicates two entire chapters to widows, it never explicitly defines this term. Unlike 1 Tim, the *Didascalia* does not require that a widow have married only once, have no relatives who can support her, or be renowned for good deeds (1 Tim 5:3–4; 5:9–10).[10] The only criterion mentioned by the *Didascalia*, that a woman must be at least fifty years old for the bishop to appoint her as a widow (141.8–9), conflicts with 1 Tim's requirement of sixty years.[11] 1 Tim and the *Didascalia* also vary in their treatment of younger widows. 1 Tim advocates financial support only for older widows, and encourages "younger widows [to] marry, bear children, rule their households, and give the enemy no occasion to revile us" (1 Tim 5:14). In contrast, the *Didascalia* sees second marriage as "an act of damage" and marrying a third time as harlotry (142.11–3).[12] The *Didascalia*, though allowing widows to remarry, prefers them not to, and mandates that the church financially support younger widows so "they may continue in chastity unto God" (142.14–15, see also 141.9–12).

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[10] For an analysis of 1 Tim's regulation of widows see J. Bassler, "A Widows' Tale: A Fresh Look at 1 Tim 5:3–16," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103. 1 (1984): 23–41.

[11] Similarly, the *Didascalia* also suggests that a bishop be fifty years or older so that he is "removed from the conduct of youth and from the lusts of the adversary" (43.25–8). It will permit the ordination of a younger bishop for a small congregation (55.9–19). Justin Taylor's examination of the *Didascalia*'s retelling of Acts 15 provides another example of how the *Didascalia* often modifies New Testament passages (Justin Taylor, "Ancient Texts and Modern Critics: Acts 15, 1–34," *Revue Bibliique* 99.2 [1992]: 373–8).

[12] Condemnations of remarriage can be found in Tertullian, *De exhortatione castitatis* and *Monog* (CCh 2:1013–35; CCh 2:1229–53).

[8] In 1 Tim the division between enrolled and non-enrolled widows is relatively clear-the former are "true widows" worthy of praise and financially supported by the church, the latter will likely become "idlers, gossips, and busybodies" (1 Tim 5.13) and are encouraged to remarry. The *Didascalia* honors enrolled *and* non-enrolled widows (141.18–142.7); both receive financial support from the church and (ideally) remain single. Besides age, the *Didascalia* outlines subtle differences between appointed and non-appointed widows. Like 1 Tim, the *Didascalia* fears that a younger woman may not "endure widowhood because of her youth" (141:11–2, cf. 1 Tim 5:11). If the bishop appointed such a woman as a widow and she later remarried, she would become blameworthy "because she promised to be a widow unto God, and was receiving as a widow, but did not abide in widowhood" (141.14–7). This passage suggests that when the bishop appoints a widow, she promises to remain single, a precondition for receiving alms. Even though non-appointed widows receive some support to discourage remarriage, the *Didascalia* implies they are not under any contractual obligation to remain single.

[9] In her investigation of the term widow, Charlotte Methuen argues that instead of anachronistically defining "widow" as a woman whose husband has died, modern scholars should see the early Christian use of the word widow as signifying a woman who leads a sexually chaste life; for many Christian communities widows could also be virgins.[13] This poses the question whether the widows to which the *Didascalia* refers included women who never married. At first glance, a surprising omission gives some support to this possibility. Considering the prevalence of asceticism in third-century Syria, the *Didascalia* should have some discussion of virgins and how the church would support them. Yet the term "virgin" never appears in the *Didascalia.*[14] This omission of "virgins," however, is better explained by the *Didascalia*'s strong polemic *against* sexual asceticism than by the *Didascalia*'s widows

[13] See Charlotte Methuen, "The 'Virgin Widow': A Problematic Social Role for the Early Church?" *Harvard Theological Review* 90:3 (1997): 285–298 for an extensive discussion of "virgin widows."

[14] The Ethiopic *Statutes of the Apostles*, however, later amends two *Didascalia* passages to include virgins (Vööbus, *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac*, 2.132n23, 2.134n42).

also including virgins. According to the *Didascalia*, only heretics condemn marriage (213.9–13, 237.21–238.1); the text commands that a man take a wife (214.18–215.2), and suggests that parents marry off their children as soon as they can (161.5, 203.17–20).[15] Similarly, the *Didascalia*'s discussion of both appointed and non-appointed widows refers to these women having had first husbands (141.8–142.15). Requiring widows to have been previously married reinforces the *Didascalia*'s stance against asceticism.

[10] The *Didascalia*'s implicit definition of widowhood reveals three important characteristics of the *Didascalia* community. First, although the *Didascalia* is familiar with 1 Tim, the age of a "true" widow is different. This shows that the *Didascalia* community did not view 1 Tim's mandates as infallible, and it may reflect an early disagreement on the canon.[16] Second, by encouraging first marriage, allowing for a second marriage, but condemning a third, the *Didascalia* represents a midpoint between the New Testament that places no restrictions on number of marriages (1 Cor 7:39; Rom 7:2–3; 1 Tim 5:14) and other patristic works that condone only first marriage.[17] The *Didascalia*'s position on this issue is particularly surprising given its Syrian context. Scholars have argued that, in the third-century Syriac church, celibacy was a prerequisite for baptism, "Christian life [was] unthinkable outside the bounds of virginity" and chastity became "an ubiquitous

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[15] Note the tension between this and the *Didascalia*'s polemic against second marriage. The *Didasclia* choses a middle ground, supporting the ideal of the *univiras* yet condemning those who are against marriage altogether.

[16] Several manuscripts amend this to read "fifty years of age and older," to conform the *Didascalia* more closely with 1 Tim (Vööbus, CSCO 408, 63). See Harry Gamble, *The New Testament Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), and Bruce Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (New York: Clarendon, 1987) for a general discussion of the development of canon.

[17] Though only a single line of chapter fourteen speaks about third marriage, one manuscript summarizes the entire chapter as "About the widows and the third marriage which is counted for fornication." At least in that community, the issue of third marriage was significant enough to devote half of the chapter subtitle to this theme. For other early Christian condemnations of second marriage see Tertullian, *De exhortatione castitatis* (CCh 2:1013–35) and *Monog.* (CCh 2:1229–53).

value."[18] In contrast, although the *Didascalia* shows a clear preference that widows remain single, nevertheless it instructs all Christians to marry, permits remarriage after the death of one's first spouse, condemns complete sexual renunciation, and shows no evidence for the typically ascetic usage of the Syriac terms bthule, qadishe, or bnath qyama.[19] Third, the *Didascalia*'s advocacy of a broader definition of a "true widow" and the financial support for younger widows clearly has economic and political implications. The document reflects a community that has a sufficient economic base to support many individuals resulting in a greater number of people financially dependent on the church.

[11] The *Didascalia* not only implicitly defines widowhood, but also constructs good and bad widows through its rhetoric. The ideal widow is to be humble, unperturbed, chaste, modest, quiet, gentle, without wickedness, without anger, not talkative, not glamorous, and not a lover of strife (143.9–144.3, 148.18–149.20). She is an altar of God and should be stationary (146.1–147.12), staying home to pray day and night (148.18–9).[20] She is unquestionably obedient to the bishop and other clergy (149.18–20), a passive, immobile instrument of the church. Needless to say, not every widow conformed to this ideal. The majority of the *Didascalia*'s chapter on widows' conduct concentrates on "rebellious widows." These women—greedy, gossipy, and mobile—are literally "out of control."

[12] The most frequent charge is that widows are greedy. Mammon is often said to be the widows' only motivation and their main goal is to receive additional profit (147.16–148.4, 152.25–7). They envy each other, and when one of them receives a gift from the church

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[18] Sebastian Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," *Numen* 20 (April 1973): 7; Arthur Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient* (CSCO 184; Louvain: CSCO, 1958) 69; Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis: John of Ephesus and the Lives of the Eastern Saints* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 5.

[19] For a discussion of these terms use in Syrian asceticism see Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*, 97–106 and Harvey, *Asceticism and Society*, 6.

[20] For a fuller discussion of this metaphor see Bonnie Bowman Thurston, "The Widows as the Altar of God," *SBL Seminar Papers* 24 (1985): 279–89; C. Osiek, "The Widow as Altar: The Rise and Fall of a Symbol," *Second Century* 3.3 (1983): 159–69; and Methuen, "Widows, Bishops and the Struggle for Authority," 202.

(151.29–30), they murmur against the receiving widow, the giver, or even the bishop (152.27–153.10). This can even lead to the widows' cursing these individuals (153.22–155.18). Other widows try to make a profit by lending money for interest (147.14–6). In extreme cases, Satan may enter greedy widows, causing them to love only worldly goods and become widows "only in name" (151.14–28). These passages give several insights into the *Didascalia* community. They suggest that problems with the distribution of church aid expose bishops to charges of favoritism, the community is concerned with the widows' power to curse, not all widows are impoverished-some are affluent enough to lend money out, and others were expected to donate to the bishop's funds for the poor and visitors (147.14–6),[21] and the community believes that widows are particularly vulnerable to Satan and may become the devil's instrument.

[13] The *Didascalia* frequently accuses widows of being overly talkative and causing strife. Concern with women's voice is prevalent in Christianity, especially in 1 Tim, where the author worries that widows would "learn to be idlers, gadding about from house to house, and not only idlers but gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not" (1 Tim 5.13). The *Didascalia* uses similar language describing rebellious widows as "talkative and chatterers and murmurers" who are "bold and have no shame" (146.9–11). They cannot stay quiet in their own home, and even during the Sunday services they whisper to others; through their distractions they cause many to become captives of Satan (146.5–147.3). The widows' most frequent infringement is revealing the names of those who gave them alms. When the bishop gives a donation to a widow, he tells her who donated the gift so that she can pray for him. The widow must keep the giver's name a secret, or it might be revealed to a pagan violating Mt 25.33–5.[22] Such a violation also improperly reveals what takes place in church to the

[21] This is in accord with the prominence of wealthy widows in early Christianity. See Elizabeth Clark, *Jerome, Chrysostom and Friends* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), and Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1994).

[22] The *Didascalia* equates a pagan with the left hand (see also 120.14–21). If a pagan knows who donated a gift, the left hand knows what the right one is doing.

outside (152.10–24) and incites quarrels between widows (153.24–25).

[14] Correlated with the concerns of gossip is a series of criticisms regarding mobility. The *Didascalia* mandates that a widow stay constantly at home (148.17) and not "run around" (146.6–10). False widows wander about, especially to ask for alms (150.12–4); these roving widows are shameless, morally blind, and greedy (146.6–10). Of particular concern is that wandering widows will associate with those who have been expelled from the church (150.12–4).[23] The *Didascalia* warns that anyone who associates with an excommunicant will be defiled and share in the guilt. Additionally, the widow's company will make the excommunicant less likely to repent, and the widow will be responsible for that person's damnation as well as her own (150.28–151.5).[24] Concerns of the widow's mobility may also form part of the *Didascalia*'s larger polemic against ascetic groups it deems heretical. Although our knowledge of third-century Syrian ascetic practice is extremely limited,[25] several scholars have suggested that wandering ascetics played a significant role in early Syrian Christianity.[26] Restricting the widows' mobility prevents widows from emulating this form of asceticism. The *Didascalia*'s rhetorical attacks against wandering, unmarried women could also be used to condemn the practices of these other groups.

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[23] Early Christian writers frequently wrote of women as particularly vulnerable to heretical influence. See Susanne Heine, *Women and Early Christianity: A Reappraisal* (Minneapolis: Augsberg Publishing House, 1986) 130–134; Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings* (New York: Oxford Press, 1992) 157–93; Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) 48–69.

[24] In several places the *Didascalia* advocates expulsion and ostracism as a way to motivate members to repent and return to the community (e.g. 64.14–65.16, 113.10–22).

[25] See Sidney Griffith, "Asceticism in the Church of Syria: The hermeneutics of Early Syrian Monasticism," in Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (eds.), *Asceticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) 235 for a discussion of scholars' dependence on later sources to reconstruct third-century Syrian ascetic practices.

[26] Robert Murray. *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975) 28.

[15] The *Didascalia*'s descriptions provide insight into the community's ambivalence toward widows. The same widow the community should support has the potential to become greedy and be taken over by Satan. The voice that prays can also gossip and curse. The widow who visits the sick can wander aimlessly or associate with heretics. Through its rhetoric, the *Didascalia* tries to regulate behavior. The *Didascalia*'s stark characterization of good and evil widows creates a subject in need of control.

[16] The *Didascalia*'s advocacy of increased financial support for widows necessitated a formal distribution system. The bishop becomes a middle-man: a donor gives a gift to the bishop, and the bishop, either by himself or through a deacon or presbyter, gives this "alm of the Lord" to a specific widow (153.4). The widow is told the name of the original donor so she can pray for him (142.21–8, 152.11). This centralization is justified on several grounds-the bishop's responsibility is to take care of everyone, he is to be a good steward, he knows who are truly afflicted, and he will follow God's commands in the distribution of alms. This system benefits the donor since he remains unaware of whom he assists and can give his alms in secret (100.22–9, 142.21–8, 153.6–8,153.19; cf. Mt 6.2–4).

[17] There are some hints in the *Didascalia* of widows who managed to circumvent this system. The *Didascalia* indicts widows who visit the sinful or excommunicated because these people give the widows money (150.12–7). Other widows are said to wander around in search of more alms (146.3, 152.27). Sometimes widows ask each other how large a donation the clergy gave them (152.27); when one widow breaks confidentiality, disclosing how much she received and from whom, the other widow may complain about her level of funding (153.1–10). The *Didascalia* reprimands such behavior. The widow must realize that God decides who receives which funds, not the bishop (153.7). If the widow complains, she is like the hypocrites of Mt 6:2, and like them she has already received her reward. Instead the widow should thank God for the assistance her companion received, pray for the one who gave the donation and the ministers who distributed it, and ask that she too would open "the door of His pity" (153.10–8).

[18] Another "loop-hole" the *Didascalia* tries to address is laity who give gifts directly to widows. The *Didascalia* emphasizes that this action is inappropriate; just as a non-Levite could not place

sacrifices upon the altar, the laity cannot bring their gifts to a widow, the altar of God. Instead the laity must give their offerings to the bishop who serves as the high priest (100.15–21). If a lay person directly supports a widow, this dishonors the bishop by implying that the bishop is not protecting the widows and despises the poor (103.6–11).

[19] The bishop should be particularly careful of the sources of donations. Widows are the altar of Christ (163.2–5) and the congregation's offerings nourish this altar (162.8–11). If alms collected from evil-doers nourish the widows, they will become impure and their prayers will be unclean (164.12–9). Since the widows would be praying for transgressors, God will not answer their prayers, and the ineffectiveness may cause some to blasphemy and question God's goodness (165.5–9).[27] At least from the perspective of the *Didascalia*, it would be better for a widow to starve than accept alms from impure sources (162.21–4, 166.3–5). If an evil-doer compels the bishop to accept his alms, the only acceptable use for the money is to buy a widow firewood. Firewood, unlike food bought with impure donations, presumably would not hurt the widow's prayer life (167.1–5). God will hold accountable a bishop who, accepting alms from the blameworthy, gives these donations to a widow (163.14–7, 165.10–166.2).

[20] The text also warns against focusing on the widows and forgetting other afflicted individuals. Twice the *Didascalia* tells bishops to take care of all the poor, even those who are married (142.17–20, 142.29–143.5), and reminds them not to neglect those whose needs may even exceed those of widows (46.19–25). The first of these two passages contains the document's only reference to widowers and implies that they, like widows may receive some form of financial support.

[21] This distribution system consolidates the clergy's power. As more widows become dependent on church support, more become directly dependent on the bishop and other clergy, who distributed the alms. The *Didascalia* discourages laity from directly supporting

[27] The *Didascalia* has a large list of those from whom one should not accept offerings (163.18–164.8). Some of the more interesting figures include "those who use their bodies wickedly," "hypocritical lawyers," "unjust tax gatherers," those who abuse the poor and slaves, and any Roman official.

widows; instead, the congregation should give donations to the bishop, as he is in the best position to properly allocate them. Because widows are susceptible to pollution from impure sources, the bishop can further regulate the funds. The *Didascalia* harshly criticizes any attempt to go outside this system. The response to any complaint is that God, not the bishop, decided how alms were distributed.

[22] The widows do not receive support unconditionally. They have specific duties, the most prominent of which is prayer. Like contemporary Jewish and Christian sources, the *Didascalia* clearly believes that a widow's prayer is extremely powerful.[28] God will always answer the prayers of a pure widow: "the widows will pray and receive from God all the good things for which they ask and seek" (167.6–9. See also 148.20–1 and 149.3–5). A widow's prayer is a precious commodity. According to the *Didascalia*, the primary reason a bishop should aid widows is "that something they ask and request may be given them quickly with their prayers" (163.12–4). Widows are appointed to "pray and entreat the Lord God" (145.15–16). First, a widow prays on behalf of the entire church (144.4–5). Second, when the bishop gives the widow alms, he tells her who had donated the gift (142.27–8), and she prays on behalf of the giver (144.4–5, 151.29–152.24). Third, the widow also prays for the clergy, especially when they apportion gifts to widows (152.1–9, 153.13–5). In summary, "a widow should care for nothing else except this, to pray for those who give, and for the whole church" (144.4–5). The *Didascalia* condemns any activity that might interfere with these prayers. For example, widows who are greedy and constantly look for profit are too distracted to pray effectively (148.5–17). Instead, a widow should neither leave her house, nor let her eyes or ears wander to avoid anything that might detract from her prayers (148.23–149.2).

[23] The *Didascalia* lists two secondary roles for widows: first, they are to work with wool to give the profits to the poor, or at the very least, lessen their own need for church support (149.5–17; see also 147.15–6, 21.1–23.1. cf. Acts 9:39–41); second, they should visit, fast with, pray for, and lay hands upon the sick (150.8–12), but they may perform these ministries only "by the command of the bishop

[28] E.g. A. Petri 7.21 (Lipsius 53–5); *Trad.* 25 (Dix 44); *Apostolic Church Order* 21 (Arendzen 70).

or the deacon" (149.24–5). The *Didascalia* notes how presumptuous is a woman who claims to know with whom she should fast, or upon whom she should lay hands. The clergy should reprove a widow who makes these decisions herself (150.1), and God will hold her liable on the day of judgment (150.5–6). In contrast, if a widow obeys the clergy's commands in these matters, she obeys God and will be blameless (150.18–21).

[24] The *Didascalia* claims a widow's works are key to her worthiness of widowhood. Those who practice good works will be "praised and accepted" (151.20–4). While these roles define widowhood as a special position in the church, they also increase the clergy's control of the widows. The emphasis on prayer defends restrictions on a widow's mobility and participation in "worldly" matters. It also justifies a continual emphasis on her behavior; only if the widow conforms to certain cultural expectations will she be pure enough to perform her primary duty of prayer and contemplation. Although a widow's involvement in limited forms of social ministry was somewhat empowering, the clergy (not surprisingly) strictly regulated this aspect of a widow's life

[25] The *Didascalia* prohibits widows from teaching, baptizing, and cursing. It warns that whenever a widow is asked anything, she should not "too quickly give an answer;" instead she should send the inquirer to the community's leader.[29] The word of the Gospel is like mustard (Mk 4:31; Mt 13:31; Lk 13:19), not prepared correctly it is bitter to those who use it. If, instead of simply being a referral service, a widow (or any other women) attempts to teach, not having a "knowledge of doctrine" she will "bring blasphemy against the word" (144.14–5) and "shall be guilty of a hard judgment for sin" (145.10–1). The *Didascalia* warns that those who do not have the proper doctrinal knowledge will inevitably blaspheme when they attempt to teach.

[26] Theological education has become a form of power; the (male) clergy differ from female (laity) by virtue of formal position and responsibility. Clergy are considered educated, yet not accountable for a gentile who refuses to convert. If a woman fails in evangelism, it is her fault and she is liable for judgment. When a

[29] Several manuscripts read "leaders" and the plural is found in the *Apostolic Constitutions*. The text never specifies, exactly who is the leader(s). Most likely its singular form refers to the bishop, its plural to all clergy.

woman teaches she takes a risk, but male clergy risk nothing by teaching. The clergy's position is educated and secure, a female teacher's is uneducated, dangerous, and often mocked (145.6).

[27] Widows can speak of righteousness, faith in God, destruction of idols, and monotheism (144.6–7, 144.10–1); neither widows nor other laity can teach about punishment, "the rest," "the kingdom of the name of Christ," or Christ's dispensation (144.11–4). Women in particular should not speak about Christ's embodiment, his passion, or his name (145.8–9, 145.13–5). The hierarchy of these issues is clear. Issues such as monotheism or the destruction of idols are simple to articulate and relatively respectable in certain pagan circles. More abstract issues, such as "the rest" or Christ's name, are more problematic. Christ's embodiment and passion are perhaps the most offensive topics to Greco-Roman sensibilities and are only to be discussed by the male clergy.[30] If women speak of these, the listeners will "deride and mock, instead of praising the word of doctrine" (145.7–11).

[28] Lastly, women ("especially widows") should not teach, because Christ did not appoint them for this task. If women were meant to teach, Christ would have commanded his female disciples (the three Marys) to give instructions along with the twelve. Since he did not explicitly do so, women were evidently not meant to be teachers (145.14–22).

[29] The *Didascalia* uses several rhetorical strategies—textual implosion (stringing together texts that, in their original context, appear unrelated to the topic at hand), cultural stereotypes, arguments of silence, authority gained from pseudonymity—to prevent widows from teaching.[31] It portrays a selection of diverse scriptural passages to refute a widow's ability to teach: it reframes the reference of the word of the Gospel as "mustard" to speak about the difficulty of teaching, instead of the benefits of the kingdom and it interprets the Matthew "pearls before swine" passage as being addressed directly to widows and laity. The *Didascalia* also employs contemporary prejudices regarding

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[30] Robert Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984) 102–4.

[31] See Elizabeth Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) 132–4 for the coining of the term "textual implosion."

women's voice—their inability to speak firmly, the likelihood of being mocked—to further disempower female teachers. The argument of silence (Jesus did not call female disciples to teach) is a typical point made by early Christian authors to reduce females' influence. The *Didascalia* reinforces this with a sudden shift in narrative voice. In its discussion of the three Marys, the text switches into the first person, reminding the reader that the twelve apostles (and Paul) supposedly wrote the *Didascalia*, and they would know definitively if Christ intended women to teach.

[30] The *Didascalia* also prohibits women from baptizing, arguing that if women were supposed to baptize, Christ's mother Mary would have baptized Jesus. Since John baptized Christ, only men may lawfully baptize (151.9–12). If a woman baptizes, she transgresses "the commandment." Such an act is "beyond the law of the Gospel," and is dangerous both to the baptizer and whomever she baptizes (151.6–13).

[31] The final prohibition is against widows cursing. The *Didascalia* states that if some widows feel they have not been given enough alms they "send out a curse like the pagans" (154.1–2). Just as the widow's prayers and blessings are extremely potent, the *Didascalia* fears the power of a widow's curses. Although the text specifies that an unjust curse is in vain (154.11–2) and that cursing in general is counterproductive (154.14–155.11), it never denies the power of a well-founded curse. The text addresses this issue by instructing the bishop to prohibit all curses (11.14–8).

[32] These prohibitions not only show that the clergy tried to regulate widows, but also suggest challenges to the *Didascalia*'s world view. One does not prohibit what one does not fear; the very fact that the *Didascalia* spends so much space and uses so many different strategies to argue against women's teaching, baptizing, and cursing suggests that this was a problem in the *Didascalia* community.[32] By attacking female authority in the *Didascalia*'s chapters on widows, the author(s) reveals that widows are key figures in this power struggle.

[33] In response to this threat, the *Didascalia*'s author(s) developed several strategies through which the clergy consolidated its power

[32] Methuen, "Widows, Bishops and the Struggle for Authority," 200 and Thurston, *The Widows*, 99 also argue that these prohibitions reflect attempts to prohibit contemporary practices.

at the expense of widows. A broader definition of widowhood increased the number of widows eligible for support and created a larger group of women financially dependent on the church. By discouraging laity from directly assisting widows, the *Didascalia* solidified the bishop's control over how funds were distributed. The *Didascalia*'s rhetoric presented the ideal widow as a passive, obedient instrument of the clergy; its construction of rebellious widows justified attempts to control these women. It used the widow's duty to pray to minimize her contact with "the world." Whatever contact she did have was strictly regulated: her social ministry was defined by others, and she was prohibited from teaching or baptizing.

Epilogue: The Apostolic Constitutions

[34] The legacy of the *Didascalia* did not end in third-century Syria. Not only did the *Didascalia* itself remain an influential document, it also was the source for much of the fourth-century *Apostolic Constitutions*. Variations between these documents' discussion of widows foreshadow the widow's plight in later Christianity. Book three of the *Apostolic Constitutions* closely follows chapters fourteen and fifteen of the *Didascalia*, making minor alterations of the latter text to adapt it to a more contemporary use. These changes evidence the changing role of the Syrian widow.[33]

[35] The *Apostolic Constitutions* revises the *Didascalia* to follow 1 Tim more closely. The bishop should only enroll widows sixty years or older (3.1.1), and a true widow would have had only one husband, be renowned for her works, and have raised children (3.1.3).[34] The

[33] It is important to note that these documents are not representative of the entire range of widows's experiences in early Christianity. In particular, the church treated wealthy widows in a very different manner than that envisioned by these documents (for extensive discussions of the role of wealthy widows in early Christian communities see Clark, *Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends* and Elm, *Virgins of God*). Still, the change between these documents shows the evolution of a particular tradition and its response to the changing environment.

[34] The Greek text of the *Apostolic Constitutions* can be found in P.A. De Lagarde, *Constitutiones Apostolorum* (Osnabrÿck: Gesamtherstellung Proff & Co. KG., 1966). Cf. *Didascalia* 141.8–9; 1 Tim 5:10; Tertullian, *Virg. Vel.* 9 (CCh 2:1219).

Apostolic Constitutions also changes the *Didascalia*'s stance on second marriage, emphasizing that an enrolled widow who remarried is guilty of sin but "not because she married a second time" (3.1.1). This qualification is repeated in the next chapter (3.1.2), where the text also explicitly states the church should allow a widow to marry a second time (3.1.2); unlike the *Didascalia*, it does not present second marriage as an act of damage. While the *Didascalia* condemns third marriage as an act of harlotry (142.11–3), the *Apostolic Constitutions* reserves this charge for fourth marriage (3.1.2).

[36] The *Didascalia* warned that any woman who baptizes endangered both herself and those to whom she ministered. The *Apostolic Constitutions* expands this brief polemic by adding three additional arguments against women baptizing (3.1.9): If Jesus wanted women to baptize he would have sent some along with the apostles to do so; Because "man is the head of woman" (I Cor 11:3) and a man is to rule over woman (Gen 3:16), a woman should not to teach (3.1.6) and it is contrary to nature for a woman to "perform the office of a priest;" and Pagans have female priests and female deities, showing the error of women in religious practice.

[37] The greatest difference between the *Didascalia* and the *Apostolic Constitutions* is the transfer of power from the widow to the deaconess. The *Apostolic Constitutions* removes all of the *Didascalia*'s references to fasting, laying hands, or blessings (149.20–5, 150.2–20). Instead the *Apostolic Constitutions* mandates that the widow "sit in her house, and not enter into the houses of the faithful, under any pretense, to receive anything" (3.1.6). At the same time that the widow loses her social ministry, the deaconess rises in prominence.[35] As in the *Didascalia* (156.1–158.6), deaconesses are

[35] See Wayne H. House, "Distinctive Roles for Women in the Second and Third Centuries," *Bibiotheca Sacra* 146 (1989): 50–2 and especially Elm 168–78 for a more complete discussion of the decline of the widow in relation to the rise of the deaconess. Allen Brent, "The Relations Between Ignatius and the Didascalia" *Second Century* (Fall 1991): 133 makes the important observation that in its attemps to solidify a monarchical episcopate the *Didascalia* decreases the deacon's power in relationship to the bishop. Because the *Didascalia* models the deaconess on this less powerful deacon, it further reduces the deaconess' threat to the bishop's authority.

to help in the visiting, baptizing, and instruction of women (3.2.15). Yet the *Apostolic Constitutions* gives deaconesses other duties as well. The deaconess stands before the women in the congregation and keeps them in order during the service (2.7.57). Any woman who wishes to speak to the bishop or a deacon also needs to have a deaconess present (2.4.26). The deaconess (not the bishop) distributes funds to the widows (3.1.14), and the widow is to honor the deaconess as she is to obey the other clergy (3.1.7).

[38] The deaconess is a member of the clergy and therefore not an elevated symbol of lay power. Since the bishop ordains her (3.2.15; 8.3.19–20), he can be more selective in choosing her than he might with a group of widows. In the *Apostolic Constitutions*, the deaconess' ministry, unlike that of the *Didascalia* widow, is limited to attending women. She is also clearly subservient to the other clergy. While the *Didascalia* honored the deaconess by comparing her to the Holy Spirit (100.12–3), the *Apostolic Constitutions* uses this analogy to make the deaconess dependent on the deacon:

> Let also the deaconess be honored by you in place of the Holy Ghost, and not do or say anything without the deacon [who is the earthly representation of Christ]; as neither does the Comforter say or do anything of Himself, but gives glory to Christ by waiting for His pleasure (2.4.26).

[39] The *Apostolic Constitutions* minimizes the widow's threat to the clergy by transferring authority away from her to the less troublesome and more easily controlled deaconess, herself subordinate to the other clergy. In her examination of the *Apostolic Constitutions*, Susanna Elm summarizes the result of this power shift: "[the widow's] position now offers no hint of any clerical status and is subordinate to that of the virgin, only marginally above the general laity."[36]

[40] The *Apostolic Constitutions* more closely conforms with 1 Tim's mandates and is more "liberal" with its stance towards second marriage. It is more aggressive in its attack against women baptizing, decreases the widow's role in social ministry, overshadows her with the rising (albeit regulated) power of the deaconess, and foreshadows the eventual loss of the widow as a church office. While several centuries passed before the widow all

[36] Elm, *Virgins of God*, 171.

but disappeared from Christian sources, the *Apostolic Constitutions* documents how the emerging institutionalized "orthodoxy" ultimately succeeded in its attempts to regulate the widow and minimize her power.

RESOLVING AMBIGUITY: WIDOWS AND THE CENTRALIZATION OF POWER

[41] A close analysis of the *Didascalia*'s statements about widows illustrated various ways the clergy tried to consolidate their power. A comparison between the *Didascalia* and the *Apostolic Constitutions* showed the continuation of this trajectory and revealed changes in the social settings of these communities. While delineating these strategies of control may be of interest in and of it itself, in a larger context it is even more illuminating.

[42] Widows were not the only target of these struggles. Numerous sociologists and anthropologists have noted the inevitable institutionalization of a religious movement.[37] The *Didascalia* and the *Apostolic Constitutions* bear witness to this phenomenon. In her work, Methuen frames the *Didascalia*'s discussion of widows in the context of "an on-going struggle to establish a more hierarchical church centered on the bishop, which led to the discrediting of other forms of authority and the groups which supported them."[38] Methuen's observation clearly influences my reading of the *Didascalia* and the *Apostolic Constitutions*. I suggest, however, that these documents were concerned with the early Christian widow not only because of the widow's actual authority but also because of her symbolic role in the community. Controlling the widow was not just a matter of regulating her behavior; it also involved redefining what she signified.

[43] A main theme in the *Didascalia* and the *Apostolic Constitutions* is power of the clergy over the laity; they establish a rigid hierarchy

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[37] E.g. Victor Turner, *Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969) 94–165 and Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1922; reprint, 1991). For an application of this analysis to early Christianity see John Gager, *Kingdom and Community* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975) 66–92. For a discussion of how models of institutionalization help explain changes in female ascetic practices see Elm, *Virgins of God*, 164–6.

[38] Methuen, *Widows, Bishops, and the Struggle for Authority*, 212.

with the bishop at the top and the laity at the bottom. The *Didascalia* gives the bishop many titles: a good shepherd (70.10–75.8), a physician (78.16–9; 114.17–115.9), a mother (104.18), a father (75.13; 100.6; 104.17), a leader (100.8), the chief (100.8), a Levite (100.5), the High Priest (100.5), a king (100.8; 106.11–107.2), Moses (103.3), an imitator of Christ (78.6–7; 92.22–93.14), God's mouthpiece (102.23), and even God himself (67.16; 75.13–14; 100.9–10; 120.2–3). A bishop's power mirrors these titles. The bishop is to judge in place of God (52.23–5), and like God he can forgive sins (67.15–21; 78.4–9). This makes the bishop more powerful than any earthly king because his ability to excommunicate is power of life and death over a person's soul (104.24–30; 107.3–8).

[44] Beneath the bishop are the other clergy, most importantly the deacon, an earthly representative of Christ (100.11; 120.2–3). Next comes the deaconess who represents the Holy Spirit (100.12–3), and then the presbyters who are the apostles (100.13–4). At the bottom of this hierarchy are the laity. While the bishop is the head, the laity is the tail (56.18–21), the bishop is the ram of Ezekiel 34, the laity the ewes (75.9–12). The laity are children, eggs, or young birds (76.1–5).

[45] The laity are to honor and fear the bishop as they would God, and the deacons as they would Christ (75.14–76.1; 106). Speaking evil against a bishop or deacon is an offense against God and Christ (103.12–23), as is any challenge to the clergy's absolute power (75.14–76.1). The laity cannot judge the clergy (110.8–13); they are not to watch over the bishop, nor can they ever ask him to account for his actions (109.8–18). There is no hope for anyone who speaks against the clergy (103.24–104.14), and the bishop is to expel anyone who contradicts his judgment (124.17–25)

[46] The *Apostolic Constitutions* similarly stresses the absolute power of the clergy. The bishop is teacher, minister, keeper of knowledge, lord, master, father, high priest, governor, king, mediator between God and the congregation, and himself like an earthly God (2.3.20; 2.4.26). The bishop is to be honored like God and the deacon like God's prophet (2.4.29–30). The clergy are the congregation's spiritual parents (2.4.33). To oppose the clergy is even worse than disobeying parents or kings; it is a rejection of God and Christ deserving of death (2.3.20; 6.1.2). In the *Apostolic Constitutions*, the division between laity and clergy is absolute. Only the bishop can

ordain others and only the ordained clergy can perform any ritual function such as baptizing, blessing, or laying on of hands (3.1.10–11).

[47] This emphasis on the clergy provides an important backdrop for understanding the reasons behind these documents' attack on widows. In her discussion of the relationship between purity, marginality, and social order, anthropologist Mary Douglas writes:

> ...where the social system is well-articulated, I look for articulate powers vested in points of authority; where the social system is ill-articulated, I look for inarticulate powers vested in those who are a source of disorder.[39]

[48] Modern scholars aptly place the *Didascalia* and the *Apostolic Constitutions* in the genre of early "church order;" these documents continually try to construct a well-articulated social structure. As Douglas predicts, these sources idealize a community where all power emanates from central points of well-defined authority. Yet these works' emphasis on the clergy's power and their constant polemic against any who would challenge clerical control suggest that, contrary to this ideal, their contemporary communities were involved in a continuing struggle to consolidate authority. Clerical leaders were trying to transfer power from marginal figures to the centralized spiritual and political control of the ordained clergy. (51) The symbol of a powerful widow threatened this development. Although a lay person, the widow retained a degree of authority otherwise seen only among ordained clergy. In the words of Peter Brown:

> Influential and devout widows were disturbingly amphibious creatures. They were neither unambiguously disqualified as married, sexually active persons, nor were they fully at home in the ranks of the clergy. They were the only lay persons who had accumulated all the attributes of effective members of the clergy, barring the crucial prerogative of ordained service at the altar. The influential widow stood for lay persons of either sex at their most active in the church. The role that members of the clergy were prepared to allow such a widow to play was a clear omen of [how] much or how

[39] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 1966; reprint, 1992) 99.

> little they valued the active participation of lay persons of either sex.[40]

[49] As argued by Douglas, those who do not easily conform to a society's categories are the most dangerous and the most heavily regulated.[41] Challenging the schemas of male/female and clergy/laity, widows were the source of disorder *par excellance*, and thus, key players in the clergy's battle to eliminate power from the margins. Douglas suggests a number of strategies societies use to resolve the ambiguity and eliminate the power of such figures. These include reducing the ambiguity by insisting on a single interpretation, affirming or strengthening the definition to which she does not conform, labeling her as dangerous, and controlling her physically.[42]

[50] The communities represented by the *Didascalia* and the *Apostolic Constitutions* employed all of these strategies in order to minimize the widows' power. To resolve any definitional ambiguities, the *Didascalia* insists that widows are part of the laity and tries to remove or regulate any aspects of a widow's life that could be considered clerical. The *Apostolic Constitutions* continues this trajectory, transferring the widow's social ministries to the ordained deaconess. At the same time, both documents continually emphasize the authority of what they deny widows, the power of the clergy; while unequivocally forcing widows into the conceptual category of laity, the communities expand the power differential between laity and clergy. As a result, the gulf between laity and clergy is large enough to make these categories mutually exclusive. On a rhetorical level, both works exploit a traditional ambivalence toward widows in order to label the widow as dangerous and in demand of regulation. In response to this generated need, these documents create structures to regulate the widow-they increase her financial dependency on the clergy, restrict her mobility, and control her behavior.

[51] Identifying the widow's ambiguity as a central concern in these documents affects the way readers view the goals of the *Didascalia*

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[40] Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christinity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) 148.

[41] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 94–113.

[42] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 39.

and the *Apostolic Constitutions*. For those who see these texts as solely trying to limit female power, there remains the question of why they transfer the widow's power to the deaconess instead of simply doing away with female authority all together. Methuen suggests one possibility: because she was female, the deaconess could minister to other women while maintaining the community's desire to conform with social norms of gender segregation; the benefits of such a system dissuaded the church from establishing an all-male clergy.[43] Elm suggests another factor: churches supported the deaconess' rise to compensate women for the decline of the widow's power and thus deter them from joining "heretical" groups.[44] A focus on the issue of the widow's ambiguity, however, provides a different perspective to this power shift between widow and deaconess. Unlike the "amphibious" widow, the deaconess was undeniably a member of the clergy. From the viewpoint of these two church orders, the deaconess' prominence is not so much an unfortunate logistical necessity as much as a deliberate move to exemplify the clergy's authority.

[52] An emphasis on the danger of ambiguity also influences modern perceptions of who was the target of these polemics. Methuen suggests that the vehemence of the anti-widow rhetoric indicates that it was aimed against widows in Jewish-Christian or more ascetically oriented communities.[45] A focus on the difficulties posed by the widows' ambiguous status suggests that such ambiguity would be sufficient to account for these attacks; the widows in question are not necessarily outside the community.

[53] Seeing the widow as a symbolic threat to the centralization of ecclesiastical power also begins to collapse scholarly distinctions between description and prescription. Modern scholars may never know how accurately these church orders describe the life of Syrian widows-Were funds distributed only by the clergy? How limited were actual widows' physical mobility? How closely did the communities follow the requirements for enrolling widows? Yet

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[43] Methuen, Charlotte. "'For Pagans Laugh to Hear Women Teach': Gender Stereotypes in the *Didascalia Apostollorum*," in R. Swanson (ed.), *Gender and the Church* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998) 30–2 and Methuen, "Widows, Bishops, and the Stuggle for Authority," 200–1.

[44] Elm, *Virgins of God*, 175.

[45] Methuen, "Widows, Bishops, and the Stuggle for Authority," 203.

even if the church never fully practiced these prescriptions, the very construction of the ideal widow as avoiding suspicion only through clearly differentiating herself from the clergy affected the lives of these widows and the structure of their communities.

[54] The widow was not a trivial figure in early Syrian communities, and her prominence in early church orders was far from incidental. These documents' portrayal of the widow and their advocacy of her control were part of a deliberate discursive strategy. As a result of their attempts to consolidate clerical power, the *Didascalia* and the *Apostolic Constitutions* were concerned with the regulation of widows. When these communities' leaders tried to increase the separation between clergy and laity, the widow became a nexus in this power struggle. As ambiguous entities and symbols for lay participation, early Christian leaders had to firmly categorize and strictly regulate widows for the clergy to gain full control of the church.

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