

The Influence of Paul's View of Women on the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*

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This paper examines the influence of Paul's letters on the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, especially in terms of the portrayal of women.¹ Paul's views concerning women's status in relation to their male counterparts, including his restrictions against women teaching and preaching in the early church, strongly influenced later Christian apocryphal works, such as the late second century apocryphal text known as the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*.² This text focuses on Thecla's insistence on remaining celibate and her desire to be baptized by Paul. This paper will analyze specific passages in Paul's letters that may have influenced this apocryphal story. The paper concludes by tracing the rise of the cult of St. Thecla that flourished during the early part of the Middle Ages, subsequently encouraging many virgin women to become martyrs.

Before analyzing the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, it is important to first look at passages within Paul's letters that have shaped interpreters' views concerning women's status, importance, and function in the early church. Women are believed by historians to have played a prominent role in the early Christian church. This is remarkable, considering the patriarchal society and traditions that prevailed at the time when Christianity was beginning to take root in towns across the Roman Empire. Galatians 3:28 is often cited for its inclusion of women in Christianity. In it, Paul attests to the equality of all, saying, "There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."³ Charles Cousar takes this to mean that "God is one and that, since he is one, he must be the God of the Gentiles as well as the Jews (so also of slaves and free, of males and females)."⁴

However, in contrast to the apparent equality given to women in Galatians 3:28, many verses in Paul's other letters seem to imply a distinct level of inequality. For instance, Paul states in 1 Corinthians 11:3 "the man is the head of the woman." Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 there seems to be a certain intolerance pertaining to the way in which women were allowed to participate in Paul's developing Christian communities. Here Paul states, "women should be silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak, but should be submissive...and if they want to learn something, they should ask their own husbands at home, for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church meeting."⁵ In Colossians 3:18 Paul demands, "Wives, be

¹ Biblical quotations in this paper are from the Holman Christian Standard Bible.

² Jan N. Bremmer, ed., *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla* (Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1996).

³ See also: 1 Corinthians 7:20-24 and Colossians 3:11 Holman Christian Standard Bible.

⁴ Charles B. Cousar, *Galatians*, Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, ed. James L. Mays (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 85. Cole refers to this as "the concept of the collective whole of the Christian church." R. A. Cole, *The Letter of Paul to the Galatians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, no. 9 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), 156. See also: James D.G. Dunn, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to St Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 70.

⁵ Lenski understands Paul to mean that "In many places woman may speak and teach even publicly, but in no place where she will exercise 'dominion over a man' by her teaching." R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1963), 616. Harrisville believes that Paul is more specifically "referring to women who disturb the worship by talking." Roy A. Harrisville, *I Corinthians*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1987), 244. However,

submissive to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.”⁶ Likewise, in Ephesians 5:22-23 Paul says, “Wives submit to your own husbands as to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife as also Christ is the head of the church.” Paul states in 1 Timothy 2:11 “A woman should learn in silence with full submission” and goes on to affirm that he does “not allow a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; instead she is to be silent.”⁷

Despite such hostility against the involvement of women in these early congregations, throughout Paul’s letters women fill important roles. In addition, certain women are commended for their roles in the development of early Christian communities and are frequently identified with a special significance. The most frequently mentioned woman is Priscilla, the wife of Aquila.⁸ In Romans 16:3-5 Paul greets Priscilla and Aquila as his “co-workers in Christ Jesus” who “risked their own necks for my life”⁹ and commands the recipient of the letter to “Greet also the church that meets in their home.”¹⁰ Phoebe is also an important woman; however, unlike

Keener believes “Because the church met in homes, questions would arise as to whether women should comport themselves as if in the domestic or public sphere.” Craig S. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 118.

⁶ Bruce states, “the structure of the family was already in being” and that “structure, hierarchical as it was, was left unaltered, apart from the introduction of the new principle, ‘as is fitting in the Lord’.” F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1984), 163. However, Patzia concludes, “There is nothing in this verse to suggest that subordination is based on a hierarchical relationship.” Arthur G. Patzia, *Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians*, A Good News Commentary, ed. W. Ward Gasque (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 73. See also: Dunn, *Cambridge Companion to St Paul*, 125-126.

⁷ In these verses, according to Fee, Paul is most likely denouncing “some kind of disruptive behavior, which perhaps included boisterous affirmation of the heresies, seems to lie behind these instructions.” Gordon T. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, Good News Commentary, ed. W. Ward Gasque (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 36. Debelius and Conzelmann conclude, “women should subordinate themselves to what the men in the congregation teach.” Martin Debelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. Philip Buttolph (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 47.

⁸ In some verses, Priscilla is alternately spelled: Prisca. Cf. 1 Corinth. 16:19, 2 Timothy 4:19, Acts 18:2, and Acts 18:18.

⁹ Romans 16:4. Jewett and Kotansky argue that “their ability to save Paul’s life in a threatening situation reveals a patronal capacity that derived from high social status.” Robert Jewett and Roy D. Kotansky, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, ed. Eldon Jay Epp (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 957.

¹⁰ Romans 16:5. In Acts 18:26, Luke reports that Apollos, having an incomplete understanding of the Lord, is taken by Priscilla and her husband to their home and “explained the way of God more accurately” indicating that they were equally considered teachers. Thiselton believes that Priscilla and Aquila were most likely “freedpersons of Jewish origin” and that they had to have been wealthy in order to have “a house large enough to accommodate meetings for worship.” Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 1343-1344. Significantly, Priscilla’s name appears before that of her husband four of the six times that they are mentioned. Jewett and Kotansky state that “the fact that Prisca’s name is mentioned first indicated her higher status in the Roman context” and that “less plausible suggestion is that her precedence indicated that she was the more active partner in leading the house church.” Jewett and Kotansky, *Romans*, 955. Concerning Priscilla’s name being given before that of her husband, Fee concludes that it “is so highly unusual in antiquity that we may also assume that hers was a significant role in their ministry.” Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 249-250. Whereas, Kelly says it is likely that “she belonged to a noble Roman family, or because she had a

Priscilla, she is mentioned without any connection to a husband. In Romans 16:1-2, Paul announces Phoebe to the Christian community in Rome. He states, "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church in Cenchræe so you should welcome her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever matter she may require your help. For indeed she has been a benefactor of many and of me also."¹¹ According to commentator Brenden Byrne, "Paul's commendation of Phoebe is an important indication of the leadership roles exercised by women in the early communities."¹² Jewett and Kotansky add that "the Roman recipients of the letter would understand her to be recommended as the patroness of the Spanish mission, whom Paul had announced in the preceding chapter."¹³

A quick glance at passages in Paul's letters pertaining to women leaves a general reader with a distinctive difficulty in completely understanding the status of women in the early Christian communities in light of some apparent contradictions in Paul's attitude. Contradictions formed from, on the one hand, the way in which they are commanded to behave by Paul, and on the other, the commendation women seem to receive for their good works and dutiful service to their community churches. Such contradictions are remedied by looking at specific passages within the context of the letter, the community for which it was written, and the issues being addressed in the letter. For instance, when put in its proper context Galatians 3:28 does not eliminate social classes. According to Hans Dieter Betz, "The Church is the body of Christ, a unified structure in which each member has a part and function."¹⁴ Social classes still exist; however, every person, whether a slave or woman, once baptized has the same access to the salvation offered to believers. All Christians are united through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church addresses this same issue. While women are said to be subordinate to men, men are below Christ in the hierarchy of Church organization.

While such strict statements as those presented in Colossians 3:18 and Ephesians 5:22-23, demanding the complete submission of women, seem somewhat unjustified in light of Galatians 3:28, Paul makes the relationship between a husband and wife analogous to Christ's relationship and commitment to the church. As noted by Francis Foulkes, Paul believes "husband and wife are to see their relationship as following the patterns of the relationship between Christ and his church."¹⁵ Likewise, Bruce adds, "the wife's subordination to her husband

more forceful personality." J.N.D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles: Timothy I & II, and Titus*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries, ed. Henry Chadwick (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 221. See also: Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina 5, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 322.

¹¹ Byrne believes Phoebe "is almost certainly the bearer of his letter to Rome." Of her being called 'deacon' Byrne states, "The title signals to the Roman community that the bearer of the letter is a personage of stature within the churches of the East." Of her being referred to as a patron, he concludes "The term designates wealthy women who acted as patrons for others." Brenden Byrne, *Romans*, Sacra Pagina 6, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), 447-448. Jewett and Kotansky say that "it appears that Phoebe was a Gentile Christian, probably a freed slave" that "functioned as the leader of the congregation." Jewett and Kotansky, *Romans*, 943-944. See also: Dunn, *Cambridge Companion to St Paul*, 91.

¹² Byrne, *Romans*, 448.

¹³ Jewett and Kotansky, *Romans*, 947.

¹⁴ Hans Dieter Betz, "Corinthians," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1992), 1147.

¹⁵ Foulkes goes on to add "The husband's commitment to his wife and to home responsibilities is certainly no less demanding than that asked of the wife but the two are different, and complementary." Francis Foulkes, *The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians: an Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), 162 and 164.

has as its counterpart the husband's obligation to love his wife."¹⁶ It is also important to note that scholars generally agree that Colossians and (especially) Ephesians were not written by Paul.¹⁷

At the opening of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, Paul has come to Iconium to teach. Thecla lives near the house in which Paul is preaching. She listens to Paul intently, ignoring both her mother and her betrothed. Because of her commitment to Paul's teaching she rejects her fiancée. Thamyris, Thecla's fiancé, goes to investigate Paul's teaching and finds Demas and Hermogenes outside arguing. They tell Thamyris, "he [Paul] takes away wives from young men and virgins from husbands." Thamyris himself believes he is "being robbed of marriage." At their instigation, Thamyris is convinced into prosecuting Paul, and he is sent to prison. Thecla continues to demonstrate her commitment to Paul by visiting him in prison. When she is found, both Paul and Thecla are brought before the governor. While Paul is banished from the city, Thecla is sentenced to be burned alive (instigated by her own mother).

God, however, intercedes and she is saved. Afterwards, she seeks out Paul, whom had been praying for her safety. She asks Paul to baptize her but he refuses. However, after initially rejecting her request to travel with him, the two travel together to Antioch. Upon arriving, Paul disappears and Thecla finds herself admired by yet another suitor, Alexander, a "leading member of the Antiochenes." We are told that she "ripped his cloak, took off the crown from his head, and made him a laughingstock." Humiliating Alexander she is thus sentenced to death a second time, this time to be fed to wild beasts. First she is tied to a lioness that refuses to harm her; the crowd is amazed, and she is taken from the amphitheater. When she is brought back she is set against both lions and bears. Again, a lioness prevents harm to Thecla by killing a charging bear. Thecla "saw a great ditch full of water" and decides to baptize herself. The pit of water is full of seals that are ready to eat her. God intercedes a second time, killing the seals with lightning and surrounds Thecla with "a cloud of fire," sparing Thecla another violent death.

Thecla goes to Myra in search of Paul, and upon finding him she explains her persecutions and baptism. We are told, "Paul marveled greatly and the hearers were confirmed." She is commanded by Paul to "Go and teach the word of God!" At the end of the story she leaves Paul in Myra, travels back to Iconium to visit with her mother and then on to Seleucia and "after enlightening many with the word of God she slept with a noble sleep."¹⁸

The central theme of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* is certainly that celibacy is to be considered preferable to marriage. Thecla is specifically referred to as a "virgin" who listened "to the things concerning purity which were being said by Paul." She is said to have watched "many women and virgins going in to Paul" and "desired to be made worthy to stand in the presence of Paul." There are many passages in the letters of Paul that could easily be viewed as having promoted the celibate life for which Thecla was willing to be condemned. The most important is 1 Corinthians 7 where Paul focuses on sex within a marriage relationship, in contrast to those who have chosen to remain unmarried and live a celibate life.¹⁹

¹⁶ Bruce, *Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 164. According to Patzia this is meant to describe "a relationship of mutual submission." Patzia, *Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians*, 73.

¹⁷ For a look at the arguments for and against the authenticity of Colossians see: Victor Paul Furnish, "Colossians," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1992), 1092-1095. For his treatment of Ephesians, see: Victor Paul Furnish, "Ephesians," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1992), 539-541.

¹⁸ In Acts 13:4 it is reported that Paul "came down to Seleucia." According to Hoppe, it is likely that Paul again passed through this port city, cf. Acts 14:26 and 15:39-41. Leslie J Hoppe, "Seleucia," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5 (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1992), 1076.

¹⁹ Dunn believes the problem that Paul is dealing with is centered on "whether married couples should have sex." Dunn, *Cambridge Companion to St Paul*, 71. Likewise, Harrisville states, "Paul will not allow the notion of marriage as surrogate for unchastity." Harrisville, *I Corinthians*, 107. See also: Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 62.

In verses 7-8, Paul specifically commends men and women who choose celibacy over marriage.²⁰ In v. 7 Paul wishes that everyone could live free from the flesh as he, but acknowledges that “each has his own gift from God, one this and another that.”²¹ In v. 8 he reinforces his previous statement, saying, “I say to the unmarried and to widows: It is good for them if they remain as I am.” In light of this verse, Craig Keener believes that Paul “recognizes that not all are endowed with the ability to endure indefinite abstinence.”²² Commenting on v. 9, which highlights the thesis of this chapter (conveyed in vv. 2-5), Keener goes on to conclude, “Paul accepts the value of celibacy for singles, but argues that it is better to marry than to be even more distracted by passion.” Most importantly to the Thecla stories are verses 34-35; Paul here states, “An unmarried woman or a virgin is concerned about the things of the Lord, so that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the things of the world how she may please her husband. Now I am saying this for your own benefit, not to put a restraint on you, but because of what is proper, and so that you may be devoted to the Lord without distraction.”²³ Also of importance is 2 Corinthians 6:14 where Paul commands, “Do not be mismatched with unbelievers.” While this verse seems not to be often associated specifically with marriage relationships it is possible that it added to Thecla’s reluctance to get married and her insistence on remaining celibate.²⁴

The beatitudes given by Paul in the post-biblical *Acts of Paul and Thecla* are written in the same style as Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount reported in Matthew’s Gospel. A few of Paul’s beatitudes specifically highlight the most important reasons for remaining celibate and of these, several parallel commands given by Paul in his canonical letters. For instance, in 2 Corinthians 6:16 Paul states, “we are the sanctuary of the living God.” The second beatitude given by Paul in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* states, “Blessed are they who have kept the flesh pure, for they shall

²⁰ Dunn concludes that in this chapter Paul, however, understands that “celibacy is not intrinsically better than marriage.” Dunn, *Cambridge Companion to St Paul*, 78.

²¹ Dunn notes that here “one’s social status is essentially irrelevant.” Dunn, *Cambridge Companion to St Paul*, 78. Harrisville adds, “the only activity which Paul will allow to interrupt cohabitation is that of prayer, meditation, contemplation.” Harrisville, *I Corinthians*, 107. While Lenski concludes, “The ideal is, therefore, not at all the cessation of marriage, or the abolition of the sexual side of marriage, or the celibate state for all.” Lenski, *St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, 280. Likewise, Thiselton argues, “the parallel is not celibacy versus marriage, but the gift of a positive attitude which makes the most of the freedoms of celibacy without frustration, and the positive attitude which caringly provides the responsibilities, intimacies, love, and ‘dues’ of marriage.” Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 513.

²² Keener goes on to conclude that “Paul accepted marriage as the best antidote for such passion” and “Paul’s articulation of the spiritual value of singleness provided support for later Christians impressed with the rise of sexual asceticism.” Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 62-63. Harrisville adds, “It is precisely because Paul regards as a gift from God what to others may simply appear as the natural order of things that he is forced to set down what he wishes as ‘counsel’ and not as command.” Harrisville, *I Corinthians*, 108.

²³ See also: 2 Cor. 11:2.

²⁴ 2 Cor. 6:14- 7:1 may not have been part of the original. Hans Dieter Betz, “Corinthians, Second Epistle,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1992), 1139-1140, 1150. Lenski, who does not treat this as a reference to marriage, nonetheless states, “the believer has been cleansed, the unbeliever has refused to be cleansed.” Lenski, *St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, 1078. He goes on to link this passage to Deut. 22:10, mentioned also by Danker, who concludes “the Corinthians should demonstrate their loyalty to Paul and to Jesus Christ by refusing to identify with the positions of those who challenge Paul’s apostolic authority and his counsels for growth in the faith.” Frederick W. Danker, *II Corinthians*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1989), 98. Keener, on the other hand, does conclude that this verse relates also to marriage relationships. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 194.

become a temple of God.”²⁵ More important is 1 Corinthians 7:29 in which Paul stresses, “From now on those who have wives should be as though they had none.” Almost identical to this is the fifth beatitude which states, “Blessed are they who have wives as if they had them not, for they shall inherit God.”

There are many correlations that can be seen between the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* and the Pastoral Epistles, namely 2 Timothy, most likely in order to add some validity to the text. For instance, the names of the persons traveling with Paul and Onesiphorus, the man whose house Paul is welcomed into to preach, are names that appear in 2 Timothy.²⁶ At the beginning of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* we are told that Paul is accompanied from Antioch by Demas and Hermogenes, men who also travel with Paul in 2 Timothy.²⁷

The apocryphal *Acts of Paul*, of which the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* comprises a large part, was most likely written at the end of the second century.²⁸ Once established as a part of the larger work, the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* began to circulate independently.²⁹ Early descriptions of the text can be found in Eusebius’ (240-309 C.E.) *History of the Church*³⁰ and in Jerome’s (347-420 C.E.) *Lives of Illustrious Men*.³¹ Jerome denounces the text’s authenticity based partially on evidence from Tertullian (160-220 C.E), whose work *On Baptism* testifies that the *Acts of Paul* should be considered heretical. Tertullian writes, “the presbyter who composed that writing...after being convicted, and confessing that he had done it from love of Paul, was removed from his office. For how credible would it seem, that he who has not permitted a woman even to learn with overboldness, should give a female the power of teaching and of baptizing!”³²

The influence of Thecla’s story, as examined in the *Acts* and the *Letters* of Paul, is apparent well into the fourth century C.E. A significant example of the influence of Thecla’s story is found in Gregory of Nyssa’s (335-394 C.E.) description of his sister Macrina’s birth.³³ Gregory writes, “when her mother was giving birth to her, she dreamed three times that she was holding her child while a majestic figure, the virgin martyr Thecla, gave her the name Thecla.” Other positive references to Thecla include Gregory Nazianzen (329-389 C.E.), Egeria, the fourth century pilgrim, and Ambrose (338-397 C.E). In his oration *On the Great Athanasius Bishop of*

²⁵ See also: 1 Cor. 3:16-17 and 6:19.

²⁶ 2 Tim. 1:16 and 4:19.

²⁷ For mention of Demas see: 2 Tim. 4:10; for mention of Hermogenes see: 2 Tim. 1:15 (cf. 4:14).

²⁸ Willis Barnstone, ed., *The Other Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 1984), 445, and Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 2, ed. R. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1991), 214 and 234-235.

²⁹ A. F. J. Klijn, “The Apocryphal Correspondence between Paul and the Corinthians,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 17 (March, 1963): 10-16.

³⁰ Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., “The Church History of Eusebius,” in *Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1 (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 344, 347. According to the editors this early reference is not to be understood as the same Thecla, see: n. 4 p. 344. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 215-216.

³¹ Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., “Jerome: Lives of Illustrious Men,” in *Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3 (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 363-364.

³² Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., “Tertullian: On Baptism,” in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3 (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 677. Citing 1 Timothy 4:7, MacDonald believes, “the author of the Pastoral Epistles wrote in Paul’s name in order to counteract the image of Paul as given in stories told by women,” referring specifically to the *Acts of Paul*. Dennis R. MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle: The Battle for Paul in Story and Canon* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 14.

³³ Peter Brown, *The Cult of Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 58. See also: Dennis R. MacDonald, “Thekla, Acts of,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 6 (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1992), 444.

Alexandria, Gregory Nazianzen writes in praise of the city of Seleucia.³⁴ Egeria, on her way back from the Holy Land records in her *Diary of a Pilgrimage* a visit she made to city of Seleucia, where Thecla was said to remained after leaving Iconium. After briefly describing the basilica and monastic cells devoted to Thecla she says, “Having arrived there in the name of God, a prayer was said at the shrine and the complete Acts of Saint Thecla was read. I then gave unceasing thanks to Christ our God, who granted me, an unworthy woman and in no way deserving, the fulfillment of my desires in all things.”³⁵ Finally, most striking is Ambrose who, in his *Concerning Virgins* praises Thecla’s commitment to virginity, going so far as to compare her to the Virgin Mary.³⁶

³⁴ Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., “Gregory Nazianzen, Select Orations,” in *Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7 (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 275.

³⁵ George E. Gingras, trans., *Egeria: Diary of a Pilgrimage* (New York: Newman Press, 1970), 87-88.

³⁶ Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., “Ambrose: Select Works and Letters,” in *Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 10 (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 376, 461.