

Ambivalent Attitudes toward Women in Late Medieval Europe: Misogyny and the Cult of Women

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I. Introduction

In general medieval Europe has been described as a male dominated hierarchical society in which lords, priests, knights, and serfs were the main characters within the frame of feudalism and Christianity. In this picture, women seem to have existed as invisible and helpless members of the community. However, it is worthy to fathom the real position of women and their goals of life.

Medieval Europe was ruled by men mainly because militaristic power was more valuable after the Germanic invasions in the fourth and fifth centuries. Between the ninth and eleventh centuries the Vikings and Magyars invaded Europe and Europeans continued to conflict with the Muslims through the crusades. The militaristic needs of this unstable period reinforced male dominance-it was a world in which soldiers ruled.

Europe underwent some significant socio-economic changes between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. For example, male population substantially decreased because men engaged in warfare for a long time. As a result, the sex ratio was unbalanced and women became a surplus in the population.¹ Also commercial capitalism was introduced to Europe through the frequent contacts with the Muslims. More importantly, a new inheritance system known as primogeniture substituted the old system that every son and daughter had equal rights for property.

Meanwhile, it was women that were segregated most in the process of this transition. In particular, as Caroline Bynum has pointed out, misogyny was intensified and the climate of opinion against women among the clergymen became harsher.² Ironically, however, it is true that the cult of women also rose apart from misogyny.

Then how and why did misogyny and the cult of women ambivalently exist between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries? This study started with a curiosity of this question. Three issues will be discussed in this article. First, what was the real cause of harsher misogyny in this period? Second, why did the cult of women and courtly love appear alongside misogyny? Lastly, how did medieval women respond and react to the ambivalent attitudes toward themselves? With a discussion and analysis of these questions, we can illuminate medieval women's lives and their world-views from a different perspective.³

II. Misogyny and Its Causes

The root of misogyny of medieval Europe can be found in the Old Testament in which the first woman Eve seduced innocent Adam to disobey God's order and eat "the forbidden fruit" at the

¹ Gerda Lerner, trans. in Korean by In Sung Kim, 『역사 속의 페미니스트: 중세에서 1870년까지』, Seoul, 1998, p. 111. (Original: Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: from the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy* (New York: Oxford University, 1993)); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), p. 226.

² Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp. 14-16, 216-217.

³ I would like to acknowledge that this article is mainly focused on the time period between 1000 and 1300.

instigation of Satan. According to the Bible, all human beings' pains and miseries originated from her sin and this story became the source of medieval misogyny in that all women were the daughters of Eve. Also the writers of the Greek and Roman myths accused a woman Pandora of the cause of the unhappiness and pains of all humans. In short, the very seed of misogyny was already deep-seated in the ancient world, out of which medieval Europe emerged.

It is also difficult to ignore the influences of the Greek philosophers. For instance, Plato highly valued human spirit as metaphysical but he distrusted body as physical. Aristotle also rated sexual desires and appetites for food low while he argued women should obey men's authority as the law of the nature.⁴ The thoughts of the ancient philosophers helped to form the dualism of Scholasticism and the idea that men represent 'spirit' while women represent 'body'-symbolizing senses and seduction- which invited the belief men are superior and women are inferior.⁵

These diverse elements made stereotyped ideas about gender in the Western world, that men were asexual beings with pure souls while women were sexual beings full of carnal desires. So, regardless of their class, medieval women were considered inferior to men and by nature subject to men's authority.⁶

In particular, misogyny and aversion to sex in medieval Europe had become more distinct since the tenth century when monasticism spread more broadly to the whole of Christianity. Eudes(879-942), an abbot of Cluny who was obsessed with the idea of contamination through any sexual behaviors, repeated that Satan must have controlled people less if there were no sex.⁷

Misogyny appeared much stronger in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and medieval Europeans' way of thinking toward marriage and sex took a part in this process. The consciousness of sex as the root of evil was deep seated in medieval societies, while people considered that the real purpose of marriage was to maintain their lineage.

However, it is not probable that medieval men's sexual desires decreased even though there existed plenty of rhetoric related to the abhorrence of women and sex. So we should find more direct causes of the intensified misogyny during this period somewhere else. In other words, it was the institutions that suppressed and estranged men from their sexual desires, inviting strong misogyny around the twelfth century.

Above all, the Catholic Church had prohibited marriages between close kin since the ninth century and as a result, in fact, it was more difficult for men to marry. The evidence that medieval men's sexual desires did not decrease, regardless of their intensified aversion to sex, can be found in the fact that men who had difficulties in marrying often abducted women. There are many stories about the abductions of females in the existing sources of the ninth century. And widows, nuns, married or unmarried women were good games for the chase of medieval youths.⁸

The suppression of sexual desires of medieval men continued. The Church started to prohibit clergymen from any "sexual behaviors, money, and weapons" to prevent their contamination from the secular world in the year of 1000. This kind of prohibition had been limited to the monks

⁴ R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 70-71.

⁵ Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, p. 67.

⁶ Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, pp. 26-30.

⁷ Duby, trans. in Korean by Ae Ri Choi, 『중세의 결혼(기사, 여성, 성직자)』, Seoul, 1999 (Original: Georges Duby, *Le chevalier, la femme et le prêtre*, Paris: Hachette Littératures, 1981), pp. 69-70.

⁸ Duby, 『중세의 결혼』, p. 54.

before, but now this was extended to all clergymen related to the Church.⁹

This prohibition continued through the Gregorian reform which obligated clerical celibacy in the late eleventh century(1075). It was usual for a medieval clergyman to have a wife or a concubine before this reform. Even in the twelfth century when the duty of clerical celibacy was strengthened and the reformers criticized the moral decadence of the clergy, it was still believed that clerical concubinage was not shameful.¹⁰ However, a significant change appeared this time in that medieval men, who wanted to rise to a high position as churchmen, did not feel right any more if they got married or had concubines. With a sense of sin about their sexual desires, medieval men branded the women who were close to them as sexual seducers, expressing their antipathy against women through strong misogyny.

The twelfth century was also the time when women's religious movements as well as the cult of Virgin Mary surged. In this period, many women more actively participated in religious movements by joining abbeys or becoming beguines.¹¹ However, the authorities of the Church considered that it was dangerous for the monks to be close to these religious women in keeping their celibacy. So the male authorities began to limit the chances for women in joining the religious houses to prevent any contamination of monks from women.¹²

More significantly the time period of blooming of women's religious movements coincided with the increase of medieval men who became clergymen or monks with the frequent foundations of churches and monasteries.¹³ Then, how can we explain the unusual religious zeal around the twelfth century? To find a right answer to this question, we need to pay attention to the new institution of primogeniture which was established by 1000. Medieval children had previously inherited their parents' property equally, regardless of their birth order or gender. But now medieval sons and daughters, except for the heir who inherited all the titles and lands, were excluded from the inheritance of property after the introduction of primogeniture.

Many sons and brothers of the nobility, precluded from the inheritance by primogeniture, chose to become priests or monks. They join the monasteries or churches which their families built or renovated and controlled. About the rapid increase of churches and monasteries in the eleventh century, a medieval chronicler, Raoul, described that the world robed herself "with a white mantle of churches." Guibert de Nogent also testified that monasteries were miraculously increased until about 1075.¹⁴ And it was quite common for contemporary men and women to join the many newly-built religious houses.¹⁵

This situation was not limited to northern France, where Georges Duby has identified it through his researches. It also took place other places in Europe like England. In 1066 there were 13 religious houses for women and nearly 50 for men in England. Thereafter the number of religious houses rapidly increased, reaching about 60 for women and almost 500 for men in 1154.¹⁶

⁹ Georges Duby, *The Chivalrous Society* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1980), p. 91.

¹⁰ Christopher Brooke, *Europe in the Central Middle Ages 962-1154* (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), p. 137.

¹¹ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp. 17-18, 111.

¹² Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 15.

¹³ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 24.

¹⁴ John W. Baldwin, *The Scholastic Culture of the Middle Ages, 1000-1300* (Lexington, Mass., 1971), p. 15; Saeng Yeoul Choi, 「수도원개혁운동에서 귀족과 여성의 역할」, 『사총』 51 (2000. 6), p. 44, note. 11.

¹⁵ Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, p. 120.

¹⁶ D. Knowles and R. N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses: England and Wales* (London, 1971, repr. 1994), pp. 488-495;

How, then, can we explain this situation that the number of the religious houses for women increased about 4.6 times and that for men about 10 times in little less than 90 years? Can we just think that the number of the religious houses of this time period sharply increased because of the religious zeal of contemporary English people? This is an arguable issue which needs further researches. However, it is evident this phenomenon was deeply related to the fact that the sons and daughters excluded from inheritance had no other options than to join the religious houses when primogeniture spread broadly in Europe beyond northern France.

It is not difficult to imagine the agonies of the medieval men who had to become priests and monks as well as to keep their celibacy as an obligation by the rule of primogeniture. It is clear how vulnerable the clergy were with their sexual desires in those days through the comments of Bernard of Clairvaux(d. 1153) when he warned the monks: "To be always with a woman and not to have sexual relations with her is more difficult than to raise the dead."¹⁷ The misogyny of a Premonstratensian abbot Conrad of Marchtal, who was typical of clergyman of the twelfth century, seems quite natural when he argued "the wickedness of women is greater than all other wickedness of the world and ... the poison of asps and dragons is more curable and less dangerous to men than the familiarity of women."¹⁸

The mentality of medieval men who loathed women can be seen through the following comments in *Mahieu's Lamentations* written in the 13th century: "marriage is harder than celibacy. Women are impossible, they talk too much. Why did the Saviour first show himself to women after resurrection? Because he wanted everyone to know about it fast. Why did Jesus not marry? He knew better."¹⁹

However, medieval men's sexual desires were not decreased regardless of their loathing of women or their sense of guilt about sex. It was not unusual for medieval clergy and knights frequently to consult prostitutes to quell their sexual desires. Even an heir had no option but to get services from prostitutes or have concubines until he married because he was prohibited to marry until his father, the family head, died. This can be proved through the fact that there were considerable numbers of licensed prostitutes all over the Europe.

In addition, the purpose of medieval marriage and cohabitation was not for love or happiness between lovers but for the lineage by the reproduction of children. Therefore medieval men's suspicion and antipathy against women still existed even after their marriage. The social abhorrence of sex and the suspicion that women had stronger sexual desires and passion like burning fire drove medieval men to regard women as the beings of distrust and contempt.²⁰

Medieval men also suspected that women, especially their wives, might control them by adding potions or poisons to food. Burchard of Worms listed the spells and incantations resorted to by women in the *Decretum* compiled between 1008 and 1012 and most of them were about the manipulation of food, for instance, "increasing or decreasing the sexual ardor of a husband by adding to his food such things as menstrual blood and semen."²¹ Since women are the main providers and preparers of food and closely related to food, they could use it to control men.²²

Christopher Brooke, *Europe in the Central Middle Ages 962-1154* (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), p. 130.

¹⁷ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 16

¹⁸ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 15

¹⁹ John H. Mundy, *Europe in the High Middle Ages 1150-1300* (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), p. 132.

²⁰ Duby, 『중세의 결혼』, pp. 61-64.

²¹ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 190; Burchard of Worms, *Decretum*, bk. 20, chap. 152, PL 140, cols. 1012-13.

Medieval husbands were afraid of their wives' revenge to them through “adultery or murder” as much as they distrusted and loathed women and actually many lords were poisoned by their wives according to the contemporary chroniclers.²³

From this perspective, medieval misogyny was men's own anger projected from their suppressed sexual desires and fear of women as the seducers of men who were estranged from marriage and sex.²⁴ In other words, the true reason for misogyny around the twelfth century can be found in medieval men themselves rather than in medieval women.

III. The Cult of Women and Its Causes

On the other hand, the cult of women also existed apart from misogyny in European societies around the twelfth century. Medieval women were sublimed as the objects of respect and adoration in the poetry of troubadours.²⁵ Then how did the cult of women coexist with misogyny side by side?

Primogeniture was also deeply relevant to the cult of women. Medieval aristocracy strictly restricted the inheritance and marriage of sons other than the heir, usually the eldest, to keep its stability as a class after the establishment of primogeniture.²⁶ In this process, a group of ordinary knights emerged who expanded in number in the eleventh century. And most of them remained single, mainly because they did not have any financial means to marry and support their own families.²⁷

Medieval knights, not chosen to be the heir, were forced to live in poverty for their whole lifetime as unmarried men and make a venture. Many ended up being killed in the battles. Under this circumstance, wealthy heiresses became the “goals” to win by any means for the wandering knights.²⁸ Knights, estranged from inheritance because of primogeniture, were eager to marry rich heiresses to rise in the world.

There was also a reason for the medieval knights to wander other than their estrangement from inheritance. That is, they had difficulties in finding right spouses nearby because of the Church's prohibition of marriage between close kin. As a matter of fact, it was much harder for the knights to marry since almost all members were related in blood through the alliances between aristocratic families.²⁹ Therefore, medieval knights hoped to meet women who were rich but not related in blood by wandering distant places, and if the women met the qualifications they could become the objects of adoration and cult.

The idealization of love between a knight and a lady is deeply related to the custom of a medieval marriage. The possible age of an heir to marry was usually in his late thirties or early forties because he could marry only after his father died. Unlike male heirs, the age of medieval

²² Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 190.

²³ Duby, 『중세의 결혼』, p. 133.

²⁴ Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, p. 79.

²⁵ Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, pp. 121-122; Robin W. Winks and Teofilo F. Ruiz, *Medieval Europe and the World From Late Antiquity to Modernity, 400-1500* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 159-162.

²⁶ Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, pp. 168-169.

²⁷ Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, p. 87.

²⁸ Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, p. 110.

²⁹ Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, p. 119.

women who were married to them was usually in their mid- or late teens.³⁰ So it was difficult for the couple to feel romantic love because of their age gap. In this situation, it was more probable for a young wife of the lord to feel love with a knight who was about the same age. Besides, the possibility that the aged lord would be killed in the frequent battles was high and once the lord was dead, his widow had the right to inherit his property unless there were claimants. If a knight was successfully married to the widow, he could possess the property as her new husband.³¹

Due to these practical and realistic reasons, there existed an atmosphere conducive to adoration and worship of young and rich women among medieval knights and ambitious men. In reality, some knights could fulfill their dreams by marrying rich women and had their own families. So the ultimate goal of medieval knights' cult and worship toward women was not in the love itself but in the realistic calculation or the aspiration to access to the ruling class through the marriages with rich heiresses. From this perspective, the cult of women was nothing but a mirror of a harsher material crisis of medieval knights. A rich lady was the dream and the symbol of romance for the medieval knights who were struggling with poverty.³²

One of the reasons for the success of a medieval man through his marriage with a rich widow was that a medieval woman had more independent rights to choose her second husband without her father's supervision, even though her first marriage was controlled by her father. She got out of the direct intervention of her father and her relatives by her first marriage, and she became independent from patriarchal regulations by the death of her husband.³³ Therefore, it was quite natural for medieval men to prefer rich widows to unmarried girls as their wives. If he won the love of and married a rich widow, he could acquire her property and control it more easily.³⁴ Then, more strictly speaking, medieval knights' cult of women was the use of women rather than respect.

Moreover, since the settlement of primogeniture, aristocratic families often tried to marry their sons with the daughters from equal or higher ranking families while their daughters with the sons from equal or lower ranking families to get loyalty from them. In particular, aristocratic men made the effort to increase the power of his own family by marrying a lady superior to him.³⁵ So, women from higher class were the objects to admire for the lower class men who desired to marry a noble lady. In relation to this, Howard Bloch argued that in a medieval society "courtliness is a much more effective tool even than misogyny for the possession and repossession of woman" in "the eternal war of the sexes."³⁶

Also the eleventh and twelfth centuries were the time when Europeans showed their increased secular greed through the long engagement in the crusades. So the trend of the cult of women was deeply related to the mentality of commercial capitalism introduced to Europe since the late

³⁰ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 226.

³¹ Duby, 『중세의 결혼』, pp. 128-130.

³² Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, pp. 166-168.

³³ Seong Pyo Hong, 「혼인을 통해서 본 중세 영국 여성의 지위」, 『역사학보』, 156 (1997), p. 71.

³⁴ The duration of medieval marriages was not long and medieval people usually married twice or three times in their lifetime. Medieval marriage as an institution was unstable like that of today. Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, pp. 72-75; Joan M. Ferrante, "Male fantasy and female reality in courtly literature," *Women's Studies*, Vol. 11(1984), Issue 1/2, p. 69; Brooke, *Europe in the Central Middle Ages 962-1154*, p. 141.

³⁵ Saeng Yeoul Choi, 「수도원 개혁운동에서 귀족과 여성의 역할」, p. 59.

³⁶ Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, p. 196.

tenth century.³⁷ Rich and powerful women were the object of cult, not the object of hate in the time when money and power were counted invaluable.³⁸ Now medieval Europeans were eager to acquire wealth and to become ruling class by any means because they regarded material security as an important power. In this process, some wealthy noble women or urban upper class women, who had properties and economic assets, were treated favorably while poor women like urban low class women or peasant women were discriminated against. In this way, the true motivation of the cult of women was the material-oriented and power-oriented desires. So old and poor women with no male protection were frequently persecuted whenever there were crises in medieval European communities.

The spread of the cult of Virgin Mary in the twelfth century was another cause of the rise of the cult of women. The enthusiasm of the cult of Mary among medieval women spread broadly and this had the social effect of generating greater respect for women generally. The social atmosphere of the cult of Mary and women also made the venomous tongues of misogynistic clergymen somewhat quiet down. Even though the cult of women as well as the cult of Mary did not establish the equality of women to men, it encouraged medieval women to have confidence in themselves and to pursue independent lives by taking part in religious movements or economic activities.

IV. Women's Response and Resistance

Medieval women had similar difficulties when medieval men, estranged from inheritance by primogeniture, became clergymen or knights. In European society between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, women outnumbered and outlived men, so they had difficulties in finding husbands. Moreover, a number of women could not marry at all because of the skyrocketing dowries.³⁹

Noble women not infrequently joined religious houses because they were unable to marry regardless of their will. Due to high dowries, it was not easy for middle or low class women to marry, either. Peasant women also had the same difficulties in marriage since they should bring dowries when they marry and pay taxes to the lords to get a marriage license.⁴⁰

In late medieval families, giving birth to a daughter meant a burden to her father. Also women were not always favorable to marriage. When women were married, they had to face the significant risks and the pains of childbirth; they had to obey their husbands and deal with endless house chores as well. Under these circumstances, some medieval women chose to remain single by rejecting marriage.⁴¹

In medieval Europe, a child could become an adult and be free from his or her parents not by reaching a certain age, but by marrying, joining a religious house or gaining economic independence. So one of the ways a woman might become independent was by joining a religious house.⁴² Joining a religious house was not just a means for independence from her family. Also the

³⁷ Robert S. Lopez, *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, 950-1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 86.

³⁸ Brooke, *Europe in the Central Middle Ages 962-1154*, p. 137.

³⁹ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp. 19, 226.

⁴⁰ Rodney H. Hilton, "Women traders in medieval England," *Women's Studies*, Vol. 11(1984), Issue 1/2, pp. 139-140, 149.

⁴¹ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 226.

⁴² Heath Dillard, "Medieval women in Castilian town communities," *Women's Studies*, Vol. 11(1984), Issue 1/2, p. 120.

broadly spread loathing of sex in those days made both men and women regard a single life as idealistic.⁴³

However, the existence of a number of independent single women who declined to marry was exceptional. It was still the social norm that a woman at a certain age should get married and be protected by her husband after being independent from her father.⁴⁴ Of course, we cannot be sure what all medieval women did think of marriage. But it is certain that considerable number of women actively resisted marriage, as documented through the records of medieval women who became saints and nuns.⁴⁵

There were two ways of resistance for medieval women to avoid marriage. One is a short term resistance like running away on the wedding day. The other is a more systematic and long term resistance, by which they abstained from food after their puberty ages to make their appearance ugly and to stop menstruation, which was closely related to pregnancy, to avoid marriage itself. In the case of a medieval woman, her husband was chosen by her parents and her marriage was decided by the order of her parents. So fasting was an effective weapon for medieval girls to avoid unwanted marriages.⁴⁶

More significantly, most medieval women did not agree with the male theologians and clergymen when they despised women and expressed misogyny in their writings. Medieval women responded to misogyny and male supremacy by emphasizing themselves as human beings that have both soul and body and proving individual excellence rather than by arguing the differences between men and women by gender.⁴⁷

When misogyny appeared stronger around the twelfth century, a lot of women resisted this unreasonable climate of opinion against them whether they were conscious or unconscious. For example, some religious women expressed their anger when religious men controlled them and treated them as inferior beings through various types of penance, including extreme fasting and physical asceticism, just as the hermits of the deserts in the fourth century.⁴⁸

In a sense women's religious movements in the late eleventh and the early twelfth centuries, with their vigorous pursuit of religious leadership, were an alternative way of living for women who rejected traditional lives for them through marriage and male protection. In particular, women's religious enthusiasm along with the cult of Virgin Mary spread widely throughout Europe was beyond the level of simple participation in the spiritual movements of the age.

That many women zealously joined the religious movements in those days is demonstrated by evidence from Fontevrault Abbey and the Order of Premonstre. Even though the exact number of female members was unknown, the total number of members of the former in the 1140s was 5000 while the number of female members of the latter in 1150 was 10,000.⁴⁹ This is significant in that these female members belonged to the upper class, mostly aristocratic women, except for some cases since they had to bring admission fees when they joined these religious houses. The fact

⁴³ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 20.

⁴⁴ Ranft, *Women in Western Intellectual Culture, 600-1500*, p. 53; Ferrante, "Male fantasy and female reality in courtly literature," p. 68.

⁴⁵ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 222.

⁴⁶ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp. 222-223; Ranft, *Women in Western Intellectual Culture, 600-1500*, p. 109.

⁴⁷ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp. 295-296.

⁴⁸ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp. 208-210, 243-244.

⁴⁹ Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, pp. 179-180; Yong Ku Cha, 「중세의 이단파 여성」, 『역사학보』 164집(1999.12), p. 236.

that the large number of religious women came from the upper class has important meanings. This meant not only that women's religious movement was vigorous but also that a lot of medieval women were estranged from marriage because of the social structures like primogeniture and the rise of marriage dowries since the eleventh century.

The center of the activities of medieval aristocratic women was mainly convents. Throughout the Middle Ages, royal and aristocratic women built convents and donated their properties to them.⁵⁰ The dramatic increase of female religious houses and women's religious fervor induced male hostilities and the financial exhaustion of the new religious orders which dispatched their priests to supervise women's spiritual life and sacraments for nuns. The distinctive religious enthusiasm of women in the twelfth century confused male religious leaders and, as a result, the Order of Premonstre and the Cistercian order prohibited the admissions of women in 1198.⁵¹ Moreover, male religious leaders repressed women's religious movements, reinforcing misogyny when monks had difficulties in keeping their celibacy due to the dramatic increase of nuns.⁵²

Women turned to religious organizations like the beguines after their religious fervor was denied by the established religious orders. One of the causes of the popularity of the beguines and its quick spread among women was that they did not have to pay entrance fees unlike the regular religious houses for women.⁵³

In addition to this, women were attracted to heretic groups like Waldensians and Cathars, in which they were allowed to be independent both in economic and religious meanings as single women. Unlike the established religious orders, these religious groups allowed mystical ways of faith which appealed more to women, encouraging them to live independently beyond the limits of patriarchal and male dominant social systems.⁵⁴

From this perspective, it is very probable that there were more women in the beguines, Waldensians, and Cathars than in the established religious houses for women even if the exact number is not known.⁵⁵ All women, regardless of their social status, could join these religious organizations with no admission fee.

The active participation of women in these heretic groups also raised issues of religious leadership between men and women. The Cathars and Waldensians allowed women to be clergy and to preach, unlike the Catholic Church that denied women's religious leadership. For instance, 30 percent of the clergy of the Cathars was women.⁵⁶ The Catholic Church and its leaders were greatly disgusted about the female priests of the heretic groups, as shown in a report that criticized a female clergy of the Waldensians as "a preaching whore" in the late twelfth century.⁵⁷

The intensified misogyny and the enthusiasm of women's religious movements in the twelfth

⁵⁰ Lerner, 『역사속의 페미니스트』, pp. 44-45, 79; Mundy, *Europe in the High Middle Ages 1150-1300*, p. 131; Ranft, *Women in Western Intellectual Culture, 600-1500*, p. 37.

⁵¹ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 15; Yong Ku Cha, 「중세의 이단과 여성」, p. 236.

⁵² Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 15.

⁵³ Although the beguines were not persecuted by the Church unlike Waldensians and Cathars, finally they were also suppressed

by the Council of Vienne in 1311-1312. Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 22.

⁵⁴ Lerner, 『역사속의 페미니스트』, pp. 107-117

⁵⁵ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 18.

⁵⁶ Yong Ku Cha, 「중세의 이단과 여성」, p. 238.

⁵⁷ Yong Ku Cha, 「중세의 이단과 여성」, p. 244. note, 80.

century were partly related to women's lost religious leadership.⁵⁸ In the early Christian church, women acted as “prophets, missionaries, heroic martyrs and leaders.”⁵⁹ Even between the tenth and the early twelfth centuries, women did preaching, confession, blessing, and even lead rituals known as “the masses without priests” from time to time as the quasi-clergy.⁶⁰

However, women lost their quasi-clerical roles and their religious roles had become gradually criticized. Women were thoroughly deprived of their religious leadership partly allowed to them before. For example, powerful abbesses like Hildegard of Bingen(1098-1179), who showed strong leadership through a conflict with the archbishop of Mainz, disappeared when the tension and conflicts between the two genders for religious leadership were intensified in the late twelfth century. Also most double monasteries controlled by women were abolished by the thirteenth century.⁶¹ Thereafter medieval women could keep their faith only as the laity with the dissatisfaction of their religious status.

As time went by, the male religious elites solidified their exclusive leadership in the Catholic Church by articulating their thoughts. In about 1245, Bernard of Parma proclaimed that “whatever might be found in earlier practice women could not teach or preach, touch sacred vessels, veil or absolve nuns, or exercise judgment.”⁶² The authoritative theologians like Thomas Aquinas also argued that “women were unfit for priesthood because of their natural state of subjection” as well as the gender of Christ being male.⁶³

The existence of intense competitions between medieval men and women for religious leadership can also be seen through the sharp increase of the number of female saints. Between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the number of female saints doubled.⁶⁴

Women's religious fervor produced a lot of female saints and became the driving force of mass religious movements led by women between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. However, the competitions and conflicts between the two sexes for religious leadership also became a cause of intensified misogyny.⁶⁵ As a result, women who were not obedient to the social and religious orders based upon male hegemony were persecuted as heretics or witches.⁶⁶

V. Conclusion

One of the causes of misogyny in medieval Europe was a viewpoint of women as the daughters of Eve who seduced a man to be decadent. The negative ideas about women were formed into misogyny and maintained throughout the Middle Ages. Misogyny was more intensified among the religious men and the Church leaders around the twelfth century. Ironically, the cult of women also spread among medieval men in the same period and the objects of the cult of women were limited

⁵⁸ Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 46-47.

⁵⁹ Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, p. 85.

⁶⁰ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 21.

⁶¹ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 22.

⁶² Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 21

⁶³ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 217.

⁶⁴ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp. 13-21.

⁶⁵ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 22.

⁶⁶ For instance, Margaret Porete, a mystic and beguine, was accused of heresy and burned at the stake in Paris in 1310. Ranft, *Women in Western Intellectual Culture, 600-1500*, p. 115; Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 22.

to the rich aristocratic and upper class women.

Above all, the immediate reason for the ambiguous attitudes toward women in medieval Europe can be seen in the structural or institutional changes around the eleventh century. For instance, a lot of medieval men and women were estranged from inheritance and marriage by primogeniture. Medieval men's sexual desires were suppressed by a series of religious regulations such as the Gregorian reform. Also money and power were the main pursuit for ambitious medieval people since the introduction of commercial capitalism into the society.

After the establishment of primogeniture, medieval men, segregated from inheritance of titles and lands, became priests and knights that composed a new rising class. The intensified misogyny as well as the cult of women between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries was a by-product in the process of these medieval men to join the mainstream ruling class. Medieval men who wanted to rise as clergymen saw the religious women in rivalry for leadership through the eyes of distrust and aversion. The poor wandering knights eager for money and lands looked for rich heiresses to marry by admiring women with much adoration.

Therefore, the double attitudes toward medieval women were a strategic difference between the priests and knights to rise in the world rather than a contradiction. The essence of the formation of a new ruling class led by clergies and knights was to solidify the male hegemony. In this process, it was women that were thoroughly estranged and discriminated from their communities.

However, medieval women reacted in their own ways rather than helplessly succumb to the male dominance. Some women rejected traditional ways of living through marriage and childbearing by pursuing independent life. For instance, a lot of women, such as Hildegard of Bingen and Mechtild of Magdeburg, chose to become religious women by joining religious houses and the beguines, creating their new identities by showing their ardent faith.

Women's religious fervor around the twelfth century was truly encouraged by the cult of Virgin Mary, but partly driven by their dissatisfaction with the religious and social systems ruled by men. The evidence of medieval women's resistance against male domination and their struggles with men for leadership can be found in that substantial number of women joined the Waldensians and Cathars that allowed them to preach. In fact, some of them preached as clergies. Some religious women even tried to prove their faith equal to that of men through their extreme asceticism like fasting. Medieval women also pursued economic independence by engaging in commerce and handicrafts, rendering aid to the poor in charity. Of course, it is hard to say that there existed feminists who worked for women's rights in a modern standard. However, it is certain that a lot of women struggled to give their own voice in a male dominated society, endeavoring to show their capabilities as an equal member of the Christianity,