

## MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

This issue of *MFN* focuses on “Motherhood and Fatherhood in the Middle Ages.” When we begin our study of medieval women with a look at Biblical passages that were authoritative during the Middle Ages, my undergraduate students are always struck by 1 Timothy 2:15: “Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.” Based on this text they expect to find motherhood as an absolute norm for medieval women, and are surprised to find that the medieval situation was substantially more complex. As Clarissa Atkinson showed in *The Oldest Vocation*, and Barbara Newman in *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, medieval ideals of motherhood might be quite contradictory, and in any case quite different from contemporary ones.

Yet motherhood permeated a variety of discourses about women in the medieval world. For the aristocracy women might serve as vessels for the perpetuation of a genealogical line, as Georges Duby has argued in *The Knight, the Lady, and the Priest* and other works. Holy women provided a spiritual motherhood for their followers—indeed, so did holy men, as Caroline Bynum demonstrated in her *Jesus as Mother*. The tension between the demands of maternity and other demands—whether of God, of marriage, or of personal fulfillment—runs through many medieval texts about women’s lives.

In focusing on the importance of motherhood to the history of women (and men), however, we must not lose sight of the importance of fatherhood. Because medieval men drew their identity from so many other occupations, fatherhood does not hold the same prominence for them in medieval texts as motherhood does for women. Yet medieval society was a patriarchal one in the strict etymological sense—not just dominated by men, but dominated by fathers, from God the Father on down. Feminist scholarship must begin to interrogate the concept of fatherhood as part of the project of denaturalizing patriarchy.

I call your attention also to the Call for Papers for the next issue of *MFN*. Many of our previous issues have focused on teaching, but that is no reason not to do it again. Perhaps I should say “have focused *more explicitly* on teaching,” for I find that the articles in every issue, while they may inform my research in ways I don’t even recognize, have a direct impact on what goes on in my classroom.

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