

LATE MEDIEVAL CONTROL OF MASCULINITY

JEAN GERSON

Jean Gerson, the Chancellor of the University of Paris and the most influential French theologian of the Late Middle Ages (1363-1429) played a crucial role in the revival of affective pastoral theology in France. His penitent affectivity, as he called it, brought him to a subtle analysis of the nature of love. In the *Sermon on Saint Bernard* and in the treatises *On distinguishing True From False Revelations* he warned about the sexual components of love and the danger of mistaking carnal love for divine.

Vigilant with himself and with others, his restless mind constantly worried about the sins of flesh, such as nocturnal emission. His anguish and extreme nervousness about male sexuality, his uneasy attitude toward feminine devotion, as well as his obsessive worries about sexual deviations represent the primary objects of criticism this study will focus on.

Male Desire for Love and Control of Women

This aspect of Gerson's personality was examined at length in the article by Brian Patrick McGuire, *Late Medieval Care and Control of Women: Jean Gerson and his sisters* (1). In his article McGuire argues that, by organizing and guiding his sisters' religious life, the Chancellor was actually fulfilling his desire for power over his female siblings. Thus, his pastoral guidance concealed his will to dominate and was a consequence of his repressed sexual drive.

Indeed, Gerson attempted to offer a new direction to women, a sort of third way — « a devout life outside both marriage and the monastery (2) ». He started the experiment with his own sisters, to whom he and his brothers left their part of their heritage so they could sustain themselves without getting married or going to a convent. Gerson maintained a close correspondence with his sisters,

(1) Brian Patrick McGuire, *Late Medieval Care and Control of Women: Jean Gerson and his sisters*, dans *RHE*, 92 (1997), p. 5-37.

(2) McGuire, *Late Medieval Care* [see n. 1], p. 8.