

Rural Women's Right and Images during Late Middle Ages Focusing on the Distaff Gospel

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Abstract

This study aims to clarify women's rights related to the lives of rural women in the late Middle Ages. For this purpose, I analyzed the Distaff Gospels written in the 15th century. This book is written in the form of a conversation where women gather at night and older women pass on their wisdom to the younger women. This book has been translated and edited as several different versions, there were changes in the contents according to the intention of the author or the context of when it was rewritten.

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The analysis in this study is the Chantilly version, which can be said to be the most primitive. Unlike the Parisian version, this version takes a very critical position on physical and mental violence against women. In addition, it describes women as active rather than passive, and does not describe women's desires negatively. It cannot be definitively confirmed, but what I found that this book was that domestic violence against women was taken very seriously in rural areas in the late Middle Ages, and Christianity was critical of such violence against women. The church was the center of respect for the human rights of women who would fight such violence.

- **Keywords**

Distaff Gospels, women right, medieval women, domestic violence, women's images

I. Introduction

We are not familiar with the Middle Ages. In particular, it is difficult to fully understand the religious life of rural women of that period. How does Christianity understand medieval women's right, and what does faith mean to medieval rural women? What is the role of Christianity in the lives of medieval women? The purpose of this study is to analyze the meaning of Christianity to medieval women and to suggest implication to modern theology. The main purpose of this study is to analyze women's domestic violence, images, and the role of Christianity in women's lives, more broadly women's rights.

To explore the role of Christianity had on late medieval women's rights related with domestic violence and women's images, the book, "The Distaff Gospels" is analyzed. The Distaff Gospels, which was written by a male author, includes folklore or religious wisdom shared by women in rural areas during evening gatherings while weaving cloth in the 15th century. While weaving, the older women shared their wisdom and experiences with other women and the male edited the story telling of their shared experience. The book is a record of conversations between older women, with tales such as Boccaccio's Decameron or Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. It shows us that these types of books were very popular at the late medieval era. Most of the stories in this book includes advice on pregnancy, parenting, marital relations, women's health, astrology, and caring for domestic animals. This book is a collection of short phrases and have a didactic character for women.

This book was written in the mid-fifteenth century, and many editions were reprinted, which shows that many people read this book.

And the Christian and superstitious elements are mixed in the content. Although this book is an essential resource to understand the life of late medieval rural women's lives, little research has been carried out on this book. Research on the meaning of Christianity for rural women and the attitude of Christianity about the domestic violence, women's rights, and women's images in the Middle Ages provide the historical insight for female theology. It has been accepted as common knowledge that medieval women were considered sub-human under the influence of Christianity. However, the book showed that women's rights were emphasized in Christianity and oppressed by secular law. This study reveals that Christianity was concerned about women's rights, thereby correcting the distorted facts that have been accepted as common sense. This study is important because it reveals the life of ordinary women and the function or role of Christianity which the doctrinal approach cannot reveal.

II. 15th Century Women's Rights in the Distaff Gospels

Research has been conducted on the reading culture of late medieval women.¹ Reading culture is defined as follows: "The term women's reading culture is broadly defined to include not only women's work but also women's clients, women's readers, and subjects of books."²

1 Reference: Paul Saenger, *Books of Hours and Reading Habits of Later Middle Ages*; H.D. Green, *Women Readers in the Middle Ages*; Susan Groag Bell, *Medieval Women Book of Owners*; Michael Camille, *Images dans les marge*; Mary Carruther, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*.

2 Liz Herbert Mcavoy and Diane Watt, "Introduction: Women's Literary Culture and Late Medieval English Writing," *The Chaucer Review* 51 (2016), 3-10..

Women's literary or reading culture continued in the 13th and 16th centuries.³ However, little research has been done on the reading culture and literacy of rural women. To study the relationship between Christianity and medieval rural women, *The Gospels of Distaff* will be analyzed in this study. This book had been printed in several versions. The most famous one is the Paris version written by French stored at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 2151. However, I would like to analyze the Chantilly version which is the original version of this book. This version is stored in the Musée Condé 654, which is kept in the Musée Condé. Chantilly's version is the earliest work, and the author's intention is less inserted, which can help to understand rural women's belief system. The most famous Paris version was based on the Chantilly version, but Paris' version editor had intentionally edited it. For example, in the Paris' version the six women who lead the story were from socially marginalized groups. The six old female speakers consisted of a sexually lustful old woman, a Waldensian, a fortuneteller, a prostitute, a midwife, and a concubine of a priest. But the explanation about the female speaker did not appear in the Chantilly version. In the process of editing this book, the editors intentionally altered the original version with a particular purpose. Because includ-

3 Liz Herbert McAvoy and Diane Watt, eds., *The History of British Women's Writing*, Vol. 1: 700–1500 (Basingstoke, 2012); Diane Watt, *Medieval Women's Writing: Works By and For Women in England, 1100–1500* (Cambridge, U.K., 2007); Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing* (Cambridge, U.K., 2003); Jennifer Summit, *Lost Property: The Woman Writer and English Literary History, 1380–1589* (Chicago, 2000); Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, *Double Agents: Women and Clerical Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (Philadelphia, 2001); Laurie A. Finke, *Women's Writing in English: Medieval England* (London, 1999); Joan M. Ferrante, *To the Glory of Her Sex: Women's Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts* (Bloomington, Ind., 1997); and Carol M. Meale, ed., *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150–1500* (Cambridge, U.K., 1993).

ing of the editor’s intention, the analysis of Paris version is limited in exploring the relationship between Christianity and women.

This book is rich in content related to the daily lives of women. The Chantilly version only records the story during five evenings. The contents of the Chantilly version lessons can be categorized as shown in the following table.⁴

Categories	First evening	Second evening	Third evening	Fourth evening	Later (Fifth)	Total
marital issues	15	3	11		7	36
maternal issues	8	3	1		3	15
childcare issues	7	6	2		2	17
fortune		22	8	1	12	43
divination /astronomy		8				8
health care		13	3			16
domestic animal issues		13	14			27
miscellaneous issues		11	1			12
total	30	79	40		24	

These are also major concerns for women in agricultural societies. The analysis shows that the most parts are about divination such as luck and misery. This content is concentrated on the second day rather than evenly distributed. The fifth day was centered on fortune, but the content differed from how fortune was discussed on the second day. The fifth day is mostly about how to prevent oneself from being possessing by the Devil. The story of this book ends on the fourth day.

“The Fortieth and Last Gospel: The Distaff Gospels ends, gath-

4 The classification of the tables was done by the researcher.

ered long ago. Since the preceding gospels, it happened that a man and his wife who were traveling from Lille to La Bassée, were overtaken by darkness around Fourness. Soon after, they went the wrong way because they kept thinking that they could see a light ahead of them...the following day, this news was spread..."⁵

This sentence suggests that the story lasts until the fourth day and the later day is later reinserted. This part develops a little differently from the fourth days story format. The format is talking about experiences in the form of storytelling: Women shared about how the Devil followed and struggled with them. The ways that the Devil is driven out have a mix of folk remedies and Christian elements. What is found in this section is that demons are described more closely as men than as women.

"from one of my neighbors who suspected her husband to be a werewolf because she would often lose him between Christmas and Candlemas. One evening, she left her house, dragging her apron behind her and the following day, she noticed that her husband had pieces of thread between his teeth."⁶

Immediately following this sentence is the emphasis of infant baptism. "What about ghosts? The worst are those of still born children and the most courteous are the ghosts of murdered children because

5 Madeleine Jeay and Kathleen Garay, *The Distaff Gospels* (New York: Broadview Press, 1985), 247.

6 *The Distaff Gospels*, 253-254.

they died or disappeared soon after their baptism.”⁷ It also emphasizes that infant baptism must be done legally. “When children are born, they must be properly baptized or lese, if it is done in haste, they will have unpleasant encounters or misfortune.”⁸ “If the rite of baptism was not well performed, many misfortunes would happen to the child, which usually relate to social interaction: deafness, metamorphosis into a werewolf, a liminal existence between human and animal.”⁹ According to these sentences, infant baptism is very important. What is unusual is that the need for infant baptism is explained not by salvation or by faith, but by the magical dimension of driving out demons. It was assumed that infant baptism was performed illegally at the time, and the cause was to avoid demon possession.

For the tale of the fourth day, there are two things to be noted. First is that ghosts are portrayed as men rather than women. The second is the need for proper infant baptism. In general, witches are more familiar to us than female demons. But in relation to the Devil, there was a concept in the Middle Ages that the Devil applied to both men and women, and it was not considered particularly harmful to humans. According to Song Hi-Young's research, medieval female witches are herbalists, midwives, doctors, pharmacists, and shamans who were not portrayed to be evil.¹⁰ Jean Louis Biget argues that the concept of the Devil has undergone great changes due to heresy, particularly the Cathars and the Waldosian.¹¹ The images of the demon were nega-

7 *The Distaff Gospels*, 255.

8 *The Distaff Gospels*, 255.

9 Françoise Loux, *Le jeune enfant et son corps dans la médecine traditionnelle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1978), 153.

10 Song, Hi-Young, “Heinrich Kramers Malleus Maleficarum - Frauenfeindliches Werk während der Hexenverfolgung.” *Zusammenfassung* vol. 72, 1018, 415-434.

tively established by the 15th-century German Inquisitor Heinrich and Jacob Sprenger's book, *Malleus Maleficarum* (the witch hammer). Just after publishing this book, however, these negative concepts did not appear to be generalized. Kathrin Utz Tremp's research found that the intensity of witch hunting was not the same across Europe and instead differed from region to region.¹² Jou Kyung Chul's research shows that even though the idea of witchcraft was conceptualized, it was difficult to make this concept accepted by the general public and establish it in people's faith.¹³ But, in the *Distaff Gospels*, the Devil was clearly feared, but Devil did not find any aspects specifically related to women. Instead, it insisted that the most unfortunate thing for women was to meet a werewolf husband. "...I would have been ruined. But let us speak about werewolves since nothing is more dangerous than meeting one."¹⁴ The story of the demon possessed werewolf was often found in literary works. In the works of Marie de France, "whether witches can by some glamor change men in beasts" also expressed the wolf man.¹⁵ The interesting point is that the wolf man is inherited. "If it is a man's destiny to be a werewolf, it would be likely that his son would inherit that from him."¹⁶ In the Middle Ages, it was generally accepted that evil spirits were based on the relationship of kinship.¹⁷

11 Alain Corbinn, *Historie Du Christinanisme* (2007), 「역사 속의 기독교」 trans by Joo Myung Chul (도서출판 길, 2008), 211.

12 Kathrin Utz Tremp, "The heresy of Witchcraft in Western Switzerland and Dauphiné," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* vol 6, 2011, 1-10.

13 Jou Kyung Chul, "A Study on the Development of the Concept of Witchcraft: From "Canon Episcopi" to "Malleus Maleficarum", *The Journal of Western History* vol, 48, 2013, 45-81.

14 *The Distaff Gospels*, 251.

15 Marie de France, "Bisclavret: Malleus Maleficarum" in R. Hanning and S. Ferrante, *The Lais of Marie de France* (Durhan: Baker Book, 1978), 61-65.

16 *The Distaff Gospels*., 255.

In this book, it connects infant death and infant baptism, “The worst are those of still-born children and most courteous are the ghosts of murdered children because they died or disappeared soon after their baptism.”¹⁸ The effect of infant baptism is to destroy ghosts and demons. Parents worried about the death of infants during childbirth, and for this reason, it seems that midwives baptized the infant. But this book clearly forbids baptism that is not legal. “When children are born, they must be properly baptized or else, if it is done in haste, they will have unpleasant encounters or misfortune.”¹⁹ This is a mix of ancient folk stories and infant baptism. The story can be seen as a mixture of the ancient story about the human wolf, which appears when the full moon rises, and the concept of infant baptism, which eliminates human sin. This book clearly corrects the mistake of being baptized by the midwife.

We assumed that the medieval people feared witches and demons as they were related to luck and misery. But the demons and the Devil were not associated with women. The death of newborns has always been associated with ghosts, and infant baptism were performed to protect newborns from demons. At times, the effort to protect newborns from the Devil led to performing infant baptism in an unlawful manner. In the fifteenth century, infant baptism was common, and it was legal for a priest to baptize, but in some cases, it would have to wait be baptized by a priest. In medieval society where many babies died during childbirth, it was natural for parents to be concerned about protecting their babies.

17 Paul Sébillot, *Le folklore de France* (Paris: Guilmoto, 1904-1907), 4 vols, 2:205.

18 *The Distaff Gospels*, 255.

19 *The Distaff Gospels*, 255.

The author mostly addressed problems that occur between couples. Most problems are the extravagant spending of young husbands, neglecting of the wife, adultery, and beatings, especially beating a pregnant wife. Domestic violence seems to have occurred frequently at the time. In this book, speakers have a very strong opinion about this. "And a man who beats his wife will never win Our Lady's mercy nor her favors if he has not first obtained his wife's forgiveness, because for certain, he commits the same sin as if injured himself or tried to kill himself."²⁰ This expression continues to appear, "a man who abuses his wife is considered as worse than a murderer before God...and the children he has fathered with her are likely to end their lives in poverty."²¹ Female beatings are defined as the same sins as suicide, and they cannot be forgiven religiously, and they will live unhappy for the rest of their lives. In this book, there was no rationalization for domestic violence, but instead it considered domestic violence, especially beating, a felony, regardless of what had led to such an action. Secular law shows that domestic violence has been officially recognized in the sense that husbands train their wives.²² Christianity strictly protects women's rights by condemning domestic violence against secular law, which permitted a husband's beating of his wife. And this book shows that domestic violence was a common occurrence at that time.

Christian protection of women's human rights is directly related to women's health. "If it happens that a man beats his pregnant wife and

²⁰ *The Distaff Gospels*, 197.

²¹ *The Distaff Gospels*, 197.

²² Brundage JA. "Domestic violence in classical canon law," in Kaeuper RW ed., *Violence in Medieval Society* (Bury St Edmunds, England: Brewer; 2000), 183–197.

tramples her with his feet, she will give birth with greatly difficulty.”²³ This sentence addressed women's human rights in terms of protecting women's physical health by addressing the difficulties of childbirth related to women's abuse. The ultimate concern of Christians, who reject domestic violence, concerns women's health.

In this book, as much as domestic violence in marital problems is a reference to her husband's unfaithfulness. “A man who is unfaithful to his wife is unworthy of any respect. And if his wife subsequently did the same thing, he would, without fail, be guilty of both their sins, and she should be acquitted without being punished.”²⁴ Since the early Middle Ages, Christianity has set strict standards for inadequate sex and affairs. In the early Middle Ages, pagans were often converted, and the church attempted to correct moral aspects by creating early penitent assault guidelines to solve the cluttered pagan sexual problems.²⁵ Early Christian stance on infidelity has been sustained. Continued statement of sexual sin until the late Middle Ages indicates that her husband's affair persisted despite the Christian emphasis. Prescriptions to prevent her husband's affairs combined the Christian element with subtle local superstitions. “If you don't want your husband to go astray with other women, you must have Saint Avoie's mass sung for three Mondays.”²⁶ “In that case, when she thinks that he is there, she should have wine and drink bought home: if he has any common sense, he will be happy to drink at home with his wife.”²⁷

23 *The Distaff Gospels*, 205.

24 *The Distaff Gospels*, 203.

25 Pill Eun Lee, “Education for the Religious leadership in the early Irish Medieval Period: focused on the Penitential Discipline,” *Theology and Praxis* 34, 2020, 391-410.

26 *The Distaff Gospels*, 203.

27 *The Distaff Gospels*, 205.

At that time, her husband's unfaithfulness seemed to be as much of a concern to women as domestic violence.

This phenomenon can be somewhat explained by the large number of prostitutes in the Middle Ages.²⁸ Male affairs did not appear to be a crime under secular law. This aspect is different from Christianity's recognition of adultery as a very serious sin in the early Middle Age Penitential. The book shows one common reason a husband avoided his wife: a young husband marries an older woman who had been widowed several times, because he covets a woman's property. The point is to emphasize that women still have sexual desire even as they age. "it is true that a woman's desire is more burning than a man's."²⁹ Although it is difficult to find another book that expresses and acknowledges women's desire as it is, in this book there is expression that women's desire is stronger than men without any criticism of this desire. For couples, women are not simply passive beings, but they have a stronger desire than men. But the images of a man expressed in marital life is very negative. He wants money to marry an older woman who is made wealthy by her husband's death, and he wastes his wife's property in pursuit of other women. On the contrary, women are victims of domestic violence but at the same time they are expressed not as passive beings but as active women in their desires.

In marital problems, the psychological pain of women is more in-

28 Some scholars in the Middle Ages claim to convey a positive meaning to prostitutes unlike any other period. However, this argument proved to be more debate in many studies. Recent research has shown that attitudes and practices toward prostitutes have always existed in history and have recently been recognized as legalization or professional specialization for them. Albrecht Classen, *The Dark Side of Sex and Love in the Premodern Era* (New York: Lexington Book, 2019).

29 *The Distaff Gospels*, 231.

tense than the physical abuse of husbands because of frequent affairs.

“You talk about beating and maiming, but as true as I am speaking, there is no greater pain for a woman than seeing her husband spend what does not belong to him or does not come from his family, while fornicating and acting against God and his Commandments. I would rather hear news of his misfortune than his prosperity, of his death than his life. And, for certain, a man who breaks his marriage vows by committing adultery, is worse than a Jew or an infidel.”³⁰

In this sentence the property not belonging to a man and not from his family but is the property entirely of the wife or inherited from the husband through bereavement. In medieval law, a woman cannot exercise her right to property if she has a husband. Thus, the woman's dissatisfaction stems from with her husband's ownership over her property. Despite these dangers, women are constantly described as beings with a desire for a young husband. This aspect is evident in the following text,

“I ate humble pie because of my second husband. He was young and strong. If my first husband was the rake, the second was the fork, God forgive him: he is dead, and I am here. And as true as God exists, if another one turned up whom I liked, young and handsome, I would not reject him even at the risk of losing all I have...You might say that I am too old and that nobody would want me, but if a man showed up, I would not

³⁰ *The Distaff Gospels*, 199.

turn him down just because of that.”³¹

This content is expressed continuously and expresses the desire for a woman to continue to want a young husband if she can become pregnant through a new marriage. Man is a cunning being who seeks the wealth of an older wife, while a woman is faithful to her desires and constantly wants peace in the family even if she loses all her property.

Concerning prostitution, this book mentions religious people's sex and prostitution. “If a man, either a cleric, a priest or a layman, has intercourse with a nun, he will die with his male member stiff and in greater pain than other people. And if children come from such a union, they will be prone to many problems and misfortunes.”³² This sentence emphasizes the man to be the recipient of the punishment for such a sin, not the nun. No mention of punishment to the nun can be found in this sentence. But the following sentence, “The concubine of a priest who persists in her sin until her death will be used by the Devil as his mount and you must not pray for her, and their children are more prone to sin than other people because it often happens that children pay for the sins of their father and their mother.”³³ The priest's concubine is regarded as a serious sinner, but does not mention the nun, who may be a victim of sexual violence. For a religious person, chastity is an important virtue, but the prostitution of the religious people is widespread. The chastity of the religious people was weak and easily compromised by the temptations of the sexual desire or

31 *The Distaff Gospels*, 199.

32 *The Distaff Gospels*, 227.

33 *The Distaff Gospels*, 227.

sexual violence.³⁴ During the medieval time, nuns often seemed to have lost their chastity. Zubin Mistry analyzes the miracles of abortions in three Irish saints' hagiography suggesting that sexual crimes of religious people at that time threaten religious identity.³⁵ Nuns are the victims of sexual violence by trying to keep their innocence through the miracle of abortion.

Marjorie Elizabeth Plummer argues that between 1521 and 1523, Christian efforts to control sexual disturbances of religious people led to conflict, resulting in claims for change in the Christian community.³⁶ And it can be seen that this tendency is connected with the priest's marriage in the 16th century Reformation.³⁷ If a priest or friar had sex with a married woman, they could not be forgiven without her husband's forgiveness because God valued the rights of others.³⁸ As mentioned earlier, in sexual promiscuous life, we see weak penalties for religious people, while offering very strict standards for others. Rather, in the book of penitential a religious person was offered greater punishment. This book, of course, did not address the inadequate sexual relations of religious people. Perhaps the reason why there is little mention of religious person's punishment is related to the reader of this book. While the early penitent manual had imposed more severe punishment on the religious person in terms of providing guidance to the priest,

34 Jo Ann McNamara, "Chastity as a Third Gender in the History and Hagiography of Gregory of Tours", in Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood (eds), *The World of Gregory of Tours* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 209.

35 Zubin Mistry, "The Sexual Shame of the Chaste: 'Abortion Miracles' in Early Medieval Saints' Lives" in *Gender & History* vol. 25(2013), 607-620.

36 Marjorie Elizabeth Plummer, *Priest's whore to pastor's wife: clerical marriage and process of Reformation early German Reformation* (London: Routledge, 2016), chap. 1.

37 *Ibid.*, chap. 4 and 5.

38 *The Distaff Gospels*, 227.

then this book would only suggest that the commoners are readers. Or in the early Middle Ages there was a need to follow religious institutional disciplines, while in the late Middle Ages, it was somewhat tolerant of sexual relations and concubines of religious people.

III. Domestic Violence and Women's Right in Modern Days

The *Distaff Gospels* have been printed in several different versions as already mentioned. The earliest version of the *Distaff Gospels*, Chantilly is an important source of understanding of the rural people's perception of the Christian view of women. The later version of Chantilly adds anti-feminist's perception while editing process and highlights the color of *Malleus Maleficarum*, a witch-hunting witch. In the Chantilly version, on the other hand, it is hard to find anti-feminist elements. The analysis of the Chantilly version highlights the correction of the distorted perception that has previously been accepted as common sense that the Christian image of medieval women was negative. In this book, women are described as active persons rather than passively acting in marital relationships.

In this book, domestic violence, including the misconducts towards infants, was described as a very serious sin. While domestic violence is tolerated in secular law, this book emphasizes that the beating of a woman and wrong behavior toward children from a Christian perspective is never to receive the mercy of the Virgin Mary. Minkyu Lee argued that naming Jesus' mother a woman had the function of enhancing the self-esteem of women who were powerless at the time.³⁹

39 Minkyu Lee, "The Roles of Unnamed Mother of Jesus in the Gospel of John: Hope for the Mar-

This is a point that the modern church must consider. Domestic violence against women and children cannot be regarded as merely a past event. The World Report on Violence and Health shows that domestic violence by husbands or close people occurs in all cultures of modern society.⁴⁰ It can be said that the modern Korean church needs to check the position of the domestic violence against these persistent problems. The point that Christianity is adamantly opposed to secular law which legally recognized the domestic violence in the 15th century provides the guideline that modern church should take.

The modern Korean churches need to reflect on what position it takes on women's human rights. Hee Sun Kim, analyzing the stories of Gentile women in the Bible, asserts that Jesus cared for Gentile women.⁴¹ Even in the fifteenth century, Christianity recognizes women's desires, physical pain, and psychological pain. As the 15th century draws closer to the Renaissance, these books are a positive assessment of human desire. However, what is implicitly required of women in the modern Korean church is that women's desires are recognized as sin. In the 15th century, even in rural areas, women's human rights are acknowledged as a natural human desire. And it seems that the physical pain of women is already taken seriously by the secular system. But psychological distress at home is seen as a difficult problem to deal with in secular law. Christianity seems to need to be sensitive to the psychological distress women face. In any pulpit in the Korean church, it is uncommon to hear sermons on women's pain, especially comfort women and opposition to female sex slaves.

ginal," *Madang*, Vol. 29 (June 2018) 45-69.

40 *World Report on Violence and Health*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization; 2002

41 Hee Sun Kim, "Many faces of the Gentile woman: a postcolonial feminist hermeneutics of Mark 7: 24-30," *Madang* vol. 34 (2020), 125-148.

On the contrary, it is the reality that such references are implicitly regarded as taboo in the church. Even though we do not know exactly what happened in the 15th century, but at least the book shows that Christianity's decisive stance on women's suffering and that women are suffering from psychological pain and are human beings with desire. Despite the centuries that have passed, the position of women in Korean society seems to lack progression. The church should thoroughly reflect on its current fundamentalist and patriarchal positions and take a more active position on domestic violence.

IV. Conclusion

The 15th century was a turbulent period of preparation for the 16th century. Of course, the Renaissance and the Reformation did not focus on improving women's human rights. While analyzing the *Distaff Gospels*, there was an atmosphere of respect for the human rights of women in the late Middle Ages. Of course, whether this feature was throughout the Middle Ages or whether it was a Renaissance-based trend was not addressed in this study. Domestic violence against women was allowed in secular law, but Christianity viewed it as a severe felony. This study corrected the common belief that women's lack of agency was due to the influence of Christianity. Christianity opposed secular laws that recognized domestic violence and that disregarded the human rights of women. The Church listened to the difficulties of women suffering psychologically from husbands who broke their trust in marriage as well as domestic violence. And the image of the Devil was not associated with the witch hunt in the late

Middle Ages. Rather, the image of the Devil was associated with men. Christianity played an important role in respecting the human rights of medieval women.

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