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Widows in the Hispano-Roman – Suevic/Visigothic Councils of Hispania²

The foundational text for all subsequent discussion about widows is from 1 Timothy 5:3-16 and a number of Church Fathers interpreted it in many ways to determine the place of widows in Christianity³. That patristic commentary and that of New Testament scholars is abundant and it is not the intent here evaluate all of it. It is advisable to highlight along the way important points as we move forward to engage the conciliar texts mainly from Hispania⁴. As regards studies specifically on Hispania for our period,

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³ *Colossians, I and II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, ed. P. Gorday, Ancient Christian Commentary of Scripture, New Testament 9, Downers Grove 2000, p. 194-206. This volume contains the representative commentary of the Church Fathers on the text 1 Timothy 5:3-16 and related passages. It also guides the reader to editions in the original languages and major translations. A summary of the early Christian commentary and interpretation is in B.B. Thurston, *The Widows: A Women's Ministry in the Early Church*, Philadelphia 1989. Insightful conclusions are in: A.G. Martimort, *Deaconesses: An Historical Study*, tr. K.D. Whitehead, San Francisco 1986; S. Heid, *Celibacy in the Early Church. The Beginnings of Obligatory Continence for Clerics in East and West*, tr. M.J. Miller, San Francisco 2000, the author discusses widows throughout this excellent volume on clerical celibacy, p. 47-48, 73-74 and includes widowers, p. 83-89.

⁴ The following is a selective list of studies on widows: M. Patzelt, *Zu Gast bei den Witwen: erste Einblicke in die Handlungsspielräume christlicher Witwen in der weströmischen Spätantike im Kontext der Erbschleicherei*, "Millennium" 16 (2019) p. 149-173;

they are excellent but lamentably few. There has never been a full consideration of the canons on widows of the Suevic-Visigothic Councils of Hispania⁵. In neighboring southern Gallia there is evidence from regional councils. A full study on widows in Gallia needs to be treated in a separate study⁶. There is one Caesarius sermon that we refer to below to make an essential point, however.

A topic that has been discussed is whether the order of widows ever became an ordained ministry during and after the apostolic period. On the earlier evidence, a church council of great importance that has been the object of some debate by scholars is the Council of Laodicea (c. 380), precisely canon 11. It deals with the question whether widows were ever ordained, it is a parallel discussion to that of deaconesses, but that is a separate topic that will not be included. Aimé Georges Martimort said that canon 11, “expressly forbids ‘instituting’ them (καθιστάσαι), going contrary to both the *Testamentum Domini* and the *Apostolic Tradition* of St. Hippolytus of Rome”. The term was in contrast to the term used (χειροτονία) to describe the ordination of bishops, priests, and deacons by laying of hands. In the view of Martimort, “the correct translation of this canon is: Those called ‘older women’ or ‘widows’ who have precedence should not be ‘instituted in the Church’”. This canon was not about deaconesses⁷. Roger Gryson expressed doubt that this council ever convened, he suggested that the canons

J.N. Bremmer, *Pauper or Patroness: The Widow in the Early Christian Church*, in: *Maidens, Magic and Martyrs in Early Christianity*, Collected Essays 1. Tübingen 2017, p. 43-64; R. Barcellona, *Le vedove cristiane tra i padri e le norme*, “*Annuario Historiae Conciliorum*” 35 (2003) p. 167-185; B. Degórski, *Wdowy w starożytności chrześcijańskiej i ich posługa w Kościele* [*Le vedove nell’antichità cristiana e il loro ministerio nella chiesa*], *VoxP* 42 (2002) p. 303-318; V. Recchia, *Le vedove nella letteratura istituzionale dell’antico Cristianesimo e nella tipologia biblica*, “*Invigilata lucernis*” 21 (1999) p. 303-332; J.U. Krause, *Witwen und Waisen im frühen Christentum*, v. 1-4, Stuttgart 1994-1995; G. Stählin, *Das Bild der Witwe*, *JbAC* 17 (1974) p. 5-20.

⁵ J.G. Pardina, *La prohibición de las segundas nupcias de la viuda de clérigo en los concilios hispanos tardoantiguos*, “*Hispania Sacra*” 56/114 (2004) p. 423-444; M. del R. Valverde Castro, *La reina viuda en el derecho visigodo: religionis habitum adsumat*, “*Anuario de historia del derecho español*” 73 (2003) p. 389-406; J. Fernández Alonso, *La cura pastoral en la España romanovisigoda*. Publicaciones del Instituto Español de Estudios Eclesiásticos, Sección: Monografías 2, Roma 1955, p. 474-476.

⁶ See the seminal study of W.E. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles. The Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, Cambridge 1994, p. 69-71, 88-110 (on Visigothic Arles).

⁷ Martimort, *Deaconesses*, p. 104-105.

were a summary of rules that applied specifically to the region of Phrygia, perhaps from one or two synods that met in that area. He thought they dated to the fourth century⁸. Either way, the content of the canon dates to the fourth century and does not change in any way its intent.

There is other evidence from the Church Fathers about this question and their relationship to deaconesses. A short summary is all that is necessary before progressing to the later conciliar evidence from Hispania. Two authors have encapsulated well the main contours of the testimony, Bonnie Bowman Thurston, and Martimort. Thurston contributed some suggestive views that shed light on the role of widows vis-à-vis deaconesses. Her monograph covers up to the third century; among the major authors are Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, Tertullian, and the *Didascalia Apostolorum*⁹. Widows had a better standing in society and the Church in comparison to their status in pre-Christian Greek and Roman society. They were never an ordained ministry as in the case of deacons and of deaconesses. Widows, nevertheless, were permitted specific duties: mainly to pray, visit the poor, instruct women, and assist at the baptism of women. This changed over time as Thurston stated, “While there was, for a time, a close relationship between the widows and the deaconesses, it was the deaconesses who eventually assumed the duties of visiting the poor, instructing women, and assisting at their baptisms”. She boldly suggested that widows were, “the forerunner of monastic orders for women”¹⁰. While this is a tantalizing thought, the rise of feminine monasticism was influenced by other corollary developments. Two things, however, became constant for widows, they were to observe frequent prayer and remain chaste to keep their status. Thurston proposed that the decline potential of an order of widows after the New Testament period was due to two developments: “the changing status of ministry in the larger church and the Edict of Constantine (313)”¹¹. Martimort added more insights to those offered by Thurston. In the discussion of the fundamental text 1 Timothy 5:9-10, he opined that, “Here we are clearly dealing with a group of

⁸ R. Gryson, *Ministère des femmes dans l'Église ancienne*, Recherches et synthèses, Section d'histoire 4, Gembloux 1972, cited in Martimort, *Deaconesses*, p. 92 note 9. The council and canon can be accessed online in English at: Council of Laodicea, canon 11, in: <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3806.htm> (accessed: 15.06.2022).

⁹ Thurston, *The Widows: A Women's Ministry in the Early Church*, p. 56-75, 76-91, 92-105.

¹⁰ Thurston, *The Widows: A Women's Ministry in the Early Church*, p. 114.

¹¹ Thurston, *The Widows: A Women's Ministry in the Early Church*, p. 115.

women who enjoyed official recognition in the Church". This did not mean that at this point widows were invested with a clerical ministry. It is argued that the 'women' of chapter 3 and the 'widows' of chapter 5 are the same in 1 Timothy¹². As regards deaconesses it is indicated that, "This ministry appeared only toward the second decade of the third century – and when it did appear, it did so only in a limited number of churches". Hippolytus of Rome held that, "Widows, however, are installed for the purpose of prayer, which is actually for everybody". Hippolytus, furthermore, echoing Polycarp, taught that "there is no liturgical role whatsoever for widows and actually gives this as a reason why they receive no laying on of hands¹³. The *Didascalia*, described the different roles of widows and deaconesses, widows, "were to live a secluded life apart; their role was strictly contemplative", and deaconesses and widows while assisting at baptism of women were forbidden to baptize, the bishop only could do so, but he could grant permission to priests and deacons could do so¹⁴. In the *Testamentum Domini*, widows were distinguished from deaconesses. It is also suggested that "widows appear to have played a much more important role than deaconesses"¹⁵. Theodore of Mopsuestia and John Chrysostom were of the same view that widows were not a formal institution in their day, "widows performed no functions, but they did receive a subsidy from the Church that was supposed to enable them to live the contemplative life"¹⁶. On the latter development, we are informed that, "the ritual blessing of a widow, which we found in the 'Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ' – *Testamentum Domini*, was expressly rejected by the Latin churches of the sixth century". Even Pope Gelasius I protested against the tendency to repeat for widows the ritual. Widows and consecrated virgins were not considered that same, so the pope ordered "the bishop to extend to widows the ritual for *velatio*, which was proper to virgins"¹⁷. On the issue of veiling of a widow, "Eventually, it was even accepted that the widow could receive a veil, provided she did not receive it from the hand of the bishop, as was the case with consecrated virgins; the widows themselves had to take their veils from the altar and cover their own heads with them"¹⁸. Some of these norms estab-

¹² Martimort, *Deaconesses*, p. 23-24.

¹³ Martimort, *Deaconesses*, p. 25, 31-32.

¹⁴ Martimort, *Deaconesses*, p. 42.

¹⁵ Martimort, *Deaconesses*, p. 49-50.

¹⁶ Martimort, *Deaconesses*, p. 119.

¹⁷ Martimort, *Deaconesses*, p. 198, 212.

¹⁸ Martimort, *Deaconesses*, p. 200.

lished in the Early Church were fully in place and are present in the canons of the councils of Hispania.

One last topic that was not the object of discussion was on the proper age of a widow. It seems that what was established earlier was simply accepted as a given and not a point of debate to treat in a council. So what exactly was the received teaching on the age of a woman to be counted in the ranks of a widow? Paul is the starting point, “Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband (1 Timothy 5:9)”. This became the early Christian teaching to qualify to enter the rank of widows. For example, Tertullian wanted to dissuade widows from a second marriage, and he even included widowed clerics¹⁹. Why did Paul choose the age of sixty? Sixty was considered to be in an advance age in the ancient world, “sixty was the average age of the ‘elderly’ in ancient literature [...] So sixty was a relatively advanced age”²⁰. The implication is that their sexual desire had diminished, unlike the younger widows that still had a very active libido, something that did not escape the notice of Paul. Ambrose of Milan in *Concerning Widows* 2, 7; 2, 9 and 9, 56 echoed these views of old age and widows without mentioning sixty years of age. The sex drive of a women was gone, procreation was out of the question, and the temptation so the thinking goes to have sex with a man was unlikely. Ambrose added, after he prefaced this with Paul’s teaching, “For she certainly is the more noble who represses the heat of youth, and the impetuous ardour of youthful age, desiring neither the tenderness of a husband, nor the abundant delights of children, rather than one who, now worn out in body, cold in age, of ripe years, can neither grow warm with pleasures, nor hope for offspring, 2, 9”²¹. Briefly, short of divine intervention as in the examples of Sarah or Elizabeth the widow was considered beyond her years for procreation and marriage. She was in a better state of mind and body to suppress any desire for a husband; an ideal age to remain single. In practice was this strictly true? Some canons of the councils on widows and re-marriage seem to identify exceptions.

The councils of Hispania are examined generally by date in chronological order; if the same theme was discussed in other councils, they will

¹⁹ Heid, *Celibacy in the Early Church*, p. 73-74.

²⁰ Thurston, *The Widows: A Women’s Ministry in the Early Church*, p. 47.

²¹ Translations into English are in: *Nicene Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. P. Schaff *et al*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Edinburgh – Grand Rapids 1952-1956, p. 392 (see note 3 above) p. 200.

be treated together. It is essential to keep before us that by then much development had transpired that defined the role of widows. A significant one is that widowhood at no time became an ordained ministry; that does not mean they were marginalized and had no specific role in the life of the Church. On the contrary, they were considered essential and so honored²².

1. Widows and marriage

The oldest council to convene in Hispania pre-dating the entry of the barbarian tribes and even before the Council of Nicaea (325) was in Elvira (306) – *Eliberri/Granada*²³. In canon 72 the bishops ruled on widows that had sexual relations with a man. She was able to obtain pardon after an acceptable five years of penance, on the condition that she entered into marriage. If the women decided to marry another man, she could not receive communion even at the end of life “nec in finem dandam esse communionem”. It was the opinion of Orlandis and Ramos-Lissón that the extreme measure may have been formulated because of repeated offenses. Even so, it is a very harsh measure to deny the *viaticum* to anyone²⁴.

Not long after at the First Council of Toledo (400) several canons were promulgated regarding widows. Canon 3 attended to lectors and widows. If a lector married a widow he could never rise to the rank beyond the

²² A study of related interest is A. Ferreiro, *Consecrated Women, Monks, and Priscillianists in the Hispano-Roman/Suevic-Visigothic Councils*, Dresden, Germany, 29 September/ 1 October 2021. *Konzilien und die Welt der Klöster (I Concili e il mondo dei monasteri)*, “Annales Historiae Conciliorum. Journal for the History of Councils” 51 (2021) p. 53-82.

²³ A thorough treatment of this council in its many facets is in: *El Concilio de Elvira y su Tiempo*, ed. M. Sotomayor Muro – J. Fernández Ubiña, Granada 2005.

²⁴ Concilium Eliberritanum LXXII: “De viduis moechis si eundem postea maritum duxerint: Si qua vidua fuerit moechata et eundem postea habuerit maritum, post quinquennii tempus acta legitima poenitentia placuit eam communioni reconciliari. Si alium duxerit relicto illo, nec in finem dandam esse communionem; vel si fuerit ille fidelis quem accipit, communionem non accipiet, nisi per decem annos acta legitima poenitentia, vel si infirmitas coegerit velocius dari communionem”, *Concilios Visigóticos e Hispano-Romanos*, ed. J. Vives – T. Marín Martínez – G. Martínez Díez, España Cristiana. Textos 1, Barcelona – Madrid 1963, p. 14. Commentary on all of the councils is in J. Orlandis – D. Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios de la España Romana y Visigoda*, Pamplona 1986, p. 45.

subdiaconate, the most common consequence was to remain a lector. Here the punishment was levelled at the lector not the widow²⁵. Canon 6 showed concern for the purity of young religious [=ascetic/monastic] women and the people that they came in contact with at gatherings. They were not to be alone unless there were present honored persons and the elderly, or honest widows and women. The honest widow is one who remained chaste after taking vows of chastity and taking the veil and habit of monastic life, this is what made them “viduarum honestarumque”²⁶. Another decision that was agreed upon is in canon 18, that imposed strict restrictions on widows of a bishop, priest, or deacon. No clergy or religious women could eat with her, nor could the widow ever receive communion. The widow only at the hour of death could receive the sacraments²⁷.

The council in Toledo was followed by another two in Girona (Gerona, 517) and Lleida (Lérida, 546). Canon 8 first navigated the complex situation of a layman that had relations – sexual implied – with a widow or a divorced woman after his wife died. This disqualified him from ever being a member of the clergy. The discipline was not on the widow but the offending layman²⁸. In Lleida, the bishops in canon 6 concentrated on a very grave matter. What to do with a man who violated or seduced – *stuprum*

²⁵ Concilium Toletanum I 3, Vives, p. 20: “De his qui viduas acceperint ne diacones efficiantur: Item constituit sancta synodus, ut lector fidelis, si viduam alterius uxorem acceperit, amplius nihil sit, sed semper lector habeatur aut forte subdiaconus”, Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 85. Canon 4 legislated more on subdeacons and remarriage, the bishops ruled that a subdeacon who remarried was to be removed and demoted to the rank of the ostiarius or lector see Concilium Toletanum I 4, Vives, p. 20-21. Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 85.

²⁶ Concilium Toletanum I 6, Vives, p. 21: “Ut religiosa puella vivorum familiaritatem non habeat: Item ne qua puella Dei aut familiaritatem habeat cum confessore aut cum quolibet laico sive sanguinis alieni, aut convivium sola, nisi ubi sit seniorum frequentia aut honestorum aut viduarum honestarumque, ubi honeste confessor quilibet cum plurimorum testimonio interesse possit”, Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 88.

²⁷ Concilium Toletanum I 18, Vives, p. 24: “Si sacerdotes vidua vel levitae maritum acceperit, in finem tantum communicet: Si qua vidua episcopi aut presbyteri aut diaconi maritum acceperit, nullus clericus, nulla religiosa cum ea convivium summat; numquam communicet, morienti tantum ei sacramento subveniant”, Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 86.

²⁸ Concilium Gerundense 8, Vives, p. 40-41: “De laicis qui viduam aut dimissam acceperint, ut in clero non admittantur: Si quis vero de laicis post uxorem aliam cuiusquamque condicionis cognoverit mulierem, in clero nullatenus admittatur”, Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 110.

– a penitent widow or a religious virgin²⁹. The word “stuprum” referred to wide array of applications of rape based on Roman Law, as N.L. Nguyen explains, “Another legal charge covering rape was *stuprum*, which covered any irregular or promiscuous sexual act including acquaintance rape, seduction, and homosexuality”. To what extent the bishops were relying on Roman Law is unknown because it is never cited anywhere. The development of Roman Law pre- and during Christian era was a long intricate process.

What we can determine here in this canon is in what sense *stuprum* was understood in this context. The situation here was complicated, what if the women decided not to separate from the man. I think this indicates that this was not a rape in the strict sense, otherwise why would a woman want to remain with a rapist? Seduction that led to their dishonor is the more sensible interpretation. In any case, both victim and violator were ordered excommunicated and banned from the Christian community. If, however, the victim returned to the ascetic faith to restore their former status, the penalty would apply only to the violator, He too until such time he too did public penance could also be restored. Both parties were given the opportunity to repent to reenter the Church. What is striking here is that neither the widow nor virgin was in any way held culpable for giving rise to the situation, it was all directed at the seductor³⁰. Again Nguyen enlightens on the evolution of *stuprum* in the Christian phase before this council of Lleida, “Originally, rape was indictable because «the rapist had committed *stuprum* or *adulterium*» with the woman, and the victim herself was deemed to have committed adultery with the rapist due to her suspect consent. Subsequently, later jurists state in the *Codex Justinianus* that victims of rape were guilty of neither *stuprum* nor adultery; consequently, rape would have been a man’s *stuprum*, for when committed upon a woman, there was no adultery since she did not possess *dolus*

²⁹ N.L. Nguyen, *Roman Rape: An overview of Roman Rape Laws from the Republican Period to Justinian’s Reign*, “Michigan Journal of Gender & Law” 13/1 (2006) p. 75-112 for the Christian phase see the insightful discussion at p. 103-111. The *Codex Theodosianus* is cited frequently, there is no reference to any council, however.

³⁰ Concilium Ilerdense 6, Vives, p. 57: “De his qui viduae poenitenti vel religiosae virgini stuprum intulerit: Qui poenitenti viduae vel virgini religiosae vim stupri intulerit, si se ab eo sequestrare noluerit, pariter a comunione et a christianorum consortio segregentur. Si vero illa quae vim pertulit ad sanctam religionem redierit, in illo solo quoadusque publice poeniteat data sententia perseveret”, Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 130.

(willful intent)”. The Council of Lleida reflects this change of not imputing guilt entirely on the woman³¹.

The Second Council of Barcelona (599) spoke to this topic too in canon 4, although limiting it to virgins only. These women abandoned the monastic habit and their chastity to get married or losing their virginity through seduction “aut violenter abstractae foeminae [a] pudicitiae vincolatore se sequestrare noluerit”. I maintain again that what is being identified here is seduction, not an actual violent rape. The violence here was the women’s loss of virginity. Once again, what kind of woman would remain with a man who had violently raped her! The bishops in Barcelona did not offer any conditions to return to the Church, they took a harder line³².

In the province of Gallaecia that was under Suevic rule, the Second Council of Braga (572) in canon 26 dictated that men who married widows or a divorcee could not be admitted to the clergy. If they had been ordained by hiding their marital status, when found out they were immediately expelled. The canon listed many other offenses, in the end the offender could receive communion at the time of death. Nothing was pronounced about any punishment for the widows or divorcees³³. In canon 29 it was agreed that widows of clergy were shunned; clergy and religious women were forbidden to sit at table with them. In addition, communion could only be given to them at their deathbed. This canon at Braga was borrowed verbatim from the Toledo council³⁴. In canon 43 the bishops again turned to irregularities having to do with lectors that married a widow. They were

³¹ Nguyen, *Roman Rape*, p. 100.

³² Concilium Barcinonensis II 4, Vives, p. 160: “Pari etiam consideratione sancientes, ut si qua virgo propria voluntate abiecta laicali veste, devotarum more induta, castitatem servare promiserit, vel si quis hominum utriusque sexus poenitentiae benedictionem expetendo a sacerdote perceiverint et ad terrena conubia sponte transierint, aut violenter abstractae foeminae [a] pudicitiae vincolatore se sequestrare noluerit, utrique ab ecclesiarum liminibus expulsi ita ab omnium catholicorum comunione sint separati, ut nulla prorsus eis vel conloquii consolatio sit relictā”, Orlandis –Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 244.

³³ Concilium Bracaraensis II 26, Vives, p. 94: “De his qui viduas aut dimisas ducunt aut in malis consiliis mixti sunt: Si quis viduam aut ab alio dimissam duxerit, non admittatur ad clerum, aut si obrepsit, deiciatur. Similiter si homicidii aut facto aut praeepto aut consilio aut adensione post baptismum conscius fuerit, et per aliquam subreptionem ad clericatus venerit, deiciatur et in finem vitae suae communionem recipiat”.

³⁴ Concilium Bracaraensis II 29, Vives, p. 94: “De viduis clericorum: Si qua vidua episcopi vel presbyteri aut diaconi maritum acceperit, nullus clericus nulla religiosa cum ea convivium summat; numquam communicet, morienti tantum ei sacramentum subveniat”.

to remain in that role, with an exception. If there was necessity, he could be elevated to subdeacon but nothing beyond that. The same applied if he were a bigamist. For the widow we are not informed of her consequences³⁵.

At the historic Third Council of Toledo (589), the bishops in two canons aimed their attention to widows. No one was to despoil the chastity of widows and could not be forced into marriage against her will. If a widow wished to marry before taking up vows of chastity, they could do so of their own free will. The same was ordered for virgins. Any man who committed this offense was denied communion, even entry into a Church. The effort to preserve the freedom of women, in this case widows and virgins, to marry whomever they wanted was laudable on the part of the bishops³⁶. Canon 10 restated in abridged form what the previous one taught: widows and virgins may choose of their own free will to embrace chastity or marriage. Once the choice was made the decision was binding³⁷.

At the seventh century Second Council of Seville (619) canon 4 considered the impact of a second marriage of a deacon and its impact on promotion within Holy Orders. Under such conditions a deacon could not be promoted to the presbyterate. In addition, if a deacon was found to have married a widow, he was to be deposed from the diaconate because it was in violation of divine and ecclesiastical law. The widows were not given any punishment nor were the deacons ordered to put them away.

³⁵ Concilium Bracarense II 53, p. 98: "Si lector alterius viduam duxerint: Lector si viduam alterius uxorem acceperit, in lectorato permaneat, aut si forte necessitas sit subdiaconus fiat, nihil autem supra; similiter et si bigamus fuerit". Cf. Toledo I, canons 3 and 4 cited above in note 25.

³⁶ Concilium Toletanum III, 10, Vives, p. 128: "Ut viduis pro castitate violentiam ullus inferat, et ut mulier invita virum non ducat: Pro consulto castitatis quod maxime hortamento concilii proficere debet, annuente gloriosissimo domino nostro Recaredo rege, hoc sanctum adfirmat concilium, ut viduae quarum placuerit tenere castitatem nulla vi ad nuptias iterandas venire cogantur; quod si priusquam profiteantur continentiam nubere elegerint, illis nubant quos propria voluntate voluerint habere maritos. Similis conditio et de virginibus habeatur, nec extra voluntatem parentum vel sua cogantur maritos accipere. Si quis vero proposito castitates viduae vel virginis inpedierit, a sancta comunione et a liminibus ecclesiae habeatur extraneus", Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 222. See Alonso, *La cura pastoral en la España romanovisigoda*, p. 457-475, on penance, p. 511-542.

³⁷ Concilium Toletanum III 10, Vives, p. 134: "De viduis quoque: qui voluerint continentiam teneant, et quae nubere elegerint quorum voluerint nubant: eaque et de virginibus", Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 222.

These illicit ordinations were reported to have occurred in the church of Écija³⁸.

At the Fourth Council of Toledo IV (633) presided by the eminent Isidore of Seville four canons enacted guidelines affecting widows. The first, canon 19, is a lengthy exposition on the ordination of bishops. At the pivotal place concerning matrimony, it was established that those who married twice – whether a widow or abandoned by a husband or a woman not a virgin – could not to be ordained bishop. Added to this, the candidate had to be selected by the clergy, the people of the city, the Metropolitan, and the bishops of the province. The widow was not described as somehow unclean, the blame was laid at the feet of the man who wished to be bishop in an illicit way³⁹. Canon 44 continued with the corollary challenge of clergy who married without the consent of the bishop. The parameters of the offense were: they could not marry a widow, a woman of bad reputation, or a prostitute. The bishop was given the authority to separate them. One thing that stands out in this canon is that the widows are numbered in the company of women of doubtful reputations and prostitutes. We see time and again that being a widow alone was not a bad thing, certain circumstances could place them in precarious situations. Here the widows are not qualified because of loose morals or any such thing; the culpable party is the one aspiring to be bishop by ignoring the protocols⁴⁰. Canon 55 decreed on consecrated widows, virgins, penitents, the tonsured, and men and women who abandoned their religious vows and habit for secu-

³⁸ Concilium Spalense II 4, Vives, p. 165: “De bigamis ad presbyterium vel diaconatum non promovendis: Quarta actione nuntiatum est nobis apud Astigitanam ecclesiam quasdam nuper ordinationes inlicitas extitisse, ita ut quidam viduarum mariti levitarum ministerio sacrarentur: quos quidem convenit a gradu suscepto inritum devocari nec ultra provehi ad diaconii ministerium quia contra divina atque ecclesiastica iura instituti reperiuntur”, Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 256. On the council see A. Ferreiro, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and Auctoritas at the Second Council of Seville (619)* “*Annuario Historiae Conciliorum*” 35 (2003) p. 247-272 = *I Padri e le Scuole Teologiche nei Concili*, Vaticano 2006, p. 263-288.

³⁹ Concilium Toletanum IV 19, Vives, p. 198-199: “De ordinatione episcoporum: qui secundae uxoris coniunctionem sortiti sunt aut numerosa coniugia frequentarunt, qui viduam vel marito relictam duxerunt aut corruptarum mariti fuerunt”, Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 276, 286-288.

⁴⁰ Concilium Toletanum IV 54, Vives, p. 207: “De personis mulierum, quae non convenit clericis copulari: Clerici qui sine consulto episcopi sui uxores duxerint, aut viduam vel repudiatam vel meretricem in coniugio acceperint, separari eos a proprio episcopo oportebit”, Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 285.

lar clothes. These returned to the secular life and some even got married. They were all given a path to penance and restoration. Those who refused were declared true apostates and were anathemized⁴¹. Canon 56 lays out concisely the two classes of widows: secular and religious. Secular widows are those contemplating marriage and so put on secular clothing. Religious widows, on the other hand, have abandoned secular clothes and have presented themselves to the bishop and the Church wearing a religious habit. These last if they then choose to marry will be punished in conformity to what the Apostle [Paul] taught according to the bishops. The gravity was that first they offered themselves to God and then abandoned their vow of chastity. Paul's censure, however, was in reference to young widows, "refuse to enroll younger widows; for when they grow wanton against Christ they desire to marry, and so they incur condemnation for having violated their first pledge" (1 Timothy 5:11-12). This crucial detail about age was irrelevant to the bishops at the council, for them the violation of a vow at any age was reprehensible. The punishment, however, was not articulated in the canon⁴².

2. Religious habit and widows

The topic of veils and religious habits as it applied to widows, virgins, and at times men surfaced as matter of attention in some of the councils. The one treatise that we have on the subject outside of the councils was written by Leander of Seville. In his letter to his sister Florentina who was entering a monastery offered advice on the appropriate clothing for a consecrated virgin. This missive came to be regarded as the *Rule of Leander* because of its broad range of topics regarding the life of a cloistered virgin. The advice to her was to focus on the inward adornment of her soul while

⁴¹ Concilium Toletanum IV 55, Vives, p. 210: "De poenitentibus viris ac viduis sive virginibus: Quae forma servabitur etiam in viduis virginibusque sacris ac poenitentibus foeminis quae sanctimoniale habitum induerunt, et postea aut vestem mutaverunt aut ad nuptias transierunt", Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 288.

⁴² Concilium Toletanum IV 56, Vives, p. 210: "De discretione viduarum saecularium et sanctimonialium: Duo sunt genera viduarum, seculares et sanctimoniales: seculares viduae sunt quae adhuc disponentes nubere laicarem habitum non deposuerunt; sanctimoniales sunt quae iam mutato habitu seculari sub religioso culto in conspectu sacerdotis vel ecclesiae apparuerint. Hac si ad nuptias transierint, iuxta Apostolum non sine damnatione erunt, quia se primum Deo voventes postea castitatis propositum abiecerunt", Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 288.

living a life of virginity and simplicity. The same was taught to consecrated widows at the councils⁴³.

It was at the Sixth Council of Toledo (638) that the subject of men and women consecrated to God who violated their vows. This had already been treated at the Fourth Council of Toledo (633) in canons 55 and 56 that are discussed above. At this sixth council, widows were included in canon 6. The bishops opened in a somber tone stating that life has a propensity to voluptuosity and that nature [human] imitates the vices “Proclivis curus est ad voluptatem et imitatrix natura vitiorum”. Men and women who took on the religious habit, or the man designated to the choir, or a women sent to a monastery of virgins, who then chose to abandon them suffered consequences. They could be forced to return to their first state, the men were tonsured and the virgin placed in a monastery. If, however, they were intent on remaining deserters of their original vows “Si autem quodlibet patrocinio desertores permanere voluerint” punishments were meted out. That were expelled from the community of Christians and no one was permitted to communicate with them “de christianorum coetu habeantur extortes, ut nec loquutio cum eis ulla sit communis”. To conclude the bishops added that widows too that abandoned their profession and habit, received the same punishment. Here was made a generic reference to the Fourth Council of Toledo “sicut universalis iam dudum statuit synodus”⁴⁴.

The Tenth Council of Toledo (656) contains two of the longest discussions on widows, religious vestments, vows, and faithfulness to religious profession in canons 4 and 5. These are extended statements on the profession and habit of widows who became religious either voluntarily or by coercion. Canon 4 was dedicated entirely to the religious habit of

⁴³ The editions of Leander’s treatise are *De la Instrucción de las Virgenes y Desprecio del Mundo*, ed. J. Velázquez, Leandro de Sevilla, Corpus Patristicum Hispanum 1, Madrid 1979 (*De habitu virginum*, p. 135-138, Spanish translation at p. 195-196). An English translation is in: C.W. Barlow, *Martin of Braga, Paschasius of Dumium, Leander of Seville*, Iberian Fathers 1, The Fathers of the Church 62, Washington 1969, p. 183-228 at 204-206. Latin-Spanish edition: *San Leandro, San Isidoro, San Fructuoso*, ed. J. Campos Ruiz – I. Roca Melia, Santos Padres Españoles 2, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos 321, Madrid 1971, p. 47-48 (Chapter 10: “De habitu virginum”). An overview of virgins in Hispania in: Alonso, *La cura pastoral en la España romanovisigoda*, p. 466-471.

⁴⁴ Concilium Toletanum VI 6, Vives, p. 238: “De viris ac foeminis sacris propositum transgredientibus sacrum: Viduae quoque, sicut universalis iam dudum statuit synodus, professionis vel habitus sui desertrices superiori sententia condemnentur”, Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 313.

a widow: “De professione ac veste religiosarum viduarum”⁴⁵. The bishops began by contextualizing their views in the context of spiritual warfare. They declared unity with the Spirit of God, union with the Apostle (Paul), and filled with the zeal of fire of the house of the Lord (the Church), while not ignoring the wiles of Satan “Bene per Spiritum Dei possumus cum sancto Apostolo dicere non ignorare nos astutias Satanae, quia inpellimur zeli domus Dei ardore cremari”. They sought to correct what was called a fraud and dismissal of the ancient law of the Fathers and that of judges by widows who believed they were not under obligation to abide by the norms of the Fathers “nam inveniuntur nonnullae viduae diversis excusationibus se adeo contengentes ut blandiant sibi, non se patrum plena religionis alligata institutione teneri”. The bishops based their views on the ancient rules “Unde antiquis inconcusse permanentibus regulis hoc adicitur novae oraculo sancionis”. A widow that sought to obtain the status of a religious must profess in the presence of the bishop or minister in writing and signed “ut vidua quae sanctae religionis obtinere propositum voluerit sacerdoti vel ministro, ad quem aut ipsa venerit aut quem ad se venire contigerit, scribitis professionem faciat a se aut subscriptione notam”. The document demonstrated that she submitted to a perpetual vow and to wear the habit at all times, whether in bed or even outdoors “ac tunc accepta a sacerdote vel ministro apta religionis usui veste seu lectulo quiescens sive quequumque loco consistens incunctanter utatur”. The bishops then went into detail about the type of habit widows were to wear. It was not to be multicolored or expensive cloths; it was to be of simple appearance similar to a religious habit. That way it would properly be a testimony of the honorable status of a religious widow “nec diversi coloris aut diversae partis eadem sit notabilis vestis, nisi religiosa et non suspecta quae careat et varietatibus colorum et diversitatibus partium, adeo ut absque ulla suspitione transgressionis maneat usui tantum apta sanctae religionis, et sui sexus competens ad testimonium probitatis”. To make sure that the religious widow was indisputably identifiable in public she was required to cover her head with a veil. It was to be either of red or black color. It was given to her when the vows were taken. The veil was a sign of sanctity for all to see to mitigate detestable audacities “Ut autem deinceps nicil devocetur in dubium, palleo purpurei vel nigri coloris caput contegat ab initio susceptae religionis, ut dum illic intulerit signum probabilis sanctitatis ubi nullius falli poterit vi-

⁴⁵ Concilium Toletanum X 4, Vives, p. 311-312, Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 363-364.

sio intuentis, nusquam adtemtetur ausus detestandae praesumptionis”. This legislation had a two-fold purpose: One, to instill in the widow the dignity and honor of taking religious vows that set her apart from everyone. There was the hope it would serve as a sign to inspire others. Secondly, to make it more difficult for the widow to be tempted to set aside her vows by blending in with the general population at will, hence she was to wear the simple habit at all times with the red or black veil or head covering.

Before proceeding to the next canon another source of importance on the habit and widows is the *Liber ordinum* that spelled out various details about religious widows and distinctive clothing⁴⁶. The text demonstrates that consecrated widows were rapidly tending to the monastic life, lending credence to Thurston’s comment cited above, that consecrated widows had been, “the forerunner of monastic orders for women”⁴⁷. Chapter XXVIII of the *Liber ordinum* titled *Benedictio Syper Vidvas Maforte Accipientes* reveals some of the spiritual theology behind veiling and more. Férotin fleshed out some details about this text. He clarified that the *maforte* was the veil worn by virgin widows that wrapped over the shoulders and appeared to have color, he noted that Jerome in his *Letter to Eustochium* (PL 22, 402) spoke of a veil or covering for virgins: “Super humeros hyacinthina laena Maforte uolitant [...] Haec est apud illas totas uirginitas”⁴⁸. Furthermore, the editor commented that, “Dans le texte de notre Rituel, le mot mafors (on trouve *mauors*, *maforte*, *mauortium*, *mafortium*, cf. le mot grec μαφόριον désigne palleum ou voile, qui devait retomber largement sur les épaules, à la manière de la mantille moderne des dames espagnoles. C’est sans doute de couleur, plutôt que son nom et sa forme, qui en faisait l’ornement distinctif des veuves”⁴⁹. The veil had a distinct color and that resembled the mantilla worn over the shoulders by Spanish women. We saw that at the Tenth Council of Toledo in canon 4 it prescribed that the color of the veil could be either red or black “palleo purpurei vel nigri coloris caput”⁵⁰. Widows, furthermore, had a distinct place after the virgins

⁴⁶ See Fernández Alonso, *La cura pastoral en la España romanovisigoda*, p. 476. In *Liber ordinum* (ed. M. Férotin, Monumenta Ecclesiae Liturgica 5, Paris 1904, p. 80-81) in the lengthy footnote the main canons from Toledo IV and X are discussed. For an overview of the text see A. Ivorra, *Liturgia hispano-mozárabe*, Biblioteca Litúrgica 52, Barcelona 2017, p. 49-52.

⁴⁷ Thurston, *The Widows: A Women’s Ministry in the Early Church*, p. 114.

⁴⁸ Hieronymus, *Ep. ad Eustochium* XXII, PL 22, 402.

⁴⁹ Férotin, *Liber ordinum*, p. 81.

⁵⁰ Concilium Toletanum X 4, Vives, p. 311-312.

to pray. The model for these widows is the virgin-widow Anna, a prophetess, daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher who ceaselessly prayed at the Temple, as recorded in the Gospel of Luke 2:36-38, her ministry was mainly to pray. Widows were to imitate her⁵¹. Earlier in the sixth century in neighboring Gallia Caesarius of Arles in *Sermon* 6 had already pointed to Anna as the model for widows. He taught that three professions were available to women in the Catholic Church: virgins, widows, and the married. As for their role models, virgins should look to Mary, widows to Anne, and the married to Susanna. Widows were directed to serve God as Anne did by fasting, almsgiving, and prayer. That way with Anne they would be in the company of thousands of like-minded widows⁵². The canons never mentioned Anne explicitly; nevertheless, it is obvious from corollary sources that she was the patron model for widows to aspire to imitate.

We now turn to canon 5, the last conciliar source on widows and their vows, titled “De remotis excusationibus viduarum transgressionem sequentum”. The goal was to mitigate any excuses that widows might make to justify abandoning religious life. In some respects it repeated the previous canon. Widows that abandoned religious life were served notice by the bishop to return of their own free will. If they refused, the widows were punished by forced seclusion in a monastery under the sentence of excommunication “quae si redire noluerint impulsu sacerdotis ad religionis habitum reducuntur, et in monasteriis redactae excommunicationis condignae sententia feriantur”. The same was applied to widows that had not received their habit through a bishop or another minister but had taken it on their own. In any case, both types of widows whether they entered, then abandoned, and returned to religious life were required to wear the veil at all times. It was also mandatory to sign a document to formalize their profession. This ‘contract’ was intended to prevent them from falling away again “Omnes hae tamen seu venientes ad primam religionem seu post transgressa resumentes iterata conversione, sicut praemisum est, et palleo capita contegant et con-

⁵¹ Férotin, *Liber ordinum*, p. 81: “Sint imitatrices Anne uidue, quam euangelicus sermo dignatus est predicare. Orationibus semper incumbant, et quod uouerunt numquam amittant. Non delectentur pristinas uoluptates, sed celestes conquirant mansiones: ut miserationis et pietatis persoluentes munera, expleant diuina precepta, conquirantes sibimet uitam eternam – Amen”.

⁵² Caesarius Arelatensis, *Sermo* 6, CCSL 103, p. 35: “Tres enim professiones sunt in sancta ecclesia catholica: sunt uirgines, sunt uiduae, sunt etiam coniugati [...] uiduae considerantes Annam [...] quae ieiuniis eleemosynis et orationibus, sicut beata Anna faciebat, seruiunt deo, cum ipsa sancta Anna sociantur multis milibus viduarum”.

scribtam roboratamque professionis faciant scribturam, per quam ulterius non sinantur relabi ad praevaricationis audaciam”. If widows did fall away, they were excommunicated and shuttered in a monastery under arduous penance to the end of their life “et excommunicationis sententiam ferant, et rursum mutato habitu in monasteriis donec diem ultimum claudant sub aerumnis arduae poenitentiae maneant religatae”. Widows who professed the religious life, took on the habit, voluntarily or by imposition, faced strict supervision by bishops that were determined to keep them professed and away from marriage⁵³.

One restriction that was intended for widows or religious women was promulgated in the First Council of Toledo (400) in canon 9⁵⁴. There is modern commentary on its diffusion and development in Hispania⁵⁵. The directive is concise and to the point. No professed woman religious or widow in the absence of the bishop or priest could sing in their home the antiphons only with their confessor or servant present. In addition, the *lucernarium* is not to be read outside of the church. They did make an exception, was allowed to be read in a villa “aut si legitur in villa” if a bishop, priest, or deacon was present. The main purpose was to maintain the oversight of clergy over these devotions. Orlandis and Ramos-Lissón believed there was another reason; this canon was intended to counter private meetings in homes *conuenticula* without the presence of Catholic clergy to ensure that these gatherings were not of Priscillianists⁵⁶. The canon does not speak with threats of any punishment, it is thoroughly a pastoral directive. In a later de-

⁵³ Concilium Toletanum X 5, Vives, p. 312-313, Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 363-364.

⁵⁴ Concilium Toletanum I 9, Vives, p. 22: “Ut nulla professa vel viuda absente sacerdote in domo sua sacerdotale officium vel lucernale impleat: Nulla professa vel viuda absente episcopo vel presbytero in domo sua antiphonas cum confessore vel servo suo faciat. Lucernarium vero nisi in ecclesia non legatur; aut si legitur in villa, praesente episcopo vel presbytero vel diacono legatur”, Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 88.

⁵⁵ On the development of the *lucernarium* in Hispania and elsewhere consult see Fernández Alonso, *La cura pastoral en la España romanovisigoda*, p. 457-458. In-depth studies on the *lucernarium* are J. Pinell, *Vestigis del lucernari a Occident*, “Liturgica” 1 (1956) p. 91-149; J.M. Bernal, *Primeros vestigios del lucernario en España*, “Liturgica” 3 (1966) p. 21-49; A. Budde, *Lucernarium*, RACH 23, 570-596; Ivorra, *Liturgia hispano-mozárabe*, p. 410-411; G.R. Miquel, *¿Otras oraciones de lucernario en el oficio vespertino hispánico?*, “Ecclesia Orans” 35/1 (2018) p. 163-170.

⁵⁶ Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 88.

velopment at the Fourth Council of Toledo (633) Archibald A. King noted, “We find moreover that Easter ceremonies of the *lucernarium* and candle were enjoined by the fourth council of Toledo in 633”⁵⁷. This evidence shows the earliest development of the *lucernarium* in Hispania, greater change would come in the following centuries there and elsewhere.

3. Widowed queen

In the late seventh century a very delicate situation arose again on what to recommend when a queen became a widow. This was not the first time the Church had to dealt with it. The bishop’s decision is found in canon 5 of the Third Council of Zaragoza (691). Since it was a widowed queen, this presented numerous unique issues that the bishops had to carefully engage. It was simply asked: what to do upon the death of a king with the widowed queen? The possible options were remarriage, assume the throne as a single woman or renounce her status and live in a monastery. The title of the canon “Ut defuncto principe subprestis regina statim et vestem secularem deponat et in coenobio virginum mancipetur permansura” revealed the bishop’s recommendation⁵⁸. A similar situation is recorded in the Thirteenth Council of Toledo (683) in canon 5 concerning widowed queens. This one at Zaragoza seems to have been intended to build upon previous legislation. Another interesting detail at Toledo is that the bishops considered re-marriage for the widowed queen as adultery “quo aut supprestitem reginam post decidentis principis mortem sibi in conubio copulet aut adulterina pollutione contaminet”⁵⁹.

It had everything to do with the social status of the woman who was the queen. She could it was feared be the object of relentless harmful intrigue that would damage her person, the throne, and the realm. The bishops did not seem to be too optimistic about that possibility with this particular queen, so they proposed an alternate solution. They perhaps thought this queen was incompetent and immoral; it was a way to remove her without

⁵⁷ A. King, *Liturgies of the Primatial Sees*, Bonn 2005, p. 543. That would be canon 9: “De benedicendo cerco et lucerna in pervigiliis Paschae” (Concilium Toletanum IV 9, Vives, p. 194). Cf. Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 274.

⁵⁸ Concilium Caesaraugustanum III 5, Vives, p. 479-480; Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 469-474.

⁵⁹ Concilium Toletanum XIII 5, Vives, p. 421; Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 430-431.

much fuss. Roger Collins reminds us that under King Ervig his wife, the Queen Liuvigoto and their sons and daughters could not be compelled into monastic life after the king's death. Were the bishops acting on the wishes of the king?⁶⁰ There was not a consistent single policy in place about widowed queens and their fate. Each situation was considered unique, the same recommendations was given. The bishop's did not want the succession to the throne to become a chaotic affair.

At Zaragoza it was decided that no man may presume to marry the widowed queen – “Licet plenissime in concilio Toletano de principium relictas institutum fuisset, ut nulli licitum esset supprestem reginam in coniugio ducere, aut sordidis contactibus maculare necque sequuturis regibus nec cuilibet hominum esset permissum”. The bishops remembered that at times many scandals had been harmful to the widowed queen and the kingdom – “Unde quia praeteritis temporibus multas scimus atque cognovimus principum relictas post eorum vocationem pro apice regni, quem regendo in cunctis tenuerunt, nullam referentiam honoris eis adhibere a populis, sed passim unicuique probatum est diversas adsumentes occasiones non solum latenter in earum contrarietate insidias moliuntur, verum etiam, quod veritati contrarium est, procaciter verba contumeliosa in conventu multorum eas adficiunt, et, quod omni religioni abominandum atque horrendum est, de his detrahare non sinunt, in katervas populi cernunt commorare”. When the king died, the queen was ordered to wear the religious habit with joyful disposition “accersito ab hoc seculo principe vestem secularem deponat, et alacri curiositate religionis habitum adsumat”. In addition, she had to enter a monastery of virgins to shield her from negative external influences “Quam etiam et confestim in coenobio virginum mancipandam esse censemus, et ut ab omni turbine mundi remota”. The loftier goal was to lead her from this world to the eternal kingdom “sed infra claustra monasterii iugi sedulitate persistens atque sanctimoniam vitam peragens de regno temporale opitulatione divina ad regnum aeternitatis mereatur pervenire”. The bishops closed by saying that if anyone interfered, they incurred excommunication and exile for an extended period “noverit se excommunicationis percepturum sententiam atque etiam exilii damnationis diuturno tempore incurrere iacturam”⁶¹.

The canons that we have surveyed lead us to reach some conclusions about widows in Hispania. There was a great deal of legislation on the

⁶⁰ See R. Collins, *Visigothic Spain 409-711*, Oxford 2004, p. 104. See also Valverde Castro, *La reina viuda en el derecho visigodo: religionis habitum adsumat*, p. 389-406.

⁶¹ Concilium Caesaraugustanus III 5, Vives, p. 479-481.

subject of re-marriage and chastity. Marriage was not a problem unless it was pursued after taking formal vows of chastity and taking the veil and habit of religious life. Once that vow was adopted it was meant to be into perpetuity. Living in a monastery was also a personal choice that they could make in most cases. Widows were valued and considered an essential part of the Church. They were not an order of widows in an institutional sense, that never happened in Hispania and it seem nowhere else in the West. The bishops were not negligent in their pastoral duties to attend to the care for widows. At the Eighth Council of Toledo (653) Job 29:13 was quoted as a reminder that one of the acts of charity included the care of widows, “The blessing of the wretched came upon me and I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy”⁶². At times, however, the bishops had to correct widows that broke their vows. We can affirm that widows, secular or religious, depending on the context, chose their own path. In some situations they were subject to others, men, husbands, or bishops. This even applied to widowed queens. Widows, moreover, were not entirely devoid of choice at every turn. It appears that many widows did choose to enter a monastery, for that is where they found a secure place to live out their spiritual lives. In the Middle Ages, as is well recorded, many men and women, widowed or otherwise, regardless of social standing chose to enter the monastery late in life to find security, companionship, serenity, and above all to prepare for eternal life.

Widows in the Hispano-Roman – Suevic/Visigothic Councils of Hispania

(summary)

The Church Fathers did not neglect to give attention to widows and articulate what they believed was their role in the Church. Modern studies are quite abundant focusing mainly from the New Testament, the early Church, and the Middle Ages. One era that has been marginalized is widows in sources from late antique Roman and Suevic-Visigothic Hispania. Early Christian writers are noted for background only, the focus here are the conciliar texts dating from the fourth through seventh centuries.

Keywords: Widows; Hispania; Sueves; Visigoths; Council; Virginity; Feminine Asceticism

⁶² Concilium Toletanum VIII 2, Vives, p. 272: “Benedictio perituri super me veniebat, et cor viduae consolatus sum”.

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