

**AGAPĒTÆ.**—A name applied to female Christian ascetics who lived together with men, although both parties had taken the vow of continency, and were animated with the earnest desire to keep it. They were also known by the nickname of *Virgines Subintroductæ* or *Syneisaktōi*, which arose at a comparatively late date, after the custom had fallen into disfavour, and has tended not a little to confuse the judgment regarding this form of sexual asceticism. In reality, this spiritual marriage was one of the most remarkable phenomena which asceticism called forth on Christian soil—a fruit of overwhelming enthusiasm for the ascetic ideal. Our sources justify us in saying that the custom was widespread during the whole of Christian antiquity. In Antioch the bishop Paul of Samosata had several young maidens in his immediate neighbourhood (Eusebius, *HE* vii. 30. 12 ff.). At the time of Cyprian, virgins who were dedicated to God lived in the most intimate relationship with confessors, priests, and laymen (*Epist.* 4. 13. 14); and the rigorous Tertullian advises well-to-do Christians to take into their houses one or more widows ‘as spiritual spouses,’ who were ‘beautiful by their faith, endowed with their poverty, scaled by their age.’ . . . ‘It is well pleasing to God to have several such wives’ (*de Exhort. Castit.* 12; *de Monog.* 16). We hear the same regarding heretics: several heads of the Valentinian sect lived together with ‘sisters’ (Irenæus, *Hær.* i. 6. 3), the Montanist martyr Alexander was united in spiritual marriage with a prophetess (Euseb. *HE* v. 18. 6 ff.), and the Marcionite Apelles had in the same way two spiritual wives, one of whom was the prophetess Philumene (Tertullian, *de Præscr.* 30).

As spiritual marriage arose from ascetic motives, it had its proper place in monasticism, and has there preserved its original form. From the first initiators or forerunners of the monastic life onwards—among the Enkratites of Tatian, the Origenists and Hieracites—to the anchorites whom Jerome and Gregory knew, we hear again and again that many monks lived together with women, and we need not wonder if we meet with traces of *Syneisaktism* proper on monastic soil till late in the Middle Ages. In the desert, where the ascetic was alone with his companion, the relation often took the form of the woman becoming his servant, and assisting him in the many varied ways in which the man of antiquity allowed himself to be waited on by his servants. We must not, however, on this account allow ourselves to be misled as to the main point, viz. that the reason why the monk and the nun had retired into the desert is to be sought in their ascetic ideal, which they had in common, and which they aimed at realizing in separation from the world. In the struggle for life and in the conflict against their own flesh they