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## **HOW SHOULD A WOMAN BEHAVE AND WHAT ARE HER DUTIES? GUIDELINES FOR WOMEN PRESENTED IN THE SELECTED SERMONS OF GILBERT OF TOURNAI<sup>1</sup>**

The aim of the article is to present what the manners of behaviour required of women were in order for them to be considered well educated as well as what their duties were according to the thought of Gilbert of Tournai († 1284), one of the most famous French preachers of the thirteenth century. His teachings constitute one of the rarest medieval texts which have come to our times and allows us to find which women's behaviour was considered right and which wrong by society in those times, as well as what duties girls, brides and widows had then.

Due to the scarcity of testimonies written by women of medieval times, which would shed more light on the issue on which the present study is focused, it is necessary to examine texts composed by the men who have dealt with this topic in their works. In fact, in the thirteenth century, authors and preachers noted a lack of such educational texts and it was from that moment that they began to compose more works which presented pedagogical content. However, at first these were mainly addressed to young people from the higher social classes. As a matter of fact, it was during the period in question that the authors, such as Vincent de Beauvais who wrote *De eruditione filiorum nobilium*, or Giles of Rome, the author of *De regimine principum*, or Paolo da Certaldo who published *Book of good morals*, composed their works. As there were very few works of this kind, some parents also took the decision to take note of their suggestions to their children; thus, in the thirteenth century Bellini Bisolo wrote *Liber legum moralium*. A similar situation could be observed with regards to works dedicated to a female audience. In fact, from the thirteenth century writers turned to women more frequently, attempting to give them advice above all concerning mores, good manners, religious and moral formation<sup>2</sup>. The best-known text explicitly dedicated to women is the one composed in 1320 by the Florentine Francesco da Barberino and entitled *Regimento e costumi di donna*. Another work which gained a certain fame at the time was *Livre pour l'enseignement de ses filles* by Geoffroy de La Tour Landry, composed for his daughters when they were of a marriageable age and *Libre de les dones* by Francesco Eiximensis. Moreover, several works addressed to specific women were also known, such as the text by Menagier

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<sup>1</sup> L. Sileo, "Maestri francescani, secolari e agostiniani", in: *Storia della teologia nel medioevo*, vol. 3: *La teologia della scuole*, ed. G. D'Onofrio, Casale Monferrato 1996, pp. 11-12; A. Horowski, *Opere e manoscritti di Gilberto di Tournai: nota bibliografica integrativa*, Roma 2015.

<sup>2</sup> To learn more, see E. Power, *Donne del Medioevo*, ed. M.M. Postan, Milano 1999, pp. 71-84.

de Paris, written for a wife of the bourgeoisie<sup>3</sup>, the letter of Anne of France, composed for her daughter Suzanne<sup>4</sup>, the letter of Louis IX, addressed to his daughter Isabella<sup>5</sup>, *Livre des trois vertus* written by Christine de Pizan for the princess Margaret of Burgundy or the letters written by Francesco Dattini to his wife Margherita, between 1385 and 1410. The need for this type of work of educational content and dedicated to women was so great that Francesco da Barberino, in the Proemio to *Reggimento*, made a comment which addressed their scarcity:

“Novellamente, Franciesco, parlai  
Coll’Onestade,  
ed a preghiera di molte altre donne  
mi lamentai collei,  
e dissi ch’erano molti  
ch’aveano scritt’ i’ libri,  
costumi ornati d’omo, ma non di donna”<sup>6</sup>.

While examining the medieval texts which have come down to our times, it may be observed that, in most cases, they were written either by clergymen or by men who belonged to the higher social classes. It is true that at that time education was generally provided either for people who were expected to embrace religious life or for those who came from very wealthy families. It is not surprising then that the opinion regarding women derived from two main sources: from the aristocracy as well as from the church. Indeed, the aristocracy, being the highest and richest social class, had a greater chance of receiving a good education, a luxury which few could afford. In fact, hiring a teacher or sending children to a monastery to make them study required a considerable expense from the father and therefore not everyone considered strictly necessary to make children, who were destined to lead worldly life, study the subjects of *trivium* and *quadrivium*. It was, in fact, fathers who frequently took upon themselves the duty of educating their children, teaching them everything necessary for a man of their class to know, thus leaving the task of educating daughters to the mothers. However, if a family made the decision to hire a teacher, they oftentimes turned to monks or priests who were willing to live and stay at their home for several years to educate young people. It was not rare for those tutors to frequently give their students misogynistic texts as an exercise in reading. It is no surprise then that the male children fed by these ideas grew up looking at women with suspicion and considered them useful only for procreation and household management. For their part, the clerics, usually unmarried, did not know and did not understand women as they were often confined to convents from an early age and hardly ever remained in contact with women. As a matter of fact, what could a man remember of his mother or sisters if he had not seen them since childhood? Locked up in a monastery,

<sup>3</sup> See Le Ménagier de Paris, *The good wife's guide*, G.L. Greco, C.M. Rose translated with Critical Introduction, Cornell University 2009.

<sup>4</sup> See Xodo Cegolon C., *Lo specchio di Margherita, per una storia dell'educazione femminile nel Basso Medioevo*, C.L.E.U.P., Padova 1988, pp. 87-125.

<sup>5</sup> See *ibidem*, pp. 126-129.

<sup>6</sup> Francesco da Barberino, *Reggimento e costumi di donne*, ed. C. Baudi di Vesme, G. Romagnoli, Bologna 1875, p. 3.

“Recently, Francesco, //I talked with the Honesty about the issue //which the women asked me about, //and I expressed my regret because many //wrote books //about good manners (education) of men, but not women”.

constantly hearing that man had been expelled from heaven because of Eve, men would see their daughter in every woman. Furthermore, the fact that they read the texts of the Fathers used to increasingly strengthen their hostility against the female sex. It is therefore not surprising that, growing up in such an environment, they considered all women the cause of every evil that affected man and, in their texts, sermons and even in their teachings, a misogynistic accent can often be noted<sup>7</sup>.

The present study focuses on the thought of one of the best known preachers who lived in thirteenth century France, Gilbert of Tournai, who noted a lack of written works for women and a neglect of their education by their parents and husbands. Following the structure of his teachings, the present study has been divided into three parts and deals with girls who were considered to be of marriageable age, married women and finally widows. Such a division of the female audience was also applied by other preachers and writers active in medieval times, who addressed women in their texts, such as, Alain de Lille (†1202)<sup>8</sup>, Bernardino of Siena (†1444)<sup>9</sup>, Frate Cherubino (†1484)<sup>10</sup> or Jacques de Vitry (†1240)<sup>11</sup>. Other writers dedicated their texts to women in accordance with their social status. Humbert of Romans († 1277), in his sermons intended for a female audience, addressed the daughters of the aristocracy, the descendants of the rich bourgeois, their maids, poor women from small villages, prostitutes and nuns<sup>12</sup>. Francesco da Barberino († 1348) in *Reggimento e costumi di donna* was instead more precise and addressed the daughters of a king, a baron, a bourgeois, a knight, a merchant, etc.

The scarcity of medieval texts composed for the female audience demonstrates that there were still few men who considered it necessary to educate women so that they would be able to read. Furthermore, it can be seen that the men's thought in this field was not homogeneous and therefore some of them, such as Vincent of Beauvais, considered it useful to teach women to read and write. Others, such as Paolo da Certaldo, for example, claimed that it was not necessary for them, while some others, such as Francesco da Barberino, attempted to find a middle ground by allowing women of high social status to learn to read.

The works dedicated to those women who were intended for a worldly life, dealt above all with the question of good manners and mores. In fact, authors and preachers used to describe what virtues had to possess and what responsibilities had to fulfil girls, wives and widows so as to be considered well educated. Even if the expectations varied, depending on the social status of the woman, there are some virtues which may be outlined and which were mandatory to be made present in all of them, such as modesty and humility.

<sup>7</sup> To learn more, see: E. Power, *Donne del medioevo*, ed. M.M. Postan, Milano 1999<sup>4</sup>; G. Duby, M. Perrot, *Storia delle donne in Occidente. Il Medioevo*, ed. C. Klapisch-Zuber, Roma-Bari 2005.

<sup>8</sup> See Alain de Lille, *Summa de arte praedicatoria*, in PL 210, col.111-195.

<sup>9</sup> See Bernardino of Siena, *Le prediche volgari* vol. 3, Firenze 1940; idem, *Le prediche volgari* vol. 2, Firenze 1958; idem, *Prediche volgari sul campo di Siena 1427*, ed. C. Delcorno, vol. 2, Milano 1989.

<sup>10</sup> See *Regole della vita matrimoniale di Frate Cherubino da Siena*, ed. F. Zambrini, C. Negroni, Bologna 1888.

<sup>11</sup> See *Jacobi de Vitriaco Sermones vulgares vel ad status*, in CCCM Tournhout 2013.

<sup>12</sup> See Humbert of Romans, in *Prediche alle donne del secolo XIII. Testi di Umberto da Romans, Gilberto da Tournai, Stefano di Borbone*, ed. C. Casagrande, Milano 1978, p. 83.

## 1. The girl

Addressing the girl of marriageable age, Gilbert of Tournai places emphasis on the value of her virginity. He insists that she keep it, not because the girl was forced by someone to do so, but because it was meant to be her individual decision<sup>13</sup>. The following virtues were also expected of the virgin: “a voluntary benevolence, a true simplicity, a merciful compassion, a humble obedience, a hilarious patience, a beautiful conscience, a provident perseverance”<sup>14</sup>. In most of the works written in medieval times, it has been noted that simplicity and humility were the two most desirable virtues in women by men<sup>15</sup>. It is no surprise then that the girls were often given the example of the patient Giselda who accepted her difficult fate with humility and simplicity<sup>16</sup>. Gilbert later noted that a well-educated girl should not be reproached by anyone for her way of speaking, her gestures or her way of walking<sup>17</sup>. Furthermore she should be “modest, she should adorn herself so that everything is honest and composed in her”<sup>18</sup>. Gilbert’s opinion in this area was no different from that of other preachers and writers. In fact, a famous Italian preacher, Bernardino da Siena, who lived over a hundred years after the period, in discussing a girls’ manner of dress insisted on its modesty, but added that the dress must always be appropriate for the social status of the girl<sup>19</sup> and it had to show the honesty of the young woman<sup>20</sup>. Anne of France also mentioned modesty and advised her daughter, Suzanne, not to wear anything but clothes which “provoke outrage, neither too tight nor too drooping because a true elegance lies in the beautiful bearing, haughty and honourable, in a delicate way, very controlled and decisive in every detail”<sup>21</sup>. Umberto of Romans, on the

<sup>13</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 83.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>15</sup> To learn more, see Egidio Romano, *Del reggimento de' principi*, ed. F. Corazzini (cur.), Firenze 1858; Vincent of Beauvais, *De eruditione filiorum nobilium*, ed. A. Steiner, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1938, pp. 190-194 Francesco da Barberino, *Reggimento e costumi di donne*, ed. C. Baudi di Vesme, G. Romagnoli, Bologna 1875; Ludovico Dolce, *Dialogo della institutione delle donne*, Vinegia 1547.

<sup>16</sup> See: According to the story, the young Marquis of Salise, named Wuistasse, who did not want to marry, one day met Giselda, the daughter of an honest man. The girl was fifteen, she was very beautiful, of good manners and took care of her father and house with humility and devotion. The Marquis, struck by her beauty and her virtues, married her. Their first daughter was soon born, but the Marquis decided to put Giselda on trial to make certain of her obedience and humility. One day he told his wife that it could not be accepted that his descendant come from such humble origins and for this he had decided to kill their daughter. The grieving wife accepted her husband’s decision. Shortly after the couple had a son, the Marquis put his wife to the same test again. She accepted. But as he was still unsure, he decided to put give her another test and instructed her to go back to her father’s house. Giselda obeyed him. The Marquis, still not convinced of his wife’s humility and obedience, informed her that he wanted to remarry a young woman who had come to him accompanied by her brother. The Marquis had Giselda come to the castle and ordered her to prepare a wedding party for him, together with the servants, who worked in his house. During the wedding dinner, the Marquis asked Giselda her opinion regarding his new wife. Her answer moved everyone, including the Marquis, because the woman asked him to have mercy on his new wife and to spare her the pain and suffering she herself had been forced to endure throughout their marriage. Only at that moment did the Marquis say that he was then sure of having a good wife and that he did not want to have any other. He also explained to everyone present that the girl sitting next to him was actually their daughter, C. Xodo Cegolon, *Lo specchio di Margherita*, op.cit., pp. 47-48.

<sup>17</sup> See Gilberto da Tournai, *Terza predica alle donne sposate*, op.cit., p. 83.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 83.

<sup>19</sup> See Bernardino da Siena, *Prediche volgari*, op.cit., p. 879.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 887.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 95.

other hand, warned that women who took too much care of their clothing should fear being rejected from the kingdom of heaven<sup>22</sup>.

A serious problem that Gilbert faced, and along with him, other medieval preachers and writers, was the curiosity of girls and their desire to leave the house to wander the streets and squares. As a matter of fact, the French preacher, addressing girls, warns them, recalling the story of Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, who, driven by curiosity, goes out with her family and while she is walking, the son of a king notices her, falls in love with her and then rapes her<sup>23</sup>. According to Gilbert, the girl and her family must always remember this story and consider every going out of the doors of their house a real danger. In fact, as Gilbert insists, even while going to church for Holy Mass, the young woman could be seen by a man and awaken carnal desire in him. The same opinion was shared by Bernardino of Siena, who advised parents to keep their daughters inside their houses and not to allow them to even go near the windows or doors. According to him the most beautiful girl is one who does not show herself to anyone. Furthermore, the preacher warns parents that while they listen to his sermons, their daughters at home spend time near the doors or windows to be seen by the young men who attracts them with their songs. Giles of Rome was also of the same opinion and added for his part that “the man should not let the women go a lot wandering or going around the district or the streets”<sup>24</sup>. Also Francesco da Barberino made an ironic comment regarding women who spent their time near windows because “if a woman sews near a window, she often pricks herself with the needle while she believes to be sewing her dress”<sup>25</sup>. As has been made visible, the problem of the curiosity of young girls and their desire to leave the house was common, and both the preachers and the writers of the time continuously struggled against this feminine „vice”.

Another issue which was to be fought, according to Gilbert, concerned secular songs. This, however, as will be presented later, is an issue in which there was not much homogeneity of thought between the preachers and the writers of the time. For his part, the French preacher did not allow girls to hear and sing secular songs<sup>26</sup>. It was Jacques of Vitry who fully shared his opinion and firmly claimed that “the woman who launches the song is the devil’s chaplain and those who answer her are her priests”<sup>27</sup>. Francesco da Barberino, for his part, however, believed that girls should practice the “chamber song” and granted them permission to listen to music. In addition, the Florentine writer encouraged girls to learn to play “the psaltery, the fiddle or another fair and beautiful instrument”<sup>28</sup>.

Like most men, Gilbert believed that every woman tried to deceive men. It was his opinion that a young girl deceived men if she practiced in front of the mirror in order to see what type of laugh best suited her<sup>29</sup>. In addition, the French preacher also saw deception in hair

<sup>22</sup> See Umberto da Romans, *Alle fanciulle o alle adolescenti laiche*, in *Prediche alle donne del secolo XIII. Testi di Umberto a Romans, Gilberto da Tournai, Stefano di Borbone*, ed. C. Casagrande, Milano 1978, p. 20.

<sup>23</sup> See Gen 34.

<sup>24</sup> Egidio Romano, *Del reggimento de' principi*, ed. F. Corazzini, Firenze 1858, p. 184.

<sup>25</sup> Francesco da Barberino, *Reggimento e costumi delle donne*, op. cit., pp. 173-174.

<sup>26</sup> Gilberto da Tournai, *Terza predica alle donne sposate*, op.cit., pp. 83-84.

<sup>27</sup> C. Casagrande, *La donna custodita*, in *Storia delle donne in Occidente. Il Medioevo*, ed. C. Klapisch-Zuber, Roma-Bari 2005, p. 106.

<sup>28</sup> See F. Barberino, *Reggimento e costumi di donne*, op.cit., p. 53.

<sup>29</sup> See Gilberto da Tournai, *Terza predica alle donne sposate*, op.cit., p. 84.

dyeing<sup>30</sup>. He dealt with girls' makeup using strong words, claiming that they insulted the Creator by putting it on their face<sup>31</sup>. He also asked them the following questions to make them reflect on their behaviour: "If you are beautiful, why do you cover the beauty of the face with ointment? If you are ugly, why do you pretend to be beautiful?"<sup>32</sup> In his words it can be observed that any attempt made by a girl to improve her appearance was, in Gilbert's eyes, true deception, since the potential husband did not see her as she really was, but had only a false picture of her.

Where beauty was concerned, Gilbert claimed that the women should not boast of her body and told them that "if you are beautiful, you are nothing more than a pile of dung covered with snow"<sup>33</sup>. And if a woman had beautiful hair, she always had to remember that "your hair is a diabolical halter by which you are dragged to hell"<sup>34</sup>.

## 2. The wife

In addressing married women, Gilbert of Tournai says that they must be able to govern the house "which consists of four duties: with regard to children, servants, maids and housework"<sup>35</sup>. From what one may observe, the most important commitment of the married woman who had children was their education. In fact, when the sons were small, they remained in their mother's rooms, where they learned good manners above all and received religious education from her. Later they were passed under the wing of their father or another man who taught them everything that was deemed necessary for them to know. The daughters, instead, remained in the mother's care and spent their days learning from her how to look after the youngest brothers, to weave, embroider, manage the house, etc., that is all the duties that a future wife would have to perform in her husband's house. While every woman was well regarded if she knew how to do housework, not all girls were expected to be able to weave or spin. In fact, the descendants of high-status families frequently occupied their time by reading<sup>36</sup>.

A good mother always had to remember that the education of her children regarding the faith and good manners was to commence at the early age, because, as Gilbert said, everything that the child "did not learn in infancy, was difficult to learn in old age"<sup>37</sup>. In his address to mothers, he instructed them to remind their children "not to listen to anything else and not to talk about anything other than what concerns the fear and love of God"<sup>38</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, pp. 83-84.

<sup>31</sup> See Ibidem, p. 84.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, p. 84.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem, p. 84.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem, p. 84.

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem, p. 63.

<sup>36</sup> Giles of Rome in *Reggimento* says: il tessere, "...il filare e opere di seta, paiono che sieno opere convenevoli a la femina. E s'elli fuisse alcuna femmina, si alta o si nobile, ch' a lei non si convenisse nè tessere nè filare nè opera di seta, o per la dignità di lei o per lo costume del paese, si le die l'uomo fare leggiare alcun libro o imparare alcuna scienza utile". Egidio Romano, *Del reggimento de' principi*, ed. F. Corazzini, Firenze 1858, p.187.

<sup>37</sup> Gilberto da Tournai, *Terza predica alle donne sposate*, op.cit., p. 64.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem, p. 63.

Furthermore, they had to influence their children not to “have dirty thoughts”<sup>39</sup> and to “ignore the secular songs”<sup>40</sup>.

Another, no less important issue concerned the company of the offspring. In fact, a mother had the duty to choose very carefully which people her children should accompany, because it was necessary to reduce the presence of those who thought too frequently about worldly things: “Make your daughters stay away from those people of the world who can teach them in an even worse way the evil they have acquired”<sup>41</sup>. Furthermore, it was a mother’s duty to look after her daughter and to remind her to save her virginity for her husband. It is not surprising then that Gilbert angrily addressed mothers who neglected the question of their daughters’ virginity or who even arranged dates for them: “Damn the women who sell their daughters”<sup>42</sup>.

Furthermore, according to Gilbert’s teachings, a mother was to remember her duty to be a role model for her daughters to follow. The same thought can also be found in the poems of Eustache Deschamps († 1407), who invited his daughter to follow her mother, because she was thrifty, elegant and she carefully kept the house and managed the servants<sup>43</sup>.

In addition to educating the children, a good wife was expected to dedicate her time to housekeeping. Addressing the women who had servants in the house, Gilbert warned them, saying that they had to drive young and lascivious servants out of the house<sup>44</sup>, because “wicked servants look for ways to manipulate and deceive their mistresses”<sup>45</sup>. Gilbert also warned that in such houses there were frequently “brazen servants who have no modesty in their gestures, no modesty in dressing, no measure in eating, nor modesty in speaking”<sup>46</sup>. In the case that a woman found a faithful servant, she was supposed to treat him in a friendly and gentle manner<sup>47</sup>. To even more greatly strengthen his idea, the preacher reports the words of St. Jerome, according to whom the woman had to protect her servants as if she were not their mistress, but their mother<sup>48</sup>. However, not everyone agreed with this claim and so for example an anonymous author of the 14th century, in the text entitled *I dodici avvertimenti che deve dare la madre alla figlia quando la manda a marito*, in the tenth commandment, warns girls against becoming “too friendly with your family, nor too bowing especially to those people who should serve you, like the minion, or labourer, whether they are a male servant, or a female servant; because too much familiarity leads to vice, and too much acquaintance generates indignation”<sup>49</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem, p. 63.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem, p. 64.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, p. 64.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem, p. 67.

<sup>43</sup> See D. Lett, *Uomini e donne nel Medioevo. Storia del genere (secoli XII-XV)*, San Giovanni in Persiceto 2014, p. 57.

<sup>44</sup> See Ibidem, p. 65.

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem, p. 65.

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem, p. 65.

<sup>47</sup> See Ibidem, p. 65.

<sup>48</sup> See Ibidem, p. 65.

<sup>49</sup> *I dodici avvertimenti che deve dare la madre alla figlia quando la manda a marito*, F. Trucchi (ed.), Firenze 1847, p.12.

In the house of a good wife, modesty was always to reign and “a wise woman must be very careful that a servant and a handmaid do not smear her house with their incontinence”<sup>50</sup>. The issue regarding servants must have created many problems in homes since more than once Gilbert warns women to pay “a lot of attention to the servants and maids because they live in the same house, eat together, look at each other, have their beds close to each other”<sup>51</sup>. Furthermore, the ability to reproach “those messy and brazen maids” was required of the women<sup>52</sup>. A mistress, according to Gilbert, had to be strict with a handmaid who was not obedient to her, talked frivolously or made an attempt to corrupt both her and her daughters<sup>53</sup>. Hearing from her servant the words “Madam, there is this very handsome knight, honest and worthy of being loved, who loves you”<sup>54</sup>, the mistress was in fact obliged to call all other servants and whip the one in their presence to make them understand that she did not tolerate these innuendoes<sup>55</sup>.

In his sermons, Gilbert divided domestic duties between the wife and the husband, explaining however that while those of the bride took place at home, those of the husband concerned the business outside the home. In fact the husband “must provide food and what to dress while the woman at home has to take care of the house and animal products”<sup>56</sup>. Similar words may also be found in *Dodici avvertimenti* where it can be read “that the man should be made to deal with things away from home, in order to be able to do those that are done inside”<sup>57</sup>.

Finally, an important duty of the woman was to “apply herself to the meditation of divine truths”<sup>58</sup>. In fact, Gilbert suggested that the wives have a room in their home where they could spend their time praying and working<sup>59</sup>.

### 3. The widow

One of the main duties of the widow, according to Gilbert, was to lead a holy life in order to become a role model for other women<sup>60</sup>. Furthermore, in society, a widow had to be known by her “pale face”, “mourning dress” and good reputation<sup>61</sup>.

Widowed women, in Gilbert’s opinion, should not abandon their commitments to their families<sup>62</sup>. In fact, just as they had the task of educating their children before, they also had

<sup>50</sup> Gilberto da Tournai, *Terza predica alle donne sposate*, op.cit., p. 66.

<sup>51</sup> Ibidem, p. 66.

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem, p. 66.

<sup>53</sup> See Ibidem, p. 66.

<sup>54</sup> Ibidem, p. 67.

<sup>55</sup> See Ibidem, p. 67.

<sup>56</sup> Ibidem, p. 68.

<sup>57</sup> *I dodici avvertimenti che deve dare la madre alla figlia*, op. cit., pp. 12-13.

<sup>58</sup> Gilberto da Tournai, *Terza predica alle donne sposate*, op.cit., p. 68.

<sup>59</sup> See Ibidem, p. 68.

<sup>60</sup> See Ibidem, p. 76.

<sup>61</sup> Ibidem, p. 77.

<sup>62</sup> See Ibidem, p. 72.

to do the same with their children or grandchildren after. If they did not have them, then they were obliged to take care of the poor<sup>63</sup>.

Gilbert also demands of a widow to show “a devotion to Christ, a pallor for continuous fasting”<sup>64</sup>, because whoever “has fasting instead of games, prayers instead of pleasures will be blessed by God”<sup>65</sup>. Furthermore, the French preacher claims that apart from charity, a widow must be modest and moderate in everything she does,<sup>66</sup> as well as that the church should become her most frequented refuge<sup>67</sup>.

Although they were widows in the eyes of men, they always remained daughters of Eve, but were still expected to fight carnal desire<sup>68</sup>. They were expected to renounce worldly pleasures and dedicate every moment of their life to prayer and fasting. According to Gilbert, in the event that a young woman became a widow, she was expected, among other things, to forget the softness of feathers and avoid hot baths because all this could warm “her still young blood”<sup>69</sup>. What is more, the French preacher did not agree on second marriages which, in his opinion, only created problems for both the woman, her previous family as well as the new one. In fact, to be even more convincing, Gilbert relays the words of the Girolamo: “You will have children with your second husband, you will bring war into the house... your husband will be jealous of your previous dead husband and if you do not hate his children it will seem that you still love the father”<sup>70</sup>. Gilberto also warns widows that being the second wife can be seen as a thread and they could always be easily accused by the people of having poisoned the children of her husband and his first wife if they fall ill<sup>71</sup>. In fact, in order to avoid all such problems it is better, in his view, for a widow to remain in her state of widowhood for the rest of her life.

## Conclusions

The present study intends to Gilbert’s of Tournai concept of the behaviours and duties of a girl, a wife and a widow. Thanks to his sermons it is possible to see what attitudes of women were considered right or wrong by the society of the time. Thanks to the words of this great French preacher, it can be seen what expectations the men used to have of the women for whom they had chosen life in the world and not in a convent. Unfortunately, due to a lack of written testimonies from women, today it is difficult to say with certainty how they reacted to the words of confessors, preachers, poets or writers. It can only be assumed that they did not always agree with such ideas, however as they were educated from an early age to be subjected to man, they kept silent out of fear and obedience. Many years had to pass before one of them, Cristina da Pizan, had the courage to face the leading thinkers of her time and

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<sup>63</sup> See *Ibidem*, p. 73.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 73.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>66</sup> See *Ibidem*, p. 73.

<sup>67</sup> See *Ibidem*, p. 73.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 74.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 78.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 79.

<sup>71</sup> See *Ibidem*, p. 79.

to write letters against the poem *Roman de la Rose* (The Romance of the Rose) by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, a work so much appreciated by men.

**How should a woman behave and what are her duties?  
Guidelines for women presented in the selected sermons of Gilbert of Tournai  
Summary**

The article presents the opinions of the 13th-century preacher Gilbert of Tournai on the duties of girls, wives and widows. Gilbert, seeing a great lack of women's education addressed them in his sermons and indicated which behaviours were proper and which should be changed or avoided. His sermons show how the woman was seen, as well as what her position and role were in 13th-century French society.

**Keywords:** women, Gilbert of Tournai, behaviour, obligation, middle age

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