

Collyridianism

Collyridianism was an obscure early Christian heretical movement whose adherents apparently worshipped the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus, as a goddess. The main source of information about them comes from their strongest opponent, Epiphanius of Salamis, who wrote about them in his *Panarion* of about 375 AD. According to Epiphanius,^[1] certain women in then-largely-pagan Arabia syncretized indigenous beliefs with the worship of Mary, and offered little cakes or bread-rolls (Greek κολλυρις – a word occurring in the Septuagint) to her. Epiphanius states that Collyridianism originated in Thrace and Scythia, although it may have first travelled to those regions from Syria or Asia Minor. Little else is known.

In his book *The Virgin*, however, Geoffrey Ashe puts forward the hypothesis that the Collyridians represented a parallel Marian religion to Christianity, founded by first-generation followers of the Virgin Mary, whose doctrines were later subsumed by the Church at the Council of Ephesus in 432. Averil Cameron has been more sceptical about whether a cult even existed, noting that Epiphanius is the only source for the cult, and that later authors simply refer back to his text.^[2] Some women interested in feminist spirituality claim the Collyridians as precursors.

Collyridianism in Christian–Muslim dialogue

The Collyridians have become of interest in some recent Christian–Muslim religious discussions in reference to the Islamic concept of the Christian Trinity. The debate hinges on some verses in the Qur'an, primarily ^[Qur'an 5:73], ^[Qur'an 5:75], and ^[Qur'an 5:116] in the sura Al-Ma'ida, which have been taken to imply that Muhammad believed that Christians considered Mary part of the Trinity. This idea has never been part of mainstream Christian doctrine, and is not clearly and unambiguously attested among any ancient Christian group (including the Collyridians). But there has been some modern speculation that Muhammad might have confused heretical Collyridian beliefs with those of orthodox Christianity. There is no evidence that Collyridianism still existed in Muhammad's time (the 6th and 7th centuries AD), but perhaps the idea of the divinity of Mary might have been associated with Christian belief in Arabia because of the heritage of the Collyridian heresy.

Some scholars reject the interpretation according to which the Qur'an is said to assert that Mary was part of the Trinity, since the relevant statements can be seen as emphasizing the purely human nature of Mary to reinforce the Islamic belief in the purely human nature of Jesus, whilst also serving as a general restatement of the central Islamic doctrine of Tawhid, the pure oneness of God.

References

- Madrid, Patrick. "Collyridianism"^[3]. ewtn.com. Retrieved January 11, 2006.
- Cameron, Averil (2004). "The Cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity: Religious Development and Myth-Making". *Studies in Church History* **39**: 1–21.

Notes

[1] *Panarion*, Haer. 79

[2] Cameron, "The Cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity," 6-7.

[3] <http://www.ewtn.com/library/HOMELIBR/COLLYRID.TXT>

Article Sources and Contributors

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