

# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 131

## Women of the Reformation

Lesser-known stories

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# Did you know?

NUNS, PROPHETS, QUEENS, WITCHES, WIVES

## WHO ELSE WAS IN THE FISH WAGON?

When Katharina von Bora escaped from the Nimb-schen convent in a fish wagon in 1523, her fellow escapees were the nuns Magdalena von Staupitz, Elsa von Canitz, Laneta von Golis, Ave Grosse, sisters Veronika and Margarete von Deschau, and sisters Ave and Margarete von Schönfeld. Von Staupitz, in her forties, was the one who originally wrote to Martin Luther to arrange the escape—her brother was his friend and former confessor, Johann von Staupitz! Nicholas von Amsdorf offered to marry her, but instead she moved in with another brother until she got her own house. She began a girls' school—perhaps the first ever outside a cloister—and married a man named Tiburtius Geuder.

## THE NAKED TRUTH

Ursula Jost, Anabaptist prophet from Strasbourg, was married to a butcher, Lienhard, also a prophet (see p. 37). Both had their visions published. In one Lienhard reported receiving a message that he should prophesy “stark naked” throughout Strasbourg. Ursula did not stop him, but the magistrates did; they put him in an insane asylum.

**SIT STILL, PLEASE** Hans Holbein's c. 1528 portrait of his own family is a window into everyday life for women and children in the Reformation era.

## YOUNG PRODIGY

Lady Jane Seymour was the niece of a better-known Jane Seymour, Henry VIII's third wife. A Protestant, she responded in 1549 to a gift from Martin Bucer and Paul Fagius—exiled continental Reformers living in England:

I have perused your letter, most reverend fathers, which has not only pleased, but highly delighted me. For I easily perceived therein your singular good-will towards me, a grace and eloquence equal to that of Cicero.

Perhaps we should mention she was eight at the time! Her father, the Duke of Somerset, was an advisor to the boy-king Edward VI and tried to marry her off to his royal charge, but ended up executed. Jane herself died at age 19, only 11 years after writing her letter.

## PUBLISHED QUEEN

Catherine Parr was the first English queen to publish in English under her own name when she issued *Prayers or Meditations* (1545) and *The Lamentation of a Sinner* (1547) after publishing *Psalms or Prayers* (1543) anonymously. Princess Elizabeth, her stepdaughter, translated *Prayers or Meditations* into Latin, French, and Italian as a present for Henry VIII.



**“EYE OF NEWT, AND TOE OF FROG”** One great fear about unattached women in the 16th c. was that they were secretly witches (see p. 8).



**ROYAL LADIES** Above: The modern *Imperia* commemorates the Council of Constance in that city's harbor; in the 16th c., Margaret Blaurer was at the center of the region's Protestant reform (see p. 33).

### FOR THE LOVE OF LEARNING

Olympia Fulvia Morata (1526–1555) from Ferrara in northern Italy was trained as a religious humanist by her university professor father and began writing poetry in Greek at about 12 or 13. Later she married Andreas Grunthler, a German Protestant physician, and they moved to Schweinfurt, right into the middle of extreme religious conflict—surviving a siege, hiding in a wine cellar, and finally escaping to Heidelberg. There Grunthler taught medicine and Morata tutored students in Greek and Latin. She died at 29 from fever. All of her surviving writings are academic and devotional works in Greek and Latin. In one early poem, she wrote that she had “dropped the symbols of my sex, / Yarn, shuttle, basket, thread” for learning, the “flowered Parnassus with the choirs of joy.”

**WHAT THE WELL-DRESSED NUN WEARS** A later illustrator depicts the different habits of French nuns.



**BUSY PRINCESS** Below: Princess Elizabeth translated Marguerite of Navarre's famed *The Mirror of the Sinful Soul* into English at age 11 (Catherine Parr's copy is at right.)



### DYING ON TWO DAYS AT ONCE

Mystic, nun, and theologian Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582) died while traveling through Spain to oversee her convents and monasteries, on the night of October 4, 1582—or perhaps the morning of October 15, 1582. Just before her death, Pope Gregory XIII had announced the adoption of a new calendar and, to repair accumulated discrepancies from the old one, removed 10 days from October. Her reported last words were, “My Lord, it is time to move on. Well then, may your will be done. O my Lord and my Spouse, the hour that I have longed for has come. It is time to meet one another.” ☞



# Letters to the editor

Readers respond to *Christian History*



## HISTORY IS NEW AGAIN

Issue #130 arrived and it's wonderful! You all always do such a fine job with this publication. It is both a work of art and an important contribution toward ministry.—*Stephanie Bennett, West Palm Beach, FL*

Thanks for sending me issue #130 of the magazine. I look forward to receiving more as they become available. I knew nothing of the history of the church in Latin America, so it was all new to me.

The history of the west coast of North America is so recent, it's hard to realize that the history of so many other places in the world goes back hundreds and thousands of years. I think that's partly why I found our tour [of Turkey] so fascinating—it gives a whole new perspective.—*Mary Martin, Burnaby, BC, participant on CHI tour to Turkey*

I got my copy of the magazine the other day and it's just beautiful. Informative articles and great pictures, as usual. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to it.—*Joel Morales Cruz, author for issue #130*

## A WAKE-UP CALL

Issue #129 has personal significance for me since in the past few years I have been greatly influenced by Tom Oden and his work in recovering the orthodox faith of the early church. Willard and Foster wrote works that challenged me at the time I read them, but I was not ready to put the spiritual disciplines into action. I need to re-read them with new eyes.

The issue has been sort of a wake-up call to intensify my efforts to learn and adopt lessons for worship and study in ways that sadly seem out of vogue in many evangelical churches. Many thanks for re-igniting that flame.—*Tom Edmunds, Washington, NJ*

*Hardly had we closed the mailbox when Tom wrote us back about issue #130:*

Another great issue!! Thank you for an issue that focuses on the Latin American church, its history and its challenges. Most informative as always. I pray for our Lord's guidance for the staff and writers at CHI

because yours is a vital ministry that keeps us, your readers, grounded in the truth.

Speaking of your staff, why not devote a short column to them so we can get to "know" those in your ministry? Just a thought. Enclosed is a ministry gift. I love supporting CHI and feel I always receive more than I give. Lord Bless!—*Tom Edmunds*

*Thanks for the idea about featuring the staff. We will look into the best way to do this.*

## NOW IT'S THREE

Last week *Christian History* #127 surfaced (I am trying to read them in the order of their arrival) and I discovered that you had included not one, but two of my letters to you. And I was shocked. And gratified. Thank you.

I don't send letters to editors with the hopes of being published . . . and usually my non-hope is fully realized. Thus seeing two letters in one issue was a veritable knock-me-over experience. Evidently you are seriously lacking in letter submissions. . . . You are altogether right in saying that #127 begins to answer my questions.—*Arne Tiegland, Carver, MN*

*We couldn't resist putting this one in too, Arne.*

## TEACHING THE FAITH

Thank you for such quality work and writing. My adult class appreciates the material.—*John Wallace, Dover, OH*

Thank you for producing this superb magazine! It is absolutely the finest history journal of its kind anywhere.—*Ronald Stan, Bellevue, WA*

I have had a wonderful summer teaching the Reformation to my adult SS class. Thanks so much for sending the DVD *Reformation Overview*. It is so well produced and a joy to teach. . . . Thanks for all your labor of love and time in giving us the tools to better teach our faith. Blessings.—*Mark Deeter*

*In issue #129, we commented that John Williamson Nevin left Pittsburgh Seminary to go to the German Reformed seminary at Mercersburg. He actually left Pittsburgh's predecessor institution, Western Theological Seminary. Thanks to eagle-eyed reader Daniel Reuter for pointing that out.*



## *Reformed Episcopal Seminary Grace*

May the grace of Christ our Savior  
And the Father's boundless love,  
With the Holy Spirit's favor,  
Rest upon us from above.  
Thus may we abide in union  
With each other and the Lord,  
And possess, in sweet communion,  
Joys which earth cannot afford.  
Amen.



## THE REFORMED EPISCOPAL SEMINARY

*A Seminary of the  
Reformed Episcopal Church and  
the Anglican Church in North America*

- Evangelical
- Catholic
- Protestant
- Ecumenical
- Anglican



# Editor's note

**AMONG THE GENRES I ENJOY READING** are mysteries, fantasy novels, and science fiction. More than once a mystery or fantasy trilogy I've read has expanded to include more than three books. The most famous instance I know of is Douglas Adams's *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*—described by the publisher as “a trilogy in five parts.” (Eventually it became six, because someone else wrote yet another sequel after Adams's death.)

We are in a similar position here. Our four-part Reformation series came out to great acclaim in 2015–2017, accompanied by the documentary *This Changed Everything* and by our eight-page foldout timeline of the sixteenth century. In that series we showed how reform arose and spread throughout the century, and we told dozens of wonderful stories. But recently it dawned on our team that, though we'd published issues devoted to women in the early church (#17) and women in the Middle Ages (#30), we'd never in 37 years published an issue devoted solely to women in the Reformation.

Enter the fifth issue in our four-issue series.

## “ARE WE NOT ONE IN OUR LORD?”

We view this issue as a companion to the Reformation series. You'll notice a similar look to our timeline and our art, but these pages are filled with fresh stories of lesser-known women's contributions to reform. Many women highlighted at more length in the Reformation series are background figures here—such as Katie Luther (#115), Idelette Calvin (#120), Teresa of Ávila (#122), and the much-married Wibrandis Rosenblatt (#118).

Doing this freed us up to feature women who may not be as well known, from printers (Margarethe Prüss) to preachers (Katherine Schütz Zell, Marie Dentièrre) to pamphlet writers (Argula von Grumbach, Zell again).

We also have more room for mystics (Ursula Jost), consecrated virgins (Margaret Blaurer), and others besides Katie Luther who pioneered the brand new profession of pastor's wife (Zell *again*, as well as Anna Bullinger, whose husband Heinrich's courtship letters to her formed the basis of our only lengthy excerpt from a male theologian in this issue—“Honorable and holy,” p.11).

And while we certainly mentioned the queens of the sixteenth century as we worked our way through our original four issues, here we bring their stories front and center. In France we spend time with the mother-daughter reform team of Marguerite de Navarre and Jeanne d'Albret. In England we put Henry VIII's conflicted array of six wives (three Catherines, two Annes, and one Jane) and two daughters (Mary and Elizabeth) fully into the spotlight.

I found these women to be fascinating, inspiring, complex, and brave. And over and over again, I noticed one theme—their argument that the gospel they loved compelled them to speak and to serve. I have many favorite quotes from their fiery treatises and compelling conversations to ponder after researching and editing this issue, but I will let Dentièrre (as translated by Mary McKinley) have the last word:

Did [Jesus] not preach and spread my Gospel so much only for my dear sirs the wise and important doctors? Isn't it for all of us? Do we have two Gospels, one for men and another for women? One for the wise and another for the fools? Are we not one in our Lord? In whose name are we baptized? By Paul or by Apollo, by the pope or by Luther? Is it not in the name of Christ? ¶



Jennifer Woodruff Tait  
Managing editor

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Don't miss our next issue, which will tell stories of how spiritual friendship has contributed to the spread of the gospel.

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# No simple story

HOW WOMEN'S ROLES CHANGED IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

*Jennifer Powell McNutt*

IN JANUARY 1540 Martin Luther's family experienced a crisis common to many families and yet too rarely acknowledged publicly by the church. His wife, Katharina von Bora (1499–1552), had a miscarriage that left her gravely ill to the point that she was unable to walk until months afterward.

No strangers to the untimely death of a child, the Luthers had lost their one-year-old daughter, Elisabeth, 12 years earlier. The heartbreaking miscarriage was soon followed by the death of their second daughter, Magdalena (1529–1542), who passed away at age 13 after enduring sickness and suffering.

Out of his own experience and with sympathy for parents facing the tragic loss of a child, Luther poured himself into the writing of a foreword to a book by his friend and pastor Johannes Bugenhagen on Psalm 29. Luther's short essay was called "Consolation for Women Whose Pregnancies Have Not Gone Well" (1542).

## **GOD HAS NOT LIMITED GOD'S POWER**

Luther strongly defended mothers against the culture's tendency to lay the tragedy at their feet. No doubt with his own Katharina in mind, Luther affirmed the

**NORMALLY THERE ARE NO HALOS** An anonymous painting from c. 1500 pictures the birth of John the Baptist as if it was happening in a typical late medieval household.

anguished prayers of mothers struggling to articulate their grief to God. One question that would have plagued his audience was whether God's presence had a place for the unbaptized, stillborn child—a pastoral care situation never handled easily by a medieval church that maintained infant baptism washed away original sin. Luther assured grieving mothers that God's promises were not rooted in the physical administration of baptism but in the covenantal promise to the families of believers:

Who can doubt that those Israelite children who died before they could be circumcised on the eighth day were yet saved by the prayers of their parents, in view of the promise that God willed to be their God? God has not limited God's power to sacraments but has made a covenant with us through God's own word.

Would Luther have written this piece if he had not been a husband and a father as well as a pastor and a theologian? It seems unlikely. The work, the struggles,



and the spiritual lives of women as wives were now up close and personal for pastors in a prominent and legitimate way once forbidden to clergy. Allowing clergy to marry had significantly changed the game. Indeed this and other rapid developments of the Reformation would serve to uniquely shape and complicate the day-to-day faith of women. Reformation scholar Merry Wiesner-Hanks wrote about this tumultuous time in *Sixteenth-Century Journal*:

Women were not simply passive recipients of the Reformation message, but left convents, refused to leave convents, preached, prophesied, discussed religion with friends and family, converted their husbands, left their husbands, wrote religious poems, hymns, and polemics, and were martyred on all sides of the religious controversy.

These women were both willing and unwilling participants in the seismic shifts taking place in their communities. They conceded and defied their circumstances even to the point of great risk and sacrifice, and populated every branch of the Reformation as devoted Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Reformed, and Anabaptists. While some took great risk to escape convents, others despaired at their closing when they were left to fend for themselves in a society ill prepared to receive them. Describing their stories leaves us with a richer and more robust picture of the Reformation as it challenged men and women alike to reconsider the status quo and grapple with old and new dimensions to life and faith. One thing is certain: as the fires of reform swept the Continent, they burned up the rule book regarding women's roles.

### WHEN ONE DOOR CLOSSES

The closing of the convents proved the most transformational change to women's daily lives. Before the Reformation a substantial portion of Europe's female population lived in convents. Here their lives revolved around religious practice, and they enjoyed educational opportunities largely unavailable otherwise.

In the best of circumstances, the convent was an attractive opportunity for fostering female piety and spiritual leadership. Those who had experienced this resisted forcible ejection from their lifelong monastic homes in the sixteenth century. Jeanne de Jussie (1503–1561) wrote one troubling account of the events surrounding the closing of the convent of the Poor Clares in Geneva in 1535, detailing the many hardships women experienced in displacement. She took particular offense when one Protestant female reformer, Marie Dentièrre, suggested that a husband would solve her woes:



**TWO OF A KIND** Martin and Katie Luther's partnership in marriage, ministry, and household management forged new ground in what it meant for pastors to marry.

In that company was a nun, a false, wrinkled abbess with a devilish tongue, who had a husband and children, named Marie Dentièrre of Picardy, who meddled in preaching and perverting pious people.... She said, "Oh, you poor creatures, if you knew what a good thing it is to be next to a handsome husband and how pleasing to God!"

To leave the convent required entering a society not prepared to receive, resettle, and reestablish female lives. Homeless, impoverished, and unmarried former nuns depended on the social welfare of Protestant city governments in such cases. Navigating the shifting landscape was challenging to all, but women felt its difficulty most acutely—social, cultural, political, and economic restrictions bound their lives, and sixteenth-century society was simply not equipped for untethered, self-supporting women.

But monastic life had not been the vocational hope of all women. In its worst form, for those locked in monastic cells as young as toddlers, the closing of the convents and the prospect of marriage offered a welcome respite. Out of this experience we get the unforgettable story of Katharina von Bora's daring escape as one of a dozen nuns fleeing the convent of Nimbschen hidden in a fish wagon on the evening of Easter Sunday in 1523.

After biding her time, von Bora eventually married Luther in 1525 and would come to manage their expansive household, exercising talents from industry to finance. Luther came to love her dearly and recognize her exceptional talents by (literally) giving her a seat at

the theological table, as we can see from his *Table Talk*, and seeking to skirt gender laws over inheritance on her behalf through his will in 1542. Katie Luther was an exception in many ways, but she also represents a new norm that treated marriage and motherhood, not the life of a celibate nun, as the primary expression of female piety.

### WIVES AND WITCHES

The medieval church had worked for centuries to advance a culture of celibacy as the highest expression of the Christian life for both men and women. Despite such efforts the systemic problem of clergy defying their vows and keeping concubines (called “Nicolaitism”) became the pivot of the church’s structural corruptions. The fathering of illegitimate children by priests opened the door for extortion and blackmail within the ranks (simony) as well as the purchasing of church offices by priests for their sons (nepotism, from the Latin word for nephew—many priests’ “nephews” were actually sons).

Priests also frequented brothels to quell sexual desires. This web of corruption was interrelational, intergenerational, and ever expanding—reaching all the way to the seat of Peter. Alexander VI, pope from 1492 to 1503, openly legitimized four of his children after he became pope, including the famous Lucrezia Borgia, and he probably fathered six more. In this setting the cry for medieval reform was often tied to a



**NO MORE NUNS AND NO MORE FISH** This is what the convent ruins at Nimbschen look like today.

recommitment to celibacy. Unfortunately celibacy campaigns tended to disparage womanhood and marriage to advance their cause. Common tropes of the era about marriage included, “Take a wife, and get a devil on your back” or “Brief is the joy, lasting the bitterness.”

The church all too frequently advanced a denigrated view of women through an appeal to nature, Scripture, and theology. Females were thought to be no better than prepubescent males, less than fully human, created in sin and for sin, and lacking God’s sacred image. These views were all par for the course in the medieval period, though inherited from early church fathers and from Greek philosophers such as Aristotle. By the sixteenth century, these disparaging views surrounding womanhood formed an integral part of celibacy propaganda—and the campaign to rid the church of heresy and witchcraft.

*Malleus Maleficarum* (*The Hammer of Witches*), written by two Dominican priests in the late fifteenth century, came on the scene with a fury thanks to the stamp of approval it received from a papal bull. “Woman” is depicted there as feeble in mind and body while prone to sexual deviance and theological heresy.

The *Hammer* argues that either God created woman defective and fleshly, or else devils conceived her; in any case, woman existed only as a “necessary evil” for the reproduction of future males. The impact of this document was devastating to women, particularly old and poor widows, who experienced the brunt of the witch-craze wrath in regions that used torture liberally for criminal prosecution.

The Reformers responded to the celibacy dispute by stressing the importance of marriage (though not as a



**“FALL DOWN AND WORSHIP”** This early 17th-c. woodcut shows a witch giving her loyalty to Satan. For centuries women were feared for their potential to become witches.



**FOLLOW ME** *Right:* Some women, like Teresa of Ávila and her nuns, still found solace in religious life.

**MISSING MONKS** *Below:* Monasteries and men's abbeys closed too—including England's famous Glastonbury Abbey.

sacrament) and, by extension, the theological dignity of womanhood. In contrast to prevalent voices in the celibacy campaigns, many Protestants taught that woman was made a good creation and in the image of God. Therefore mutual respect between spouses was warranted. As Luther wrote even before his marriage to von Bora, "Each should honor the other's image and body as a divine and good creation that is well-pleasing to God himself."

## REFORMING MARRIAGE

In the writings of Calvin, the blame once heaped solely upon Eve for her role in ushering original sin into the world was also extended to Adam, an atypical move for the period. When traditional readings of passages like 1 Timothy 2:15 seemed to threaten the idea that women have equal access to salvation through justification by faith alone, Luther reinterpreted the passage saying, "For Christ, our Savior, did not hold woman in contempt but entered the womb of a woman. Paul also reflected on this [when he wrote], 'Woman will be saved through bearing children,' etc."

To the Reformers the battle to redeem marriage was a fight with the devil. Calvin wrote in his commentary on Genesis, "The more Satan has endeavored to dishonor marriage, the more should we vindicate it from all reproach and abuse, that it may receive its due reverence." Importantly this reverence extended to marriage meant theological reverence for womanhood.

These were not just mere theological affirmations; these teachings had a noticeable impact in Reformation society. Protestant city councils closed brothels as part of their efforts to protect marriage. Church liturgies moved the marriage ceremony to the prominence of the Sunday morning worship context.

Meanwhile institutional bodies such as the Genevan Consistory dedicated countless hours of their disciplinary activity to what amounted to marital counseling. Women were encouraged to participate in the spiritual instruction of their children, which was one of the primary motivations for the Reformation's movement to educate girls. Zurich reformer Heinrich Bullinger promoted motherhood as the foremost expression of female piety in *On Christian Marriage* (see



p. 11). Even so motherhood was not the only avenue for the Reformation's pious women.

## PIOUS WOMEN, MANLY COURAGE

Women were also drawn to receive and advance the theological message and mission of the Reformation. Former abbess Dentièrè, though her efforts were not approved by de Jussie, worked tirelessly from Geneva to promote reform among women—encouraging the closing of convents and writing "to give courage to other women detained in captivity, so as they might not fear being expelled from their homelands, away from their relatives and friends, as I was, for the word of God." Dentièrè's story (see "A very useful epistle," p. 16) captures how the Reformation message compelled women to embrace reform and to enter the theological fray with their own words.

Luther's earliest convictions about the priesthood of all believers, his emphasis on the authority of Scripture, his reformulation of justification, and his appeal to Christian freedom all played



**WATCHING THE BABY** In this c. 1498 painting *Virgin and Child in a Landscape*, Jesus and Mary resemble a typical aristocratic toddler and mother.

significant roles in encouraging the participation of women in the Protestant Reformation. Luther's reading of 1 Peter 2:9 early on was particularly empowering: "Because the words of Peter are written to all Christians . . . it follows that the holy, pious women and children are tonsured and anointed priests. . . ." With this encouragement and more, a flurry of female authors began to publish pamphlets advancing the Reformation message.

Whether you read Argula von Grumbach (see "Our first woman reformer," pp. 17–20), Katharina Schütz Zell (see "She would follow only Christ," pp. 29–32), or several generations later Anna Maria van Schurman (1607–1678), reoccurring themes emerge. These women writers celebrated the right to finally receive, read, and learn from the Word of God. They appealed to their baptism as the basis for their shared priesthood. They emphasized how the Holy Spirit could use all people for God's purpose and cited Balaam's donkey in Numbers 22 as an illustration. They quoted Jesus's words—"Whoever confesses me before another I too will confess before my heavenly Father" (Matthew 10:32)—to prove Christ's intention that both men and women could proclaim the Good News.

Above all they made it clear that they ultimately answered to God instead of men and cited the Parable

of the Talents in Matthew 25 in support. Rather than cast aside their gifts, they would use them to God's glory. Von Grumbach wrote to the faculty at Ingolstadt, "I don't intend to bury my talent, if the Lord gives me grace." They preached, they published, and they read. In the case of Anabaptist women, they suffered imprisonment, shared their biblical convictions in court, and received martyrdom. The pious women of the Reformation showed "manly courage" (as one Anabaptist text put it) in numerous regards.

### ANOTHER DOOR OPENS

In the end, although the closing of the convents meant a significant change for women's roles in the church, it did not prove to be the death knell of female church leadership. The rise of the roles of pastor's wife and pastor's daughter was no small development. For the first time since before the days of Charlemagne, the pastor's family became a legitimate and respectable family unit within the life of the church.

Moreover renewed attention to the church's offices according to the Pauline epistles led to the recovery and reestablishment of the office of deacon, and with this came the retrieval of the female diaconate. Deaconesses primarily cared for the poor; this became a ministry of widows and single women particularly.

The church of Geneva and Reformed churches in the Netherlands actively encouraged and advanced deaconess ministry; the office may have existed as early as 1566 at the Reformed Church in Amsterdam, although the consistory did not record the names of the women until 1582. Selection went by the same procedure as the selection of male deacons, although the female deacons never participated in the consistory gathering or managed the finances. Still it was an official vehicle for female church ministry.

Finally, as the centuries wore on, the Protestant emphasis on the priesthood of all believers was used as a theological basis for permitting women to enter the ordained ministry as clergy. Beginning with seventeenth-century German Pietism, then in nineteenth-century evangelical congregationalism and twentieth-century mainline Protestantism, Protestantism became the only branch of the church to allow and in fact to encourage the female priesthood. When one door closes, another door opens... ☐

*Jennifer Powell McNutt is Franklin S. Dyrness Chair for Biblical and Theological Studies at Wheaton College, the author of Calvin Meets Voltaire, and the coeditor of The People's Book: The Reformation and the Bible. She is ordained in the Presbyterian Church (USA).*



# “Honorable and holy”

*Heinrich Bullinger's Der Christlich Eestand (Christian Marriage), translated into English by Bible translator Miles Coverdale, was one of the most popular books about marriage on both the Continent and in England. These excerpts from its theological and practical instructions give us insight into the roles of women and their lives in Reformation-era Protestant families.*

**T**he woman was taken from and out of the side of man, and not from the earth, lest any man should think that he had gotten his wife out of the mire; but to consider that the wife is the husband's flesh and bone and therefore to love her; yet was she not made of the head, for the husband is the head and master of the wife. Neither was she made of the feet (as though thou mightest spurn her away from thee and nothing regard her) but even out of thy side, as one that is set next unto man to be his help and companion. And as the bone of the flesh is strong so ought the husband to be the strength, help, and comfort of the wife.

As soon now as the woman was set before Adam he [ac]knowledgeth immediately that she was for his purpose, that he loved her well and that he could find in his heart to love her as one that was of his own kind, of his own blood, flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone....

Therefore is wedlock a covenant . . . a right knot unto God acceptable, a yoking together of one man and one woman with the good consent of both. Here also must we add why they are and should be yoked together: even to the intent that they may live honestly and friendly the one with the other, that they may avoid uncleanness, that they may bring up children in the fear of God, that the one may help and comfort the other.

What God hath coupled together, let not man separate. Therefore must it be considered not only whether two persons come together, but whether it be done with God or no. That thing is with God which is not done against his commandment and words. There be many whom God coupled not together, but carnal lust, money, good flattery.... Therefore in going about marriage a Christian man must first look that in handfasting himself to a woman he make no divorce of the true faith....

## DRINKING VIRTUE

In the second book of Moses [Exodus], the 22nd chapter, doth God command thus; if a man beguile a maiden that is not betrothed and lie with her, he shall endorse her and take her to his wife; if her father refuse to give her unto him, he shall pay money according to the dowry

**MARRIAGE ADVICE** Bullinger (seen here on his monument in Zurich) penned a bestseller that is now all but forgotten.

of virgins. Here doth God give the father authority to take his daughter from the man to whom she is promised by the laws. . . .

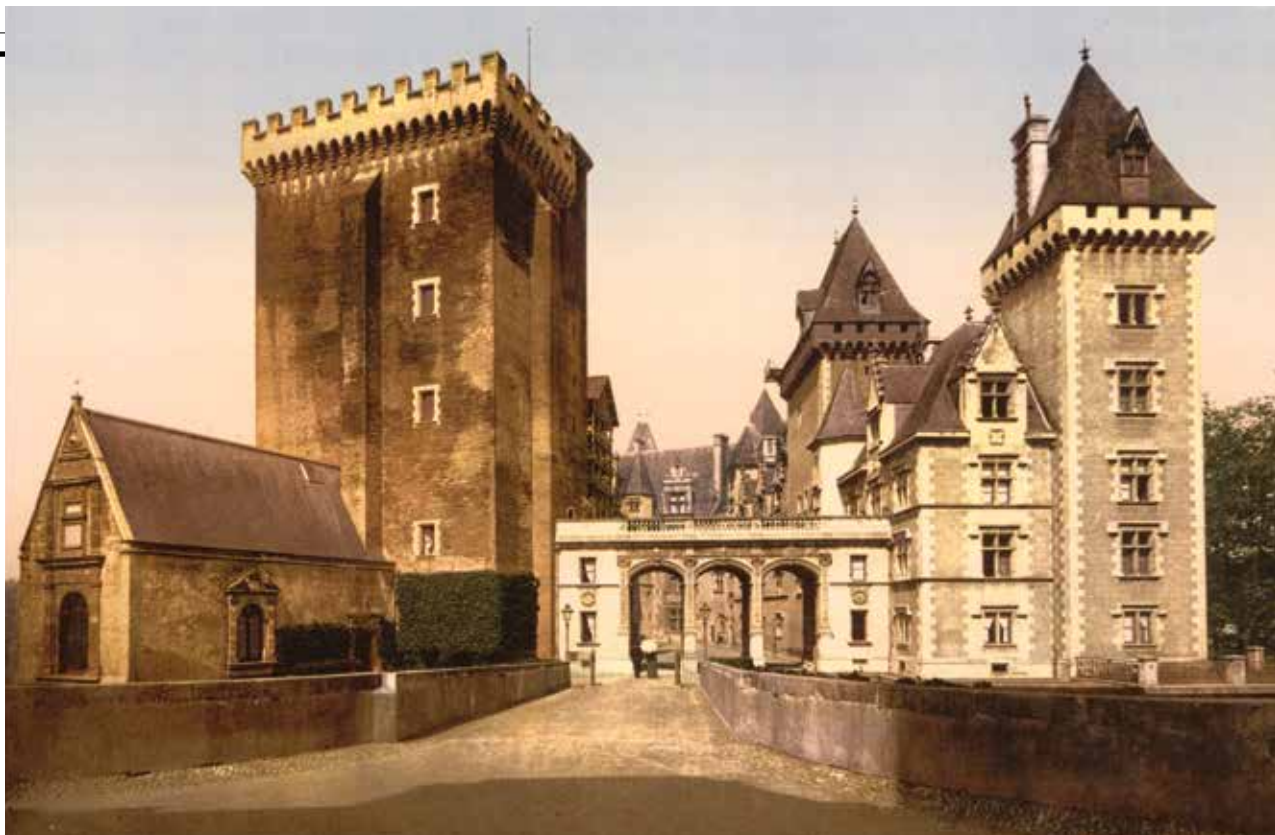
[Parents] know well also that to be fruitful or barren cometh of God. Therefore do they [ac] knowledge that they have not the children of themselves but of God. And this cause is no small or light thing. For to have children is the greatest treasure. For in the children do the parents live (in a manner) even after their death. And if they be well and luckily brought up God is honored by them, the public [welfare] is advanced, yea all men (their parents also) are the better for it....

Wedlock is honorable and holy; therefore must not we as some lesser persons cast away good manners and become like unreasonable beasts . . . a great work and holy ordinance of God which defileth or unhalloweth no man save him that taketh it upon him with an unclean heart....

Great joy and quietness it bringeth to the parents to see their children godly and virtuously brought up. . . . The women should nourish their own children with their own breasts or else if they may not for weakness yet ought they to seek honest and godly nurses of sober language that with their milk they may drink also virtue. And the parents, especially the mother, must endeavor to speak first to the child perfectly plain and distinct words, for as they be first informed to speak they will continue....

And even from infancy let the parents tell their children no fables nor lies, nor no vain nor light conversation but that only which is godly, honest, grave, and truthful let it be planted in their hearts. They must teach them first certain godly sentences though they yet cannot understand them, let them commit them to memory and practice them in speech till they may hereafter the better perceive them.—*Heinrich Bullinger, Der Christlich Eestand (1540); from the translation by Miles Coverdale, The Christen State of Matrimonye (1541), spelling modernized.*





# Like mother, like daughter?

MARGUERITE DE NAVARRE AND JEANNE D'ALBRET SHAPED  
FRENCH RELIGION FOR GENERATIONS

*S. Amanda Eurich*

**MARGUERITE DE NAVARRE** (1492–1549) and her daughter, Jeanne d'Albret (1528–1572), were a rare and powerful force: a mother-daughter duo who shared an interest in the new religious ideas spreading across sixteenth-century Europe and helped to sustain the fledgling evangelical movement in Catholic France. Court life complicated their personal relationship, but their common commitment to reform and renewal had an indelible impact across French-speaking Europe.

## **MOTHER KNOWS BEST**

The only sibling of Renaissance French king Francis I (1494–1547), Marguerite was a luminary in French court circles and a serious patron of the arts. She was also a gifted writer in her own right, penning poems, plays, and a brilliant collection of short stories, *The Heptaméron* (1558), published posthumously; they exposed corruption and abuses in the medieval church, including the predatory behavior of clergymen. After a childless marriage to the Duke of

**BE OUR GUEST** The Chateau de Pau, one of Marguerite's castles, served as a refuge for many reformers.

Angoulême ended with his death in 1525, Marguerite married Henri d'Albret, king of Navarre, in 1527. His tiny principality was a sovereign state positioned between two great superpowers: France and Spain. They had a son and a daughter, but only the daughter, Jeanne, survived to adulthood.

Like many noble children of the era, Jeanne spent her formative years in the care of governesses and private tutors, but Marguerite's spiritual inclinations still shaped her daughter's education and religious beliefs. Fearful that his wife's religious activities would endanger his political interests at court, Henri demanded Marguerite recant her faith, but she refused. Years later Jeanne relayed how her father's displays of anger and violence convinced her to wait until his death to make any public profession of the new faith.



Guillaume Briçonnet (c. 1472–1534), the bishop of Meaux, encouraged Marguerite's interest in the new religious ideas circulating in Europe and became her private chaplain and personal confessor. Briçonnet introduced Marguerite to a group of reform-minded clerics and scholars, the Circle of Meaux, who felt called to regenerate the spiritual life of ordinary people. Convinced that the key to reform was giving lay men and women access to the Word of God in the vernacular, they supported programs of religious renewal in parishes. Many preachers associated with Briçonnet, including Guillaume Farel (1489–1565), went on to become key leaders of the French-speaking Reformation movement.

Marguerite's outspoken defense of evangelical thinkers also earned her the enmity of theologians at the University of Paris, a bastion of Catholic orthodoxy. In 1533 the faculty condemned one of her poems, *The Mirror of the Sinful Soul* (1531), as heretical. But their actions did little to diminish Marguerite's enthusiasm for renewal and reform in the church—or the literary success of the text. As a young princess, Elizabeth I of England read and translated the poem into English as part of her school lessons.

As her brother Francis I increasingly adopted repressive policies toward reformed ideas and practice, Marguerite retreated to Béarn and her estates in southern France. There she composed even more explicitly evangelical works. The most polemical piece was the play *The Inquisitor* (c. 1535–1536), which features a testy encounter between a pretentious inquisitor and a group of children who confound the illustrious theologian by the purity and simplicity of their belief, as one of the children announces, “in faith alone.”

For all her interest in reform, Marguerite did not fully embrace Protestantism, clinging to hope that renewal and reform would come from within Catholicism. Nonetheless her estates, particularly her chateau in Nérac, became a refuge for reform-minded theologians.

Brilliant humanist Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, translator of the New Testament into French, lived his last years in exile in Nérac. A young Jean Calvin—we know him as John Calvin—also visited Marguerite in 1534, although he later became a vocal critic of many in her circle.

With a Franciscan priest at her side, Marguerite died in 1549, calling on the name of Jesus. A little more than a decade later, the daughter she had raised to respect God as “father, mother, and



**ALL IN THE FAMILY** Jeanne d'Albret (*left*) and Marguerite de Navarre (*right*) each promoted reform—the daughter as a Huguenot, the mother as a Catholic defender of reformers.

husband” became one of the most ardent champions of the Reformed faith in France.

## ROYALS REFORMED

At the tender age of 12, Jeanne d'Albret displayed the first sign of the legendary *fermesse* (stubbornness) and independent spirit that would define her leadership. Betrothed without her consent to Guillaume, Duke of Cleves, Jeanne drafted a formal protest. She later claimed Marguerite threatened to beat her into submission, but Jeanne refused to relent and had to be carried to the altar. When Guillaume betrayed French interests a year later, the pope granted petitions to dissolve the union, which had not been consummated.

Five years later Jeanne made a much happier marriage with the dashing Antoine de Bourbon (1518–1562), a first prince of the blood (the French term for nobles descended from royalty; Antoine could claim King Louis IX as his ancestor). Little matter that this marriage was also driven by politics beyond Jeanne's power to control; Antoine was a young, handsome, and initially attentive husband.

As befitted a powerful prince, Antoine spent much time away waging war against the king of Spain and later against Protestant rebels as lieutenant general of France. During these absences he wrote loving letters from the field and nurtured Jeanne through the heartbreak of losing three children in infancy. Henri, born in 1553, and Catherine, in 1559, survived to adulthood. Both in their own ways would become defenders of the Reformed tradition.



**FAMILY QUARRELS** Jeanne d'Albret waited to declare herself a reformer until her father, Henri d'Albret (*far left*) died; religion also separated her from her husband Antoine (*above*). Her son (shown with wife Marguerite of Valois, *center*) would renounce his Huguenot beliefs to assume the French throne as a Catholic monarch.

Antoine's wandering affections created the first strain between the young spouses, but religion produced an irreparable breach. Queen of Navarre since her mother's death in 1555, Jeanne declared her conversion to the Reformed faith on Christmas Day 1560 and promptly set about establishing Reformed worship in her southern domains. In Béarn she ordered the confiscation of the Catholic church's property, diverting ecclesiastical revenues toward Protestant pastors' salaries and an academy to train Calvinist clergy. Like her mother Jeanne carried on an avid correspondence with reformers, who assisted the queen with her religious efforts.

### A CUNNING QUEEN

At first Antoine seemed to share Jeanne's enthusiasm, but his toleration was short-lived. When Calvinists attacked religious sculptures and altars as pagan idolatry and desecrated the ancestral graves of the Bourbon family, he took matters into his own hands and dismissed the Protestant tutors Jeanne had hired for Henri (1553–1610). Antoine installed the young prince at court in Paris and banished Jeanne back to Béarn.

This bitter separation of mother and son lasted for five years, during which Henri was educated by men of impeccable Catholic credentials and mentored in court life by none other than the queen mother of France, Catherine de' Medici (1519–1589). By 1562 the simmering conflict between Huguenots (Protestants) and Catholics in France erupted into a full-scale war that lasted more than 30 years. Antoine's death while leading Catholic armies of King Charles IX left Jeanne a widow fully in charge of her own fortunes.

As a woman Jeanne could not hold the military titles and offices that were essential pillars of aristocratic power, so she cultivated the good graces of her brother-in-law, Louis de Bourbon (1530–1569), Prince de Condé, also an ardent Protestant. With Condé's help, she had Henri recognized as the admiral of Guyenne as his father had been. The admiralty brought in significant revenues, which maintained Huguenot armies.

But the struggle was far from over. Condé's involvement in the "Surprise de Meaux," a failed plot to kidnap young King Charles IX (1550–1574) in 1567, had perilous consequences. It was one of many Protestant attempts to seize control of key members of the house of Valois. Fearing reprisals Condé sought refuge in the heavily fortified Atlantic port city of La Rochelle, a Protestant stronghold. In time Jeanne too would leave her estates in Béarn for the safety of La Rochelle.

A revolt of Catholic nobles in Béarn and Navarre in 1568 revealed the fragility of Jeanne's position; it was rumored Charles IX had encouraged the rebels. With her children in tow, Jeanne fled toward La Rochelle. As she journeyed through enemy territories pursued by indomitable Catholic warlord Blaise de Monluc, noble supporters joined her. When she finally entered La Rochelle's massive gates, some 400 nobles and their armed retinues triumphantly marched with her.

For the next three years, behind the fortifications of La Rochelle, Jeanne headed a council of war, raising foreign money and troops and pledging her





**BROTHER AGAINST BROTHER** Left: A 16th-c. artist portrayed the bloodshed of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre; a 19th-c. one (above) imagined Catherine de' Medici and the French court surveying the scene.

own fortunes to champion liberty of conscience and freedom of worship in France. She also dispatched emissaries to Protestant courts in England and the Holy Roman Empire to solicit financial and military aid, offering her jewels as collateral to Queen Elizabeth I of England, who became a critical ally.

Jeanne's vision for a Huguenot homeland based in southern France and her long involvement in military strategizing earned her the undying support of many of Condé's followers. When he was killed in battle in 1569, Jeanne effectively became political head of the Huguenot movement, working with Gaspard de Coligny who commanded Protestant troops in the field. In the summer of 1570, her dogged efforts helped bring the French crown to the negotiating table to sign the Peace of Saint-Germain, an agreement highly favorable to Huguenot demands for freedom of worship, equality before the law, and military security.


Jeanne readily admitted that she did not possess her mother's literary talents, but she proved to be an able polemicist and shrewdly marshalled the printing press to mobilize support for the Huguenots. In La Rochelle she actively encouraged Calvinist printers and financed printing Bibles, tracts, and political broadsheets. She also subsidized translating the Psalms into the Béarnais dialect and the New Testament into Basque (a language spoken in northern Spain and southern France).

In 1569 she penned a masterpiece of political propaganda known as the *Ample Declaration* in which she defended the right of Huguenot nobles to raise arms and defend themselves against religious tyranny. The work quickly became a centerpiece of Huguenot theories of political resistance.

## DEATH AND RIOT

Jeanne died in Paris in 1572 at age 44—in the midst of preparations for the marriage of her son, Henri of Navarre, to Marguerite of Valois, King Charles IX's younger sister. The union was the brainchild of Medici, who hoped a marriage between the two warring royal houses would signal a lasting peace between Catholics and Protestants.

Rumors soon spread that Jeanne's death was not due to natural causes, even after an autopsy performed by Catherine's court physician indicated she had died of complications from tuberculosis. The gossip stoked rising religious tensions in the capital, culminating in August 1572 with the infamous St. Bartholomew's Day massacre that left thousands dead in the streets of Paris and in the provinces.

But in the tumultuous decades that followed, Jeanne's son continued her mission, leading the Huguenot army to victories in the field. Eventually he converted to Catholicism to ascend to the throne of France as Henri IV and brought an end to religious warfare with the Edict of Nantes in 1598. 

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**HERE I AM** In 2002 Dentière received belated recognition; her name was added to the Wall of the Reformers in Geneva.

little women” wanting to know the truth. She acknowledged 1 Timothy 2 but defended women’s rights to interpret and teach the Bible anyway.

In part two of her pamphlet, Dentière described exemplary biblical women, refuted the notion that women are the source of evil, insisted again that they are able and entitled to interpret Scripture and teach one another, and called on biblical authority to defend their right to a public voice in religious matters.

Her long final section recognized the Bible as the sole source of Christian doctrine, affirmed salvation through faith alone, attacked the Mass, and excoriated Catholic clergy and the papacy.

After the *Epistle’s* publication, the Genevan council worked to prevent the publication of other women authors, and Dentière appears only fleetingly in records, usually identified through her husband. For instance in September 1546, Calvin, writing to Farel described a confrontation with “Froment’s wife”—a “funny story” of Dentière preaching on the street corners and in taverns. When challenged by Calvin, she criticized him and his associates, accused them of being like the scribes in Luke 20:45, “who want to walk about in long robes,” and complained of their tyranny in suppressing open speech.

In his letter to Farel, Calvin dismissed Dentière derisively. But a 1561 copy of his sermon on 1 Timothy 2:8–12 carries a preface by an “M.D.” who criticized extravagant clothing and cosmetics. Ultimately, though, it is Dentière’s earlier letter that has most outlived her:

If God has given grace to some good women, revealing to them by his Holy Scriptures something holy and good, should they hesitate to write, speak, and declare it to one another because of the defamers of truth? Ah, it would be too bold to try to stop them, and it would be too foolish for us to hide the talent that God has given us, God who will give us the grace to persevere until the end.

—Mary B. McKinley, professor emeritus of French, University of Virginia, editor of *Marie Dentière: Epistle to Marguerite de Navarre and Preface to a Sermon by John Calvin, and coeditor of A Companion to Marguerite of Navarre*.

## “A very useful epistle”: Marie Dentière

**B**orn to the noble d’Ennetière family in Tournai, Marie Dentière (1495–c. 1561) left an Augustinian convent in the early 1520s to join French advocates of church reform who had sought refuge in Strasbourg. She married Simon Robert, a former priest from Tournai; in 1528 they followed William Farel to the Swiss Valais, where she shared her husband’s ministry. Soon widowed with children, she married reformer Antoine Froment in 1533. Two years later they joined Farel in Geneva in the struggle to win that city for the Reformed. That year she is known to have exhorted Poor Clares to leave their order and renounce celibacy. But her greater fame was yet to come.

After the governing Council of 200 banished Farel and John Calvin from Geneva in 1538, Dentière published a pamphlet titled *A Very Useful Epistle Composed by a Christian Woman of Tournai* (1539) and addressed to Marguerite, queen of Navarre (see “Like mother, like daughter,” pp. 12–15). It attacked council members, but mainly targeted powerful French Catholic clergy who had not challenged Rome. Quickly confiscated, only two copies are known to have survived. It makes for powerful, subversive reading.

### “POOR LITTLE WOMEN”

Dentière first deplored Calvin’s and Farel’s expulsions and the era’s general corruption. She addressed herself to two groups of women: those “in captivity” where the Reformed faith was persecuted, and “poor



# Our first woman reformer

ARGULA VON GRUMBACH PROCLAIMED “NO WOMAN’S CHIT-CHAT,  
BUT THE WORD OF GOD”

**Peter Matheson**

**DON'T LET THE UNUSUAL NAME TRIP YOU** up! Argula von Grumbach (1492–1554 or 1557) was a brave and extraordinary woman. Martin Luther (1483–1546) knew her well. We have a precious copy of his *Little Book of Prayers* with a dedication to her inscribed in his own hand: “To the noble woman Hargula von Stauff at Grumbach” (von Stauff was her maiden name).

Luther knew well what von Grumbach had suffered for the sake of the gospel: the abuse, the threats, the loss of status. This Bavarian noblewoman, with four little children dependent on her, had taken incredible risks. She had challenged the influential theologians of Ingolstadt University in Bavaria to a public debate with her in German about the legitimacy of their conduct in persecuting a young student.

Von Grumbach's challenge was unheard of. Theologians didn't lower themselves to debate with lay people, and still less with women, not to mention in German rather than Latin. They tried to ignore her, but friends had her letter to them published by the new medium of the time: the printing press. Publishers all over Germany and into Switzerland then raced to reprint it, no less than 15 times. It was a huge sensation: a mere woman challenging a university!

The woodcuts on the front covers portray von Grumbach, Bible in hand, alone, confronting an intimidated, bewildered group of scholars. The heavy tomes of their traditional theology and canon law lie discarded on the ground (see p. 21).

## PAMPHLETS AND POETRY

What had led to von Grumbach's letter? The Ingolstadt theologians had arrested and interrogated an 18-year-old student, Arsacius Seehofer (d. 1545), and threatened him with death if he would not renounce his evangelical views. Von Grumbach knew the young man and reacted with horror:

My heart and all my limbs tremble. Nowhere in the Bible do I find that Christ, or his apostles, or his prophets, put people in prison, burnt or murdered them. How in God's name can you and your university expect to prevail, when you



**FACE FORWARD** This portrait medal of von Grumbach was made from life about 1520.

deploy such foolish violence against the word of God?

It was the autumn of 1523, in the exciting early years of the Reformation. Up to then lay people had possessed no right at all to debate theological matters. For one thing you had to be able to converse in Latin.

But in Zürich a public debate had just taken place in the spring of 1523 between defenders of the old church and the evangelical reformer Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531). It was conducted in German, and it had convinced the city fathers to promote the Reformation.

Von Grumbach avidly followed breaking news about the spread of reformist views. Probably this dramatic event in distant Zürich encouraged her to



**CAREFUL WHERE YOU WALK** These beautiful gardens grow outside the Alte Anatomie building at the University of Ingolstadt. The university, founded in 1472, was just five decades old when von Grumbach protested.

tackle religious issues, von Grumbach rebutted this dismissal with 1 Corinthians: didn't St. Paul say that every baptized member of the church is a temple of the Lord? She quoted the apostle in a poem she wrote the following year, responding to lewd and derisory attacks against her:

God's spirit is within you, read,  
Is woman shut out, there, indeed?  
While you oppress God's word,  
Consign souls to the devil's game  
I cannot and I will not cease  
To speak at home and on the street.

make her own protest—though she said that she did so in fear and trembling, certainly:

I suppressed my inclinations [to criticize Catholic preaching against Luther]; heavy of heart, I did nothing. Because Paul says in 1 Timothy 2: "The women should keep silence, and should not speak in church." But now that I cannot see any man who is up to it, who is either willing or able to speak, I am constrained . . .

She had found it impossible, following Matthew 10, to keep silent:

I find there is a text in Matthew 10 which runs: "Whoever confesses me before another I too will confess before my heavenly Father." And Luke 9: "Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, I too will be ashamed of when I come in my majesty," etc. Words like these, coming from the very mouth of God, are always before my eyes. For they exclude neither woman nor man. And this is why I am compelled as a Christian to write to you.

Von Grumbach's response held both substance and sensationalism. In words that ordinary people could understand, her pamphlet—which was soon followed by seven others from her pen—raised key issues about freedom of speech, the authority of Scripture, and the urgent need to reform the church.

She pointed out that throughout Scripture and right down through the history of the church, the Holy Spirit had moved women like her to speak out, and she sensed that she stood in this prophetic tradition.

Knowing that clergy had dismissed women in the past as emotional beings too ill-equipped to

### LUTHER'S BAVARIAN CHAMPION

Von Grumbach was born in 1492—the year Columbus sailed—to the lively, educated, and chivalrous von Stauff family, with its seat in Ehrenfels Castle on the Laber River in Germany. Her first name recalls the noble Argeluse, a prominent character in the epic *Parsifal* about King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table. When she was 10, her father gave her a beautiful Koberger edition of the Bible in German.

In adolescence the young Argula von Stauff moved from little Beratzhausen, near Regensburg, to Munich. The cultured Bavarian court—where Luther's mentor, Johann von Staupitz (c. 1460–1524), was a much-admired preacher—became her university, so to speak. She learned to move comfortably among the great and the good—and the not so good.

When she married nobleman Friedrich von Grumbach in 1510, she set up homes in little Bavarian villages and market towns: Lenting, Dietfurt, Burggrumbach, and Zeilitzheim. There their children were born. Her time in small villages prepared von Grumbach for her later role in establishing Lutheranism in these rural areas.

Von Grumbach was not only an inspirational and controversial author but also a wife, mother, gifted correspondent, confidante of women, and mistress of her household's day-to-day life. A creative tension existed between what we might call her "public" life and the local, personal networks she created, where she also exercised her influence.

Yet what undoubtedly most impressed von Grumbach's contemporaries was her knowledge and apparently effortless mastery of Scripture. She knew



great tracts of it by heart. Her pamphlets were a mosaic of biblical quotations, grouping together the prophets and Paul, the Psalms and the words of Jesus in a way that showed she had made the Bible her own.

Von Grumbach was no mere wielder of proof texts, however. Following the lead of Luther and Philip Melancthon (1497–1560), she found a coherent, unitary message in the whole Bible:

Ah, but what a joy it is when the spirit of God teaches us and gives us understanding, flitting from one text to the next, so that I came to see the true genuine light shining out.

The gospel for her was light, illumination, and the liberating message of a gracious God.

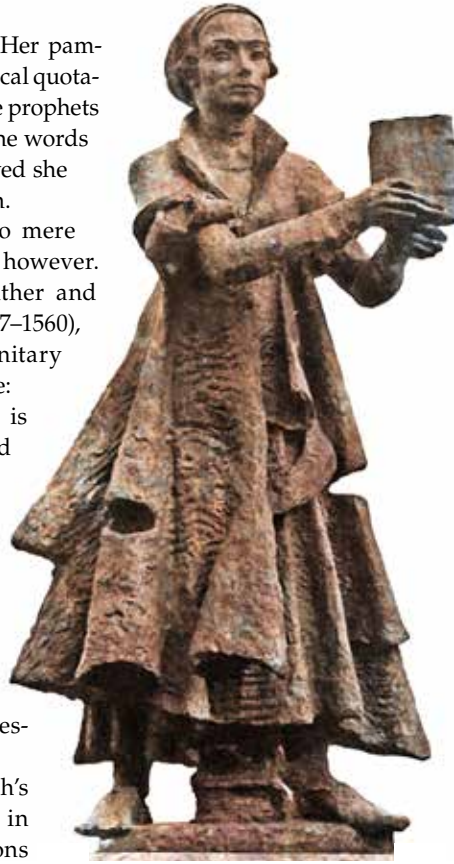
Argula von Grumbach's forthrightness, however, in publicly attacking the actions of the Ingolstadt theologians infuriated not only the latter, but every leading institution of her time: the university, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, the Bavarian princes under whose rule she lived, and not least her own husband, "Fritz." Critics pointed to his inability to "control his wife," and Fritz lost his lucrative job in the service of the Bavarian dukes as punishment.

#### PAUPER, PAMPHLETEER, PROPHET?

Von Grumbach never received the public debate she asked for, but instead struggled with financial difficulties for the remainder of her life, pawning a precious necklace again and again to raise funds. We have wonderfully detailed lists of the provisions she ordered for her kitchen, often with apologies for the delay in paying for them.

Despite the chronic shortage of funds, von Grumbach took infinite pains with her children's education, including that of her daughter, Apollonia. She carefully chose her children's teachers—not only the very best available, but also pioneers of Lutheran education.

In her plans for the children, von Grumbach dreamed of preparing them for a different sort of church and society. Her vision was never restricted to the church in the narrow sense. Schools had to flourish too; the lifestyle of the nobility needed transformation; corruption and luxurious living should be banished from the land.



**WORD AND PRAYER** *Left:* This statue of von Grumbach in Dietfurt shows her holding the Bible. Also precious to her was Luther's *Little Book of Prayers* (below), which Luther inscribed to her, and in which she wrote "Pray remember me to God, which I intend never to forget. I now commend myself to you."



Even so von Grumbach was always up against it. Though her sons had huge respect for her, they could not shake off the influence of their peers, the male nobility—spendthrift, carousing, always quarreling and hunting.

Her eldest, Georg, wasted his opportunity to study in Wittenberg by becoming embroiled in debt. He was also badly wounded in a feud. Her second, impulsive son, Hans-Jörg, was killed in an unedifying local brawl. Young Apollonia died early, as did von Grumbach's first husband.

Her second husband, Burian von Schlick, a Bohemian nobleman, ardently supported the Reformation but also died prematurely, imprisoned by his relatives over a family dispute. In a raw and violent society, tragedy upon tragedy befell von Grumbach. Near the end of her life, she herself was grossly mistreated, held captive, and forced to flee her family home in Bavaria.

It is all the more remarkable, then, that von Grumbach's contribution to the Reformation is so memorable. Her rich correspondence complements the exceptional documentation of her life through the testimony of her eight pamphlets in their various editions. Providing a real treasure trove for readers today, her letters survived because authorities confiscated them as they gathered evidence for a legal challenge involving her son, Gottfried.

Much of von Grumbach's correspondence relates to money matters, but other letters also survived, including a moving and sometimes hilarious back-and-forth



**GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN** Today Ehrenfels Castle, where von Grumbach was born, is a ruin, though the vineyards around it are active and produce grapes for white wine.

Franconia, Germany, still trace their foundation back to her.

### LIVING LEGACY


Awareness of von Grumbach's contribution to the Reformation never totally died out. In the mid-sixteenth century, Ludwig Rabus reprinted her works, hailing her as one of God's elect witnesses and martyrs. Encyclopedias in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries dubbed her a "Bavarian Deborah" with "spear and lance."

In the nineteenth century, romantic biographies kept her memory alive—one by Eduard

Engelhardt celebrates her "true manly strength," as he puts it. Historical scholarship began at last to take von Grumbach seriously in the twentieth century; a critical edition of her writings has appeared in English and in German.

Schools are named after her and statues erected in the little villages where she lived (see p. 19). An Argula von Grumbach Society in Munich promotes her memory. In the last couple of years, an exhibition in Ingolstadt and a lively musical, of all things, in Münster have again brought her to public attention; the musical celebrates her as *Argula von Grumbach: Mother Courage of the Reformation*.

Today the cruel circumstances of von Grumbach's life speak to our hearts while we are drawn to the prophetic character of her spirited writings and inspired by her exemplary courage. "I do not flinch," as she said:

With Paul, 1 Corinthians 2, I say "I am not ashamed of the gospel which is the power of God to salvation to those who believe." . . . What I have written to you is no woman's chit-chat, but the word of God. 

*Peter Matheson is an emeritus professor at Knox Theological College, Dunedin, New Zealand, the author of Argula von Grumbach: A Woman's Voice in the Reformation and Argula von Grumbach: A Woman Before Her Time, and the editor of the scholarly edition of von Grumbach's works. He is also the author of The Imaginative World of the Reformation and The Rhetoric of the Reformation and editor of Reformation Christianity and of the works of Thomas Müntzer, among many other books.*

with her children, communications from their teachers, and a raft of correspondence with more than a hundred other people, including diplomats, women friends, tradespeople, and even Jewish moneylenders with whom she was on good terms.

Von Grumbach's contacts with reformers such as Melancthon, Luther, and Andreas Osiander (1498–1552) in Nuremberg, and Urbanus Rhegius (1489–1541) in Augsburg signal her high standing. At crucial meetings of the Reichstag (parliament) in Nuremberg, and then at the famous Diet of Augsburg of 1530, she lobbied Protestant princes from the sidelines, urging them to stand firm by the faith. She also worked hard to heal the rift in the evangelical camp between the Wittenbergers (including Luther) and the South German and Swiss Protestants (including Zwingli) about the nature of the Lord's Supper.

It has been estimated that some 30,000 copies of von Grumbach's pamphlets circulated, and in a largely illiterate society, where they were read aloud, the actual audience would have been much higher. Her opponents described her in vile and odious terms (Jesuit Jacob Gretser, writing after her death, called her a "Lutheran Medea," referencing a character from Greek mythology who had killed her brother and children). But for many contemporaries, she was a prophet before her time, and they compared her to Judith, Esther, and Susanna.

Von Grumbach's reading of Scripture with a woman's eye encouraged lay people in particular. Contemporaries hailed her courageous witness as almost unbelievable and as very rare for the female sex. Evangelical churches in little rural villages in



# “The gates of Hell cannot prevail”

## Argula von Grumbach

*Von Grumbach's letter to the University of Ingolstadt protesting the arrest and exile of Arsacius Seehofer for holding Lutheran views, excerpted here, became her most famous and best-selling piece of writing*

**H**ow in God's name can you and your university expect to prevail, when you deploy such foolish violence against the word of God; when you force someone to hold the holy Gospel in their hands for the very purpose of denying it, as you did in the case of Arsacius Seehofer? When you confront him with an oath and declaration such as this, and with imprisonment and even the threat of the stake to force him to deny Christ and his word?

Yes, when I reflect on this my heart and all my limbs tremble. What do Luther and Melancthon teach you but the word of God? You condemn them without having refuted them. Did Christ teach you so, or his apostles, prophets, or evangelists? Show me where [in the Scriptures] this is written....

One knows very well the importance of one's duty to obey the authorities. But where the word of God is concerned neither Pope, Emperor, nor princes—as Acts 4 and 5 make so clear—have any jurisdiction. For my part, I have to confess, in the name of God and by my soul's salvation, that if I were to deny Luther and Melancthon's writing I would be denying God and his word, which may God forfend forever. Amen....

The pot burns [Jeremiah 1:13]; and truly you and your university will never extinguish it. And neither the Pope with his decretal, nor Aristotle, who has never been a Christian, nor you yourselves can manage it. You may imagine that you can defy God, cast down his prophets and apostles from heaven, and banish them from the world. This shall not happen. I beseech you, my dear masters, let him stay; have no doubt about it: God will surely preserve his holy and blessed word....

Greed has possessed you; you would be much readier to suffer God's word if you did not profit from the publication of the [Pope's] decretal. The gospel does not pull in so many dollars for its advisers. I have seen how my dear lord and father of blessed memory had to pay twenty gulden for a piece of advice [from a priest] four lines long; not that it did him a cent of good....

My heart goes out to our princes, whom you have seduced and betrayed so deplorably. For I realize that they are ill informed about divine Scripture.... I am quite convinced that if they knew the truth, they would not continue to act on your requests as they



**READY TO FIGHT** Von Grumbach's pamphlet shows her facing off against the university theologians.

have now done with Seehofer and would not have given permission for him to be murdered....

I beseech you for the sake of God, and exhort you by God's judgement and righteousness, to tell you which of the articles written by Martin [Luther] or Melancthon you consider heretical. In German not a single one seems heretical to me. And the fact is that a great deal has been published in German, and I've read it all....

I have no Latin, but you have German, being born and brought up in this tongue. What I have written to you is no woman's chit-chat, but the word of God; and (I write) as a member of the Christian Church, against which the gates of Hell cannot prevail. Against the Roman, however, they do prevail. Just look at that church! How is it to prevail against the gates of Hell? God give us his grace, that we all may be saved, and may (God) rule us according to his will. Now may his grace carry the day. Amen.

—“*To the University of Ingolstadt*” (1523), in *Argula von Grumbach: A Woman's Voice in the Reformation*, ed. Peter Matheson. Used by kind permission of Bloomsbury Plc.

# The Reformation through women's eyes



Sandro Botticelli, *The Virgin and the Child* (1480)

University of Ingolstadt to protest the university's treatment of a Lutheran student.

**1524** Schütz writes *Letter of Consolation to the Suffering Women of Kentzingen* and *Apoloogia for Matthew Zell on Clerical Marriage*. Katharina von Zimmern formally resigns as abbess of the Benedictine Fraumünster convent in Zurich.

**1525** Katharina von Bora marries Martin Luther. Ursula Jost begins recording visions.

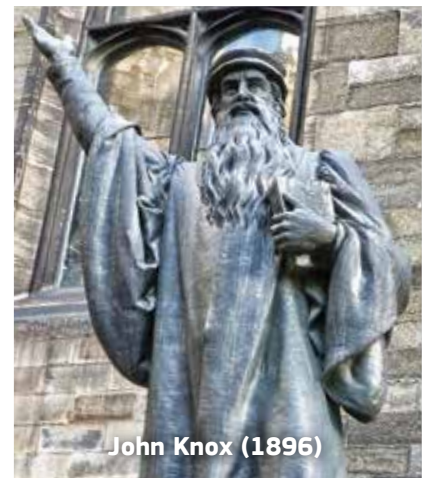
**1527** Marguerite de Navarre marries Henri d'Albret. Prüss and her third husband, Balthasar Back, print Hans Hut's *A Christian Instruction*. The Holy Roman emperor's troops sack Rome.

the *Works of God in these End Times*. That same year she and Back are censured for publishing the work of Melchior Hoffmann.

**1531** Marguerite de Navarre publishes *The Mirror of a Sinful Soul*.

**1532** Henry VIII marries Anne Boleyn secretly.

**1533** Henry formally marries Anne



John Knox (1896)

Boleyn after Thomas Cranmer annuls his marriage to Catherine of Aragon.

**1534** Prüss begins issuing volumes of a hymnal of the Bohemian Brethren revised by Schütz.

**1535** Von Freyberg is arrested for her Anabaptist activities, though she is later released. The Poor Clares convent in Geneva closes. Around this time, Jeanne de Jussie probably writes *The Short Chronicle* and Marguerite de Navarre writes *The Inquisitor*.

**1536** Henry VIII marries Jane Seymour. Calvin goes to Geneva and begins reform there.

**1539** Marie Dentièrre publishes *A Very Useful Epistle Composed by a Christian Woman of Tournai*.

**1487** *Malleus Maleficarum* (*The Hammer of Witches*) is published.

**1495** Leonardo da Vinci begins painting *The Last Supper*.

**1509** Catherine of Aragon marries Henry VIII of England.

**1510** Margarethe Prüss inherits her father's printing business.

**1511** Prüss marries printer Reinhard Beck, a necessity to continue printing as a woman. Her other two husbands will also be printers.

**1517** Martin Luther rises to fame after proposing his *95 Theses*.

**1519** Zwingli begins reform in Zurich. Charles V becomes Holy Roman Emperor.

**1522** Katharina Schütz becomes convinced of justification by faith.

**1523** Katharina von Bora and other nuns escape the Cistercian convent in Nimbschen. Schütz marries former priest Matthew Zell. Argula von Grumbach writes *To the*

**1528** Noblewoman Helena von Freyberg joins the Anabaptists.

**1529** Heinrich Bullinger marries Anna Adlischwyler, a former nun from a Zurich convent, after a long courtship.

**1530** Prüss prints Ursula Jost's *Prophetic Visions and Revelation of*



Katharina von Bora's gravestone, Torgau (1552)



## Featured in this issue Writings Church & State World events

**1540** Bullinger publishes *Der Christliche Eestand* (*On Christian Marriage*), based in part on his courtship letters to Adlischwyler. Henry VIII marries Anne of Cleves; the marriage is annulled after a few months and he marries Catherine Howard.

**1541** Miles Coverdale translates Bullinger's book into English, and it proves popular. Margaret Blaurer's ministry culminates in her service to plague victims in Constance.

**1542** Martin Luther writes the short preface "Consolation for Women Whose Pregnancies Have Not Gone Well" to introduce a book by Johannes Bugenhagen.

**1543** Henry VIII marries Catherine Parr, who will outlive him. Nicholas Copernicus writes *On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres*.

**1544** The future Queen Elizabeth I translates *The Mirror of a Sinful Soul* into English—at age 11.

**1545** Jeanne d'Albret, only surviving child of Marguerite and Henri, marries Antoine de Bourbon.



Coat of arms of an abbess (16th c.)

**1546** John Calvin challenges Denière about her preaching in the streets. Anne Askew is martyred in England for Protestant beliefs.

**1547** Edward VI, son of Henry VIII and Jane Seymour, becomes king of England.

**1548** Schütz preaches a sermon at her husband's funeral.

**1553** Mary, daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon, becomes queen of England after the death of her half-brother, Edward VI, and the nine-day reign of Lady Jane Grey. She works to abolish Protestantism by force.

**1555** Jeanne d'Albret becomes queen of Navarre when Marguerite dies.

**1558** Marguerite de Navarre's *The Heptaméron* is published posthumously. Schütz publishes her last work, *Meditation on Psalms and an Exposition of the Lord's Prayer for Sir Felix Armbruster*. Elizabeth, daughter of

Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, becomes queen of England; she will rule for 45 years and reestablish Protestantism in what becomes known as the "Elizabethan Settlement."

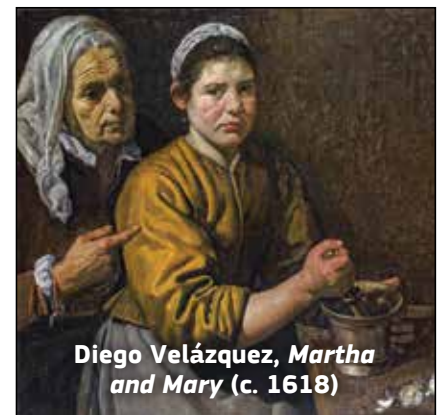
**1560-1580** Witch trials in Europe reach their peak.

**1562** French Wars of Religion begin.

**1566** Conferences of Reformed deaconesses are held in Amsterdam and elsewhere.

**1569** Jeanne d'Albret writes *The Ample Declaration* to defend Huguenot nobles.

**1572** The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre occurs in France. Charlotte Arbaleste Duplessis-Mornay becomes known as a



Diego Velázquez, *Martha and Mary* (c. 1618)

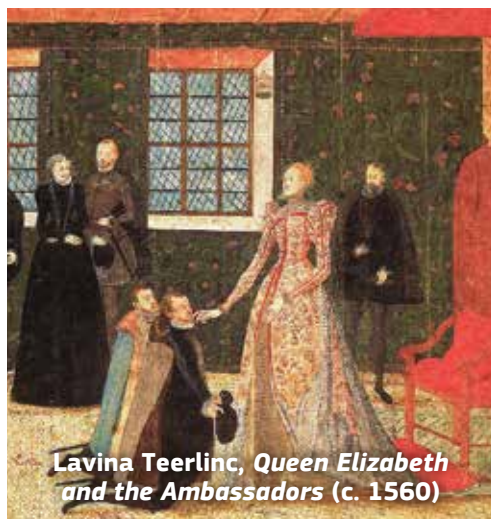
writer from her first-person accounts of the event.

**1582** Gregorian calendar is introduced.

**1611** De Jussieu's *The Short Chronicle* 1535 is published.

**1618** Thirty Years' War begins.

**1623** Duplessis-Mornay's *Memoires de Messier Philippe de Mornay*, her husband's biography, is published posthumously.



Lavinia Teerlinc, *Queen Elizabeth and the Ambassadors* (c. 1560)



# Not a soap opera

THE WOMEN OF THE ENGLISH REFORMATION WERE ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN A THEOLOGICAL DRAMA

*Calvin Lane*

**PRESENTATIONS OF TUDOR ENGLAND**, whether we find them in academic research or on cable TV, usually offer two overlapping storylines: on the one hand, we have the Reformation and, on the other, the dynastic soap opera that was the family of Henry VIII (1491–1547). Does that mean the Reformation in England was a sullied affair, one lacking theological substance? Was it simply the story of a lascivious king who wanted one divorce after another?

Even during the sixteenth century, some continental reformers suggested as much; Martin Luther, for example, had little respect for England's bluff "King Hal." Notwithstanding the critiques of Dr. Luther, many continental Protestant circles still believed God worked through anointed sovereigns—even in the messy bits of their lives.

We shouldn't forget that the "soap opera" aspects of the reform in England allowed women to play vital parts in a national drama. While women were certainly part of the story on the Continent (think

**FAMILY PORTRAIT** Henry is pictured with wife #3, Jane Seymour, and his son by Jane, Edward, while daughters Mary and Elizabeth watch from the sidelines.

of Argula von Grumbach, Katharina Schütz Zell, or Wibrandis Rosenblatt), the women in Henry VIII's life—both his wives and his daughters—played enormously important roles in shaping Christian life, thought, and practice in early modern England. Not simply actors in a soap opera, these women and the parts they played left a strong legacy among English Christians.

## THE SPANISH PRINCESS

The story we tell of the English Reformation often begins in the late 1520s with Henry's desire to end—or more properly speaking, invalidate—his marriage to Catherine of Aragon (1485–1536). Catherine was the daughter of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castille, the "most Catholic monarchs" of Spain





(titles granted to them by the pope in 1493). She had been previously married for one year to Henry's older brother, Arthur, before his death in 1502. Henry argued that this marriage had been consummated, making Catherine Henry's sister. The king used Leviticus 20:21 to argue that his marriage to Catherine was therefore incestuous and that God was punishing Henry by not granting him a male heir.

This claim was complicated by an earlier papal recognition that Catherine and Arthur had not consummated their marriage, and therefore, her marriage to Henry was emphatically not incestuous—and by Catherine being the aunt of the most powerful man in Europe, the devoutly Catholic Holy Roman Emperor Charles V.

As the story unfolded, Henry moved to make himself supreme head of the church in England and therefore the arbiter of his own question in 1534. The seemingly earthy issues of sex and marriage had revealed a deeper question about authority. Catherine's legacy rests in how she negotiated the challenge. She responded that she was loyal to the king and was his true wife while also remaining faithful to the "old religion."

When it became clear that Henry's move for supremacy would be packaged, to some extent, with the evangelicalism of continental Protestants, her witness mirrored the rhetorical strategy and self-fashioned identity of many "traditionalists" well into the latter half of the sixteenth century: a posture of fidelity to old ways, which included loyalty to both the old faith and the crown. In Catherine's case her loyalty led to the annulment of her marriage and a short life in banishment—forbidden from seeing her daughter, Mary.

Such early "traditionalist" Catholics, like Catherine, shouted their loyalty both to the English crown and to their Catholic faith. Catherine's "traditionalist" legacy continued for a generation or more. They were, sadly, trying to square a circle: loyalty to both king and pope. Others abandoned this seemingly insurmountable task.

A more aggressive form of Roman Catholicism emerged in England following the Council of Trent in the middle of the century, which included a religious stance quick to declare certain monarchs heretics and bastards. This different breed of English Catholics hid Jesuit missionaries and seminary priests trained

overseas, and they later plotted against the crown. Nevertheless Catherine's rather tragic witness—a heartfelt and seemingly sincere attitude toward both the church and her husband—set a powerful example for many conscience-stricken men and women in England and highlighted how Henry's reformation began as a question of authority.

### EXECUTED, DIED, ANNULLED . . .

We might be tempted to write off Anne Boleyn (d. 1536), Henry's second wife, as simply a home-wrecker (or in the words of those loyal to Catherine, a "goggle-eyed whore"). However she was also a more complicated figure, becoming an active part of an evangelical network in England in the early 1530s.

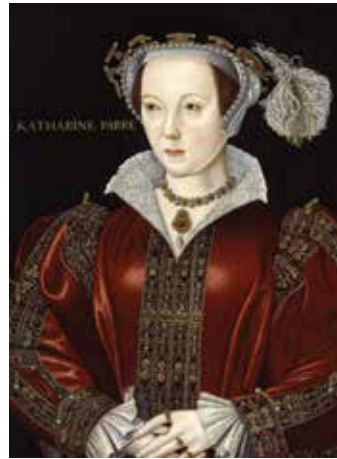
Evangelicals like star preacher Hugh Latimer (c. 1487–1555) and new archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556) influenced her family and subsequently Boleyn herself. With definite connections to both Lutheran and Reformed Protestants on the Continent, their push for new understandings of Scripture in the Christian life no doubt affected Boleyn's approach to turning the heart of the king.

For example, when the monasteries were dissolved, she ordered two of her chaplains to preach to the king about using the monasteries for evangelical purposes. Both Latimer and Simon Haynes preached that the abbeys ought to be converted into places for studying Scripture and relief of the poor, not simply liquidated for the royal coffers (which Henry ended up doing). After Boleyn overplayed her hand and failed to produce a male heir, Henry executed her in 1536.

The king eventually got his male offspring, Edward, by wife number three, Jane Seymour (c. 1508–1537). She, however, tragically died from childbirth. With an heir secured, the king's priorities changed; his chief advisor Thomas Cromwell (c. 1485–1540) pushed for an alliance with the German Lutherans. Henry's marriage to Anne of Cleves (1515–1557), the daughter of a Lutheran prince, in 1540 became the most curious of all his marital adventures.

Anne of Cleves's father was a member of the Schmalkaldic League, a Lutheran defensive confederation, and the marriage was contracted without the two parties actually meeting. Henry had only been presented with a portrait of the young noblewoman by artist Hans Holbein, a painting he later declared to be misleading.

Once they did meet, Henry was not impressed and the marriage was never formally consummated. This botched marriage led to the execution of Thomas Cromwell—and it also helped to shape the ultimate direction of Protestantism in England. During the 1530s and 1540s, continental Protestants were still sorting themselves into two different and evolving confessional parties—the Lutherans



**SIX WOMEN, ONE KING, SIX INFLUENCES** *Top left to right:* Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, and Jane Seymour all participated in changing religious currents as well as in Henry's struggle to produce a male heir. *Bottom left to right:* Anne of Cleves and Catherine Howard represented religious paths not taken, while Catherine Parr helped preserve Protestantism in England.

49, and his marriage to the niece of the conservative Duke of Norfolk on the same day he had Cromwell beheaded signaled to evangelicals like Cranmer that they should proceed with caution. (In the early 1540s, Henry executed evangelicals and Catholics alike.) Famously unfaithful to her much older husband, the new queen's affairs led her to the executioner only a year later.

It was pious wife number six, Catherine Parr, who would leave the greatest mark on Henry's younger children, Edward and Elizabeth. Catherine was part of a Christian humanist network, and she regularly urged Henry to con-

tinue the church's reformation—so much so that she came close to being arrested on heresy charges herself.

Catherine Parr's greatest contribution to the story, though, was in supplying evangelical tutors for the heir and for the Lady Elizabeth. Under such influence Edward wrote to Cranmer at the age of seven, encouraging the archbishop's promotion of the Word of God. The stories of Anne of Cleves, Catherine Howard, and Catherine Parr were critical in orienting the players who would be so influential in the next decade.

### BATTLE OF THE HEIRS

One of the great ironies of Western history is that Henry, who was so concerned with leaving a male heir, left behind two daughters who made an even greater impact on English politics, culture, and religion than did their little brother. Edward VI was the first of Henry's children to rule, but he did not do so for long; he became king at age 9 and tragically died at 16 (many suspect tuberculosis) in 1553. His desire that his Protestant cousin Lady Jane Grey should succeed him was thwarted, and Grey enjoyed only a nine-day reign before being convicted of high treason and executed a few months later.

As a result the daughter of Henry and Catherine of Aragon, Mary (1516–1558), succeeded to the throne;

centered in Wittenberg and northern Germany and the Reformed in the Rhine Valley of south Germany and Switzerland. Where English evangelicals would fit was not a forgone conclusion. The failure to join the Lutheran Schmalkaldic League via Henry's marriage to Anne of Cleves only accelerated the movement Cranmer and others were making to align with the Reformed.

The Reformation as it proceeded after Henry's death in 1547 under Henry's son, the boy-king, Edward VI (1537–1553), and Archbishop Thomas Cranmer would situate the Church of England within an international communion of Reformed churches. There would be no close tie with the Lutherans. The story of Anne of Cleves became a critical part of that turn of events and, perhaps curiously, she outlived all of Henry's wives—continuing to live in England, visiting court (where she had the title of “the King's Beloved Sister”), never remarrying, and enjoying a pension well into the 1550s.

### ... EXECUTED, SURVIVED

After Cranmer formally annulled the king's marriage to Anne of Cleves, Henry swiftly reentered wedlock in July 1540 with wife number five, the vibrant 17-year-old Catherine Howard. The king was



she and Elizabeth had been restored to the legitimate line of succession in 1543, though briefly disinherited again by Edward's will. A devout Catholic like her mother, Mary ordered the Latin Mass celebrated for the soul of her dead Protestant brother.

It was, in fact, her commitment to the faith of Rome that created the concept in England of *Roman Catholicism*. Back in the fifteenth century, the pope in Rome had been a peripheral figure among even the most devout English Catholics. Now loyalty to the pope was a rallying cry, and faithfulness to him became an identity marker. Thus the leader of English Roman Catholics, a cousin of Henry VIII who had fled to Italy, came home to Mary to be her archbishop of Canterbury: Reginald Pole (1500–1558).

Mary would also bring another of her cousins, King Philip of Spain (1527–1598), to England to be her husband. Spain already had the reputation of being a hotbed for the Catholic Reformation and anti-Protestantism. This marriage solidified Catholicism in the Protestant English imagination as dangerously foreign.

But Mary knew that reconciliation with Rome would take more than a return of old Latin prayers and staunchly Catholic monarchs. For instance the question of the monasteries lingered; after the ejection of the monks, they had been sold to the *nouveau riche* as manor houses (note this well, fans of *Downton Abbey*). This obstacle was navigated with care in the 1550s, and the disaffected abbeys remained in lay hands.

Nevertheless Mary and Pole worked in earnest to resurrect the Mass across England, reestablish monastic communities where possible, and inspire loyalty to Rome via preaching. This campaign also featured the burning of key Protestants, including the imprisoned Thomas Cranmer.

In jail Cranmer had signed multiple recantations of his evangelical faith, and, according to the logic of inquisition, he should have been spared the stake. After all the triumph of inquisition is recantation: a heretic who repents. Burning was a last resort for purging the community.

Cranmer, however, was burned anyway—and thus made his famous recantation of his recantation, reversing his abdication of Protestantism at the last moment with high drama—because of a personal



**NOT IN FAVOR** The Tower of London began as a royal residence, but it was also a prison, housing both Anne Boleyn and her daughter, Elizabeth.

grudge held by Queen Mary. She wanted her pound of flesh from the heretic who, she believed, lured her father to divorce her mother. That does not mitigate the sincerity of her Catholicism any more than Anne Boleyn's evangelicalism reprieves her from being the "other woman" in the breakdown of Henry's first marriage. These women were just as complicated as the male players in the story.

#### GOOD QUEEN BESS OR NICODEMITE?

Just like her little brother, Mary reigned for only a short time. What she hoped was a child in her womb turned out to be a tumor, and she died in 1558. This meant yet another of the women in Henry's life would play a significant role in the religious history of England: Elizabeth, his daughter by Boleyn. Even as an infant, Elizabeth had played a symbolically Protestant part in the religious drama; the grumbling friars at her baptism grimly quipped that the water should have been boiling hot.

Though nurtured in her youth by stoutly evangelical chaplains and teachers, Elizabeth dutifully attended Mass during her older sister's reign—a common practice for Protestants wishing to survive Catholic rule. While many fled for continental safe-havens like Frankfurt and Geneva, many other Protestants stayed and walked a dangerous high-wire—sometimes dissembling, sometimes compromising outwardly.



**FAITH OF QUEENS** Far left: Queen Elizabeth remarked at her accession: "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes." Mary (left) told her subjects that she could not "forsake that faith that the whole world knows her to have followed and practiced since her birth."

**GAME OF CROWNS** Below: Today the wearer of the imperial state crown remains the head of the Church of England.

John Calvin in Geneva famously dubbed the French Huguenots who took this course "Nicodemites" and the name was also used for several leading English Protestants in the 1550s. The biblical reference is to Nicodemus who visited Jesus in John 3, but only under the cover of night.

Elizabeth's personal high-wire act remained an undercurrent in her religious policies for the rest of the sixteenth century. From the start of her reign in late 1558, she advanced Protestant men who, like her, had stayed in England during Mary's reign. Most notable among these were her lord chancellor, William Cecil (1520–1598), and her first archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker (1504–1575).

Elizabeth's church was unmistakably Protestant and clearly part, once more, of an international communion of Reformed churches. She dismissed the torch-bearing monks at her coronation and only weeks after her accession, at Mass on Christmas Day, she demanded that the host (bread) not be elevated.

By the spring of 1559, the *Book of Common Prayer*, the Protestant form of worship developed during the reign of her little brother, Edward, was revived; in time the official *Book of Homilies*, a Protestant preaching aid, was expanded so that evangelical preaching could be heard across England.

It is often noted that Elizabeth, to the distress of many of the Protestants who came home from continental exile, had a taste for ceremony—not exactly Catholic but perhaps hankering after Lutheran patterns that had been abandoned by Reformed

Protestants. Not only did she insist on the surplice (a white gown) for her clergy, she also kept a silver cross in her chapel royal, certainly not a part of the material context of Reformed prayer book worship anywhere else in England.

While Elizabeth demanded outward conformity, she did not pry beyond that—she did not, as it was often said, wish to make windows into her subjects' souls. One could get along simply by showing up at one's parish church for prayer book services.

That would be a hallmark of the Church of England well into the seventeenth century.



### CRITICAL ACTORS

In the end the women surrounding Henry VIII were certainly more than pawns in a sordid soap opera. Most of them had agency and were critical actors in a national religious drama. They charted paths many

others followed. This is true whether we are speaking of Catherine of Aragon and traditionalists, Anne Boleyn and the early evangelicals or Catherine Parr and the later ones, Anne of Cleves and England's shift toward the Reformed, Mary and resurgent Roman Catholics, or the idiosyncratic Protestantism of Elizabeth. Each represented key features of the story of the Reformation in sixteenth-century England, and their influence has long outlived them to shape English Christianity today. 📖

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# She would follow only Christ

FROM PAMPHLET WRITING TO PASTORAL COUNSEL, KATHARINA SCHÜTZ ZELL  
FOUGHT FOR HER RIGHT TO SPEAK

*Elsie McKee*

**KATHARINA SCHÜTZ ZELL** (c. 1498–1562) was reared as a faithful member of the church in Strasbourg, a city that manifested the ecclesiastical problems and the reforming spirit of the late medieval and early modern world. By her own account, the young Katharina Schütz was actively devout and spiritually anxious; she attended the sacraments, did good works, led other women in religious activities, and even read the Bible in German (which the clergy did not encourage!), but she could find no assurance of her salvation.

Then she heard the teachings of Martin Luther, spread in Strasbourg by Matthew Zell, in late 1521 or early 1522. Zell's teaching convinced her that she was saved by faith, by the grace of trusting in Christ alone, without her own works or the merit of anything created (including the sacraments).

This new teaching did not turn Schütz away from the church, but gave new life to her commitment and transformed her religious vocation. Still dedicated to God, she no longer felt she had to earn God's approval: according to her new understanding of Scripture, God freely accepts those who trust his son alone and that trust is God's gift, not human doing. No one needs any human intercessor or ritual mediation.

**FIRST LADY** Schütz's marriage gave her new prominence at the cathedral in Strasbourg where her husband was the pastor.

As a member of this priesthood of believers, laywoman Schütz felt herself called to be a "fisher of people"; she would tell others how they could be saved, according to what she had learned from the Bible by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, through the words of Luther, Zell, and others. She would use her pen, her voice, her home, and her very self to fulfill that calling.

## **MOTHER OF THE AFFLICTED**

Schütz's outward life soon changed as radically as the inward: she wed pastor Matthew Zell on December 3, 1523. (As with many early modern German women, she was often referred to by her former last name, which we will use here for clarity.) In Strasbourg the new movement had begun to take hold seriously only a little more than a year earlier, so both were putting themselves at significant risk. For priests to marry was to court Catholic condemnation, but Protestants saw these marriages as a witness to the Bible's authority over "human-devised" teachings of church tradition.



Clergy who determined to marry had to find women willing to be labeled immoral for living with priests; today the courage of these women has mostly been forgotten. Some pastors married their housekeepers, regularizing long-term relationships. Schütz was (to her knowledge) the first respectable woman in Strasbourg to marry a priest. Zell was not just any priest, but the one leading the Protestant “heresy,” so his new wife soon experienced scandalous rumors and slander.

Confident of the rightness of her position, she wrote to Strasbourg’s bishop defending clerical marriage on the basis of Scripture, later published as the *Apologia for Matthew Zell on Clerical Marriage* (1524). Besides her own justification for exchanging the celibate holy life for a married holy life, her intriguing text includes a creative, biblically based argument for a layperson, a woman, speaking out publicly.

This was far from the only religious conflict, however. In July 1524 Catholic overlords forced 150 men in nearby Kentzingen and their pastor, Jacob Otter, to flee. They took refuge in Strasbourg, the nearest city with Protestant sympathies; the Zells welcomed 80 into their large parsonage and helped feed them for four weeks. This was only the beginning of a lifelong practice of receiving travelers and refugees, a ministry dear to both husband and wife. Besides looking after those who had fled, Schütz was concerned about those who had been left behind. Her first printed pamphlet was a *Letter of Consolation to the Suffering Women of Kentzingen* (above at left).



**MY FIRST BOOK** Far left: Schütz may have continued publishing under her own name as a matter of pride, pointing to her honest roots.

**LOST HISTORY** Left: There are no surviving images of Schütz: the definitive edition of her works bears the image of her friend Wibrandis Rosenblatt.

## A FELLOWSHIP OF MUTUAL LOVE

Their marriage also established one of the first Protestant parsonages, with

important consequences for Schütz as one of the first examples of that new female calling: the pastor’s wife. Roman canon law taught that marriage was a sacrament, a mirror of the relationship between Christ and the church. Its primary purpose was procreation, but it was also a means to prevent sexual sin; those who could do without this “concession” were considered more holy.

Protestants clearly insisted that marriage was not a sacrament but a fellowship for procreation and for avoiding fornication. Strasbourg’s reformer Martin Bucer (1491–1551) regarded marriage as a covenant; he added a third reason as the most important—a personal relationship of “mutual love.” In Strasbourg where Bucer’s ideas first spread, newly married priests and their wives were particularly visible models of that mutual love in “holy households,” which would become the ideal pattern for families.

Like Schütz, Zell came from Alsace and from a substantial artisan family. An educated man and the most popular preacher in the city as well as the first Protestant pastor, he became one of the leading figures of the church. His wife also became acquainted with individuals from higher social ranks than those she had known as a girl—something not possible for housekeepers of earlier priests or even respectable citizen-wives among the “common people.” Once an obscure young woman known by name probably only in her home parish, she became a recognized figure in the city of Strasbourg and among Protestant associates of her husband in Germany and Switzerland.

Despite the fact that he was 20 years older and better educated, Zell regarded Schütz as a partner in faith from the beginning and increasingly accepted her cooperation in his ministry as well; he called her “wedded companion,” “mother of the afflicted,” and “assistant.” The last exasperated critics. Protestant pastors’ wives of the first generation were often remarkable people who regarded their marriages as religious callings, but most couples expressed this vocation in more conventional ways than the Zells.



Bucer thought Schütz had undue influence over her husband when in the early 1530s she vigorously encouraged Zell in his rejection of the custom of godparents because it was not biblical. The point was resolved peaceably, but Bucer apparently felt that guiding Zell would be easier if Zell's wife were not pulling in the other direction. Despite their exasperation with her independence, however, the first-generation reformers never doubted the orthodoxy of her faith, and they consistently appreciated her service to the needy.

Practical reasons freed the two to work together. Their two children died very young, and although her household included young relatives or students at various times, Schütz had more time to share her husband's work than did some fellow clergy wives. She deeply mourned the loss of her children, and their memory no doubt contributed to her concern for other children.

#### "BURST FORTH IN SONG"

The new perspective Zell and his colleagues preached brought significant changes to the shape of belief and practice; among the most visible were the altered forms, language, and character of public worship. Many people welcomed less formal German services, celebrated in more austere buildings with regular biblical preaching, corporate practice of the sacraments, and a voice in the prayers for everyone through song.

However very few songs met the standards of the new clergy—creating the problem of what to sing or pray at home, as old hymns to the saints were banned. In this context Schütz edited a version of the Bohemian Brethren hymnbook. Controversial Silesian nobleman Caspar Schwenckfeld (c. 1489–1561) probably brought her the book on one of his visits; her chief contribution was a vivid little foreword. The songs of the Brethren were generally acceptable in Strasbourg, but Schwenckfeld, their sponsor, was not, and the book was never republished.

In the 1530s reaction against Roman Catholicism developed into new church institutions, and Strasbourg's leaders began to banish those who did not accept Protestant forms of worship, although they stopped short of executing dissidents. The Zells, however, continued to befriend and receive all kinds of people—against the wishes of Bucer, now Strasbourg's leading theologian, although Zell remained the most popular preacher.

These tensions rose to dangerous levels in the 1540s and finally to war in 1546. The Protestant Schmalkaldic League was defeated in 1547, and negotiations

**CONVERSATION PARTNERS** Schütz interacted with three famous religious leaders of the era, but never let them define her: Schwenckfeld (*below left*), Bucer (*below right*), and her beloved husband, Zell (*below bottom*).



with victorious Holy Roman Emperor Charles V worked out a truce, the Augsburg Interim. When its provisions took effect in 1548, Strasbourg found itself once again a city where the Mass and other Roman sacraments were celebrated and Roman priests moved through the streets.

The elderly Zell strongly opposed compromise, but his fiery sermons ended with his death on January 10, 1548. Schütz was devastated to lose her beloved husband and pastor, especially at a time of such religious danger. At the burial she unexpectedly preached a sermon, recounting his life and death and urging his parishioners to hold faithfully to his teaching. Following his death she also privately wrote for herself a series of meditations on the book of Psalms, pouring out her grief over the loss of Zell, and the effects of the Interim on the gospel and church to which they had devoted their lives.

As a widow Schütz continued to love and serve the church and the people in Strasbourg, but by the 1550s she was living in a changed world. Almost all the leaders with whom she had shared the early days of reform were dead. Most of the city's new ministers were shaped by increasing confessional divisions



**TOWERING STEEPLE** This engraving of Strasbourg is from the 17th c., but still shows the prominent cathedral church central to the life of Schütz and Zell.

pitting Protestants against one another, against Rome, and against Schwenckfeld and Anabaptist groups who did not agree with any of the established churches.

Schütz herself steadfastly refused to take sides against any who had broken with Rome as long as they held to the essential teachings of Christ as the sole Savior and to Scripture as the sole authority. She disagreed with Anabaptists on some points but admired the ethical discipline that most of them demonstrated and thought they certainly should not be persecuted.

#### ON THE DEFENSIVE

In the 1550s Schütz found herself defending her faith on two fronts. One party was Schwenckfeld's circle of disciples in the city, who claimed her as one of their own but criticized her for not conforming. Schwenckfeld himself in 1551 publicly claimed Schütz as his supporter, which apparently led to an estrangement between them. In 1553 she wrote him a long letter to make clear her appreciation for his gifts and her determination not to be claimed by his or any other party.

The second generation of Protestant ministers in Strasbourg also considered her a Schwenckfelder despite her expressed objections. While her argument with the Schwenckfelders was not known beyond their circle (and apparently deliberately forgotten there), Schütz's dispute with Strasbourg clergy became public.

She finally felt compelled to publish her correspondence with Zell's successor, Ludwig Rabus (1523–1592), to enable her fellow citizens and church members to draw their own conclusions. Was she an apostate inspired by the devil who had always troubled her husband and the church, as Rabus said, or was she in fact a better representative and voice for the first-generation reformers than he was?

been responsible for many years. She helped the needy, both individually and by shaming the government into reforming its home for poor and sick Strasbourgers. She continued to teach and comfort those who came to her and to insist on doing what she believed was right, no matter how controversial.

In the months before her death, Schütz preached at the burials of two women friends who were Schwenckfelders; their families did not want the city clergy to call them heretics. Controversy surrounded her own burial because Strasbourg clergy considered her a Schwenckfelder, but her friends and family rallied. Conrad Hubert, Bucer's secretary and the only remaining first-generation minister, reluctantly agreed to defy the ecclesiastical establishment and to preach the service. Two hundred friends, relatives, and parishioners gathered to bid her an earthly farewell on Sunday afternoon, September 6, 1562, in the graveyard where her husband and children were buried.

In life she had defended all who were maligned: Zwingli, Schwenckfeld, the Anabaptists, and especially her beloved husband, but that did not make her the disciple of any of them—even of Zell; she would learn from anyone but would follow only Christ. ■

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# “Christ is the master”: Margaret Blaurer

**T**he Protestant Reformation's destruction of monastic institutions largely closed off the major alternative to marriage for sixteenth-century women (though a few convents limped along for the aristocracy to park surplus daughters in). Reformers put forth married housewives, not celibate ascetics, as the model of female godliness. Margaret Blaurer's life, though, demonstrates how reform reluctantly made room for female celibate ministry.

Blaurer (c. 1493–1541) came from a wealthy family of linen merchants prominent in the southern German city of Constance and the neighboring Swiss canton of St. Gall since the thirteenth century. Her brothers, Ambrose (1492–1564) and Thomas (1499–1567), sustained the family's prominence; Ambrose joined a Benedictine monastery, and Thomas became mayor of Constance.

While studying law at the University of Wittenberg, Thomas fell under Luther's influence and embraced evangelical ideas. He won over Ambrose, who left the monastery to become the leading Protestant pastor in Constance. Margaret, like her brothers, had received a Christian humanist education and knew Erasmus personally. The Blaurs also became friends with Martin Bucer in Strasbourg.

## THE MATCHMAKER

Bucer kept trying to find spouses for friends and colleagues, including Ambrose Blaurer and John Calvin. He enlisted Margaret Blaurer's help in matchmaking for his young secretary and also sought to marry off Blaurer herself. He first suggested Wolfgang Capito (c. 1478–1541), who he wished to keep out of the clutches of an Anabaptist widow. Later he tried to arrange a marriage between Blaurer and a theologically unstable Italian evangelical refugee 10 years younger, Fontius.

Bucer even suggested that should his wife, Elizabeth, die, *he* could marry Blaurer. Elizabeth sent a (presumably joking) message to Blaurer warning her that if she came between the two she would be in “a real predicament.” But the reality of sixteenth-century marriage was that bereavement was common, the life of clerical spouses hard, and relatively few respectable women were willing to marry former priests or monks.

That Bucer twice sought to marry Blaurer to people he considered in danger of heresy speaks to his high opinion of her own theological soundness. But Blaurer resisted. At one point Bucer called her “masterless,” but immediately added: “But you say, that where Christ is the master, a person is not masterless.” Bucer had previously insisted on Mary's wifely submission to Joseph as



**CITY FASHIONS** This map shows Constance—also the site of the 15th-c. council that had burned John Hus at the stake—and St. Gall. Margaret and Ambrose would have probably dressed like the couple in this picture.

important for her holiness; acknowledging that a woman might have Christ as direct master showed his respect.

Ambrose assured Bucer that Blaurer was of more use to the church as a single woman. (Eventually Bucer married Capito to Wibrandis Rosenblatt and then married Rosenblatt *himself* after Capito and Elizabeth Bucer died.) After her mother died, Blaurer managed the household as did Protestant housewives like Katie Luther. But her singleness and her brothers' backing allowed her to devote herself to Constance's poor and to establish an organization of women to assist her. She acquired the unofficial label “deaconess of the church,” a biblical term Protestants applied to women engaged in active ministry.

Blaurer's ministry culminated with the plague outbreak of 1541. Transforming a former convent into a hospital for plague victims, she cared for them personally until she caught plague herself and died at 47. In the sixteenth century, the plague was the acid test of ministry. Clergy who abandoned cities were discredited; those who stayed and ministered were regarded as heroes. In giving her life to plague victims, Blaurer gave ultimate proof that Christ was indeed the only master she needed to carry out a true and godly vocation as a single woman.—*Edwin Woodruff Tait, contributing editor, Christian History*



# Dangerous pamphlets

## MARGARETHE PRÜSS HELPED ADVANCE THE RADICAL REFORMATION THROUGH HER PUBLISHING

***Kirsi Stjerna***

**BORN INTO A FAMILY** that owned a printing press, Margarethe Prüss (d. 1542) grew up with the smell of ink and the steady clacking sound of the press at work.

As the daughter of a master printer, wife of a printer—not just once but three times—and mother-in-law of yet another printer, she also became a printer in her own right, highly unusual for her time. Between her marriages she used special widow's privileges to manage a printing house independently during some of the most turbulent times of the Reformation. Between 1522 and 1527, the years of rebelling peasants and vigorous unauthorized lay pamphlet writing, Prüss played an instrumental role in spreading the seeds of reform.

Publishers had to calculate the risks of printing the words of those considered “radical.” Prüss wielded significant power by providing some of the most radical voices of the time with a platform—especially Anabaptists, the most persecuted of all.

## PAMPHLETS AND RADICALS

The Prüss family business had the fortune of operating in one of the free imperial cities. Strasbourg, with autonomy from territorial princes, was directly subor-

**NEW TECHNOLOGY** From the mid-15th c. until the Industrial Revolution, printing involved the use of type set in a hand press.

dinate only to the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. In many ways a publisher's dream and known for its tolerant vibes, the city attracted prophetic groups and radical voices of the Reformation.

These radicals were charismatic groups and individuals who, though influenced by Reformation teachings, broke away from many traditions preserved by those who would become known as the magisterial Reformers. The radicals celebrated the experience of the Holy Spirit speaking to and through individuals and were explicitly Spirit-led communities, with fewer institutional structures for religious expression. They refused to give an oath or serve in the army, which made them suspect in the eyes of authorities.

Also suspicious was how, in their early stages, they welcomed women's participation and even leadership as prophets. Most of all such groups were considered a threat because they broke the imperial law of infant baptism by practicing believer's baptism. These





Venduntur in officina Ascensiana.



**BOLD MOVE** Above: Charlotte Guillard, another early female printer, was unusual in publishing this 1547 book on canon law under her own name. Both she and Prüss would have worked on presses like the one at left.

"Anabaptists" (or "re-baptizers"), as they were called, suffered heavy persecution by other reforming groups and Catholics alike.

In Strasbourg Anabaptist or Spiritualist movements constituted about 10 percent of the city's population. Women figured prominently, including in the circle of visiting Anabaptist leader Melchior Hoffman (c. 1495–c. 1543). His followers included several prophetic women, such as Barbara Rebstock, wife of a weaver; and Ursula Jost (d. 1532 or 1539). Prüss directly supported Jost with her publishing decisions during the heat of Reformation pamphlet writing.

Jost, from Illkirch, south of Strasbourg, was the illiterate wife of Lienhard Jost, a butcher who was also a prophet; they had eight children. Her visionary prophetic activity lasted several years (1525–1532). A total of 77 of her apocalyptic visions were recorded with the involvement of Hoffman, who considered her message as important as that of the prophets of the Old Testament. Prüss's printing shop published Jost's *Prophetic Visions and Revelation of the Works of God in these End Times* (1530). Little else is known of Jost's life. Even her death date is ambiguous; all

we know is that Lienhard married another woman, Agnes, in 1539.

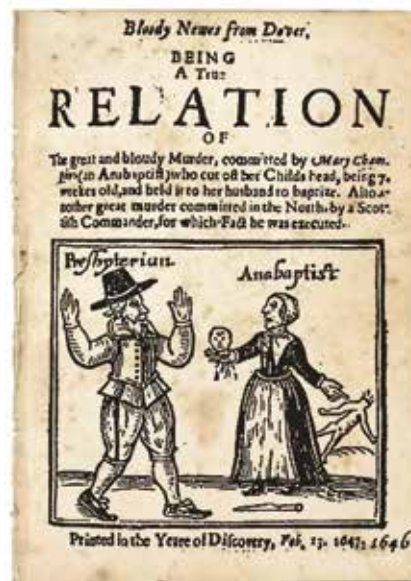
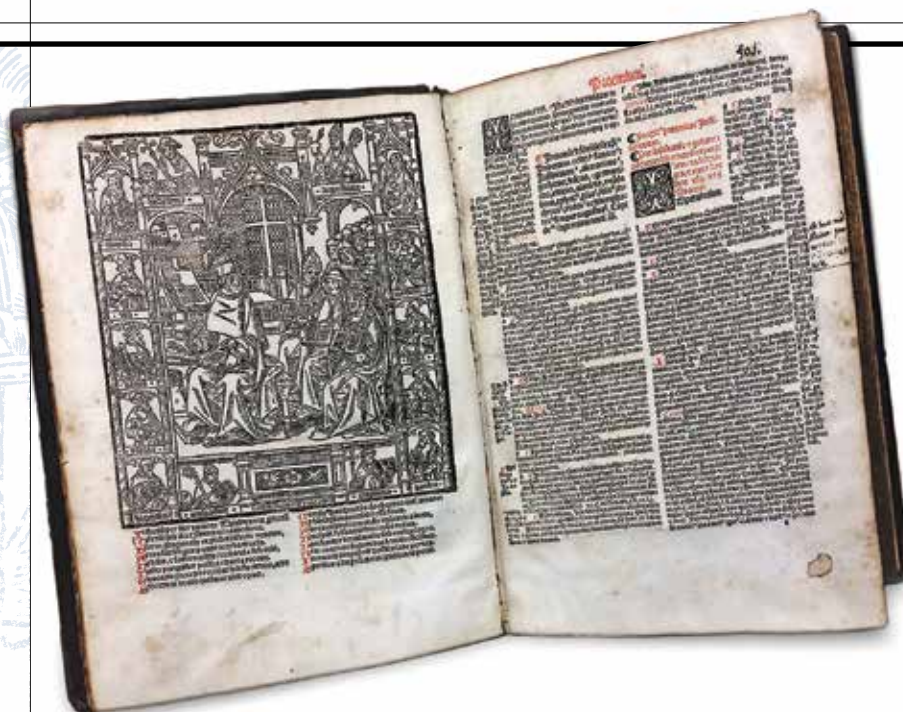
Even in Strasbourg publishing these Anabaptists' works was a dangerous business. In fact anything not flowing from or supporting Catholic teachings brought a certain level of notoriety to a publisher. Printers who decided to publish such materials risked not only financial ruin due to censorship, but their very lives as well. Nevertheless Prüss continued her work.

### THE FAMILY TRADE

Prüss inherited the family printing business after her father died. Johannes Prüss Sr. (1447–1510), a devout Catholic, had been printing since 1480. He produced mostly missals and breviaries, serving the Catholic bishops in the eastern part of the German regions. The last breviary he worked on was published some months after his November 1510 death.

After the Middle Ages, guild regulations had become tighter and effectively excluded women from the apprenticeships of previous centuries that had given them decision-making roles, leadership, and true ownership in the given trade. To own a print shop, one needed





to be prepared by training, have (or have purchased) citizenship, and be in good standing as a member of the guild, which gave voice and vote in matters relating to the trade business and city affairs. Women were not allowed to hold a citizenship or guild membership on their own, though they could confer both on their sons or husbands. We know of one exception: Walburga Wähninger in Strasbourg bought a printing shop and citizenship, but there is no record of her ever publishing in her own name. Nevertheless women worked behind the scenes with significant but unrecognized impact.

Prüss probably received informal training in the family business, as was typical in a trade family. Daughters would work, without pay, for the family trade, and learn on the side, mostly informally. As wives women could enter into partnerships—unofficially. To continue in the family business, the daughter would need to marry a man in the same craft. As widows women had a chance to exercise more ownership, though guild regulations limited it in length.

### THREE PRINTER HUSBANDS

Prüss inherited the well-established family printing and its adjoining print shop as well as another smaller shop by the cathedral. In the following 20 years or so, the family's printing business doubled from 40 to 80 books a year. The explosion of pamphlet writing partially contributed—suddenly both men and women were engaging in it with gusto, and the works needed publishers.

Guild regulations prevented a single woman from operating the business, so the print master's daughter married Reinhard Beck in 1511; Johannes Prüss Sr. had trained Beck as a typographer, along with Margarethe's brother Johannes Jr. Upon their marriage Reinhard gained formal ownership of the shop; he had already

**"BLOODY MURDER"** Above: Anabaptists continued to be persecuted for over a century; this anti-Anabaptist pamphlet is an American one from the 17th c.

**COURT'S IN SESSION** Left: This textbook on Roman law was printed by Yolande Bonhomme, another female printer, in 1541.

purchased a citizenship months earlier. From the records of texts the Prüss-Beck shop began to publish, it is clear that he had at least Protestant leanings.

Johannes Sr. had published mainly Catholic materials along with works by Anabaptists Hans Denck (c. 1495–1527) and Johannes Bunderlin (1499–1539). Now the press also printed Wittenberg theologians: Martin Luther and Andreas Karlstadt von Bodenstein (1486–1541), Luther's colleague. Luther, especially since his excommunication and outlawing in 1521, had become a notorious figure. Karlstadt was even more problematic because of his association with the Spiritualists and radicals. Evidence of religious conflict exists between Margarethe and Johannes Jr. By 1511 he moved his own business to another location.

After Beck died in 1522, Prüss had a limited window of two years to operate the shop without a husband. She did so formally under the guardianship of her father's assistant and new son-in-law, Wolfgang Foter, who married her daughter Ursula. In 1524 she married for the second time. Johann Schwann (d. 1526), who came from Marburg via Basel, had been a member of the Franciscan order but left in 1522. The marriage ended with Schwann's death; before that they published explicitly Reformation materials.

After becoming a widow, *again*, Prüss could be picky about her next husband—she was a catch, with her shop and the rights that came with it. Her last





husband, Balthasar Back (d. 1551) from Kirchheim an der Eck, entered the picture in 1527. Of all her partners, he appeared the most outspoken friend of Anabaptists and Spiritualists. Historians believe he was an Anabaptist, but no indisputable record exists of family members receiving believer's baptism or expressing such beliefs in public. The material they printed suggests sympathy and even alliance, though; Anabaptist works and other books pushing the envelope flew off their presses.

They printed seven works by Melchior Hoffman and were the only press to issue *A Christian Instruction* (1527) by Hans Hut (c. 1490–1527), a radical Anabaptist who had participated in the German Peasants' Revolt. They also published a hymnbook edited by Katharina Schütz Zell (see "She would follow only Christ," pp. 29–32), a female evangelical leader in Strasbourg.

Eventually their gamble bore financial and political consequences. In 1530 Back faced the threat of arrest for publishing Hoffman's works. They lost significant income when editions of Hoffman were censored, as were Jost's visions and the works of Sebastian Franck (1499–c. 1543), a known Spiritualist. Despite orders to destroy their inventory, many works survived. Prüss and her family continued in business and to disseminate forbidden material.

## DIVERSE PATHS

Prüss's three marriages across three decades led to eight children—seven with Reinhard Beck and one

**TOLERANT CITY?** The *Nuremberg Chronicle* give us a picture of Strasbourg (under its medieval Latin name, Argentina) probably less than a decade before Prüss's birth.

with Schwann. In her will she left her possessions to her eight children, who were not all on the same page regarding religion. Her son Reinhard continued the family business in Basel; her daughter Juliane joined a Catholic convent; her daughter Ursula continued in the printing business with husband Wolfgang; and her daughter Margarethe married Franck.

She clearly believed in her children's education, taught them the art of publishing and the love of books, and instilled in them faith. Just as her print shop published different voices, her own household evidenced her inclusive vision. Prüss herself was an unsung hero of the Reformation, advancing its most radical aspects as she exercised her calling, risking her life more than once as the ink smell filled the room and the press clacked on. **■**

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# “God my Lord is even stronger”

EXEMPLARY WOMEN OF THE REFORMATION WITH CONFIDENCE  
IN THEIR CONVICTIONS

*Rebecca Giselbrecht*

## **KATHARINA VON ZIMMERN (1478–1547)**

Katharina von Zimmern was the last abbess of the Benedictine Fraumünster Abbey in Zurich. The large church with a splendid courtyard is still located at the heart of Zurich on the Limmat River near the mouth of the Lake of Zurich.

Katharina von Zimmern entered the Fraumünster convent when she was 14 years old. Four years later in 1496, she was named abbess of Fraumünster at the young age of 18. Von Zimmern bore responsibility for substantial farmlands, estates, and properties along the banks of the river.

According to the old laws from the early Middle Ages, the abbess of Fraumünster was the ruler of Zurich; but by 1518 both her power and the convent were in decline. Only four women still lived and worked in the Fraumünster Abbey when reformer Huldrych Zwingli and the Zurich city council asked von Zimmern in the early 1520s to close and give the

**FAITH LIVES ON** Today the Fraumünster Abbey is an Evangelical Reformed Church (most known for beautiful stained-glass windows by 20th-c. artist Marc Chagall).

abbey and its properties over to the city of Zurich. Both church and state in Zurich had made the sweeping all-inclusive decision to become a Reformed city.

In December of 1524, von Zimmern abdicated her rights and conceded her property to the city. In her brief speech of abdication, she said that she had freed her conscience and consciousness, gained insight from honorable people, and as a Christian with the strong hope of living her life according to godly order, she agreed to turn her abbey over to the city of Zurich.

Now 47, von Zimmern stood at the beginning of a Reformed life. Although she had the right to remain living in the abbey, she married Eberhard von Reischach and had two children; her husband was briefly exiled from the city and she went with him, but both returned





in 1529. After von Reisach died in the battle of Kappel in 1531, the last abbess of Zurich bought a house there where she resided until her death.

### HELENA VON FREYBERG (1491–1545)

Helena von Freyberg of the region of Tirol was born of the lower nobility but chose to leave her inherited comfortable life to participate in the radical Reformation. She and her husband, Onophrius von Freyberg of Hohenanschar, had four sons, all of whom became knights. When Tirol banned Anabaptist practices, she fled to their castle in Münchenau. Von Freyberg and her entire household (excluding her husband) received a “second” baptism as adults in March of 1528.

Pilgram Marpeck (d. 1556) led the community of Anabaptists to which von Freyberg belonged. The group based its interpretation of the Bible on a synthesis of mysticism, apocalypticism, and separated congregationalism. After her baptism von Freyberg’s home served as the center for Anabaptist activity in the area—she ran a house church from 1527 to 1529, visited 36 Anabaptists in prison in 1528, and supported others financially. In 1529 a recanting Anabaptist gave the authorities the evidence they needed to arrest von Freyberg. She escaped to her husband in Bavaria, then to Eppan, and finally left Tirol.

Von Freyberg settled in Constance, a Lutheran area, where she influenced the local Anabaptists; ejected from there, she went back to Münchenau. In 1533 the government asked her to recant her Anabaptist beliefs to continue living at Münchenau. She considered recanting in public, which would have weakened the Anabaptist cause, but finally did so only in private. Afterward she fled to Augsburg. Her exile did not diminish her enthusiastic support for the Anabaptist community in

**HIGH AND MIGHTY** Above: Although this picture of Zurich is from the 1800s, it gives an idea of how the church towered over the town in medieval times. Von Zimmern’s tomb is there today (right).

Augsburg until the authorities arrested her on Easter 1535. After testimony in court, she was put in chains overnight and released the next day. Her husband and sons arranged that she could remain in Augsburg until her death.

Von Freyberg testified about her Anabaptist faith when she tried to mediate between Marpeck and Caspar Schwenckfeld (1490–1561; see *Christian History* issue #21 for more on Schwenckfeld). As part of this, she wrote her spiritual biography, now in the *Kunstbuch*, a collection of unpublished writings from 1527 to 1555 by members of the Marpeck circle. Like Katharina von Zimmern’s abdication, von Freyberg’s confession was the result of a profound and embodied biblical foundation combined with willingness to live according to her convictions:

The devil has covered me over many times and distorted the light and made me white while I was black and perverted the Holy Spirit into a spirit of flesh. This is what (the devil) does in spiritual things; he presents himself as if he were white as an angel (and very humble). But God my Lord is even stronger and deprives him of his power and might through Jesus Christ, His beloved Son.

### URSULA JOST (C. 1500–C. 1532)

During the early years of the Reformation, monasteries and convents closed, members of the clergy married, and a host of fresh expressions of religious freedom began to sprout up all over Europe. Strasbourg prided itself on being open to various strands of the new



**LAY PROPHET** Interest in Jost's visions (*left*) has revived in our day.

**CHURCH MOM** Anna Bullinger (*below*) gained fame as the wife of Zurich's lead pastor.



faiths; three different Anabaptist groups, members of the radical Reformation, found homes there.

Ursula Jost belonged to the group of Anabaptists that converged around controversial lay preacher Melchior Hoffman (1495–1543); Jost and others in the group were known for their prophetic visions (see “Dangerous pamphlets,” pp. 34–37). Ursula Jost’s first vision was recorded in 1525. She married Lienhard Jost, who was also a visionary—confined involuntarily to an insane asylum for a time because of it—and they lived together with their daughter Elsa on the southeastern edge of Strasbourg near the Butcher’s Gate until Ursula died sometime before 1539.

In the print shop owned and run by his wife, Margarethe Prüss, Balthasar Beck recorded and published 77 of Jost’s visions in *Propheische Gesichte*. Often apocalyptic in nature, her visions pointed to the end times spoken of in the Bible or to times of crisis: serpents and toads, manna, the cross, ladders to heaven, the pope being dragged into hell, and people rising from their graves.

What Jost saw reflected the troubled times she lived in as the peasant revolt of the 1520s and the overthrow of the Roman Catholic Church’s authority changed the world around her. Jost followed the pattern of biblical prophets: judgment and wrath versus patience and endurance, the ways of the world versus God’s ways. Her conclusion was that the crown of life will go to children who take the narrow path.

#### **ANNA ADLISCHWYLER BULLINGER (C. 1504–1564)**

In Zurich Anna Reinhart Zwingli pioneered the role of the pastor’s wife as spouse to Huldrych Zwingli; Anna

Adlischwyler continued it by marrying Zurich’s second *antist* (lead pastor), Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575). Both Annas served as their husbands’ partners in ministry.

Anna Adlischwyler had inherited money, a house, and some household goods when her father died. Her mother, in turn, sent Anna to enter the Dominican religious order in Oetenbach in 1512 to honor his death.

After Zwingli claimed the pulpit to reform Zurich in 1519, the Zurich city council ordered in 1522 that all of the nuns in Oetenbach must hear the gospel message preached by Zwingli in his role as *antist*. Three years later Katharina von Zimmern resigned as abbess of Fraumünster, and all monasteries and convents were closed. Only a few stragglers were left; Adlischwyler was one. By 1526 only she and an elderly nun named Justina remained in Oetenbach.

Adlischwyler soon met Bullinger, and we know from his letters that he started courting her in 1527. He lost his patience after she refused to marry him in 1528. In 1529 he sent her a long letter about how a Christian wife should behave—this letter later became the center of his *On Christian Marriage* (see “Honorable and holy,” p. 11).

Bullinger’s diary recounts that Adlischwyler would not marry him because it displeased her mother. He took the matter to marriage court and also sent the most powerful men in Zurich to convince Adlischwyler to marry him; finally, shortly after her mother died, she conceded. After Zwingli died in the Battle of Kappel in 1531, Adlischwyler was the wife of the most powerful man in Zurich—the *antist* of Gross Münster (“great church,” the main Protestant church).

Adlischwyler became the mother of 11 children in 18 years as well as Zurich’s most welcoming hostess to people from around the world. Bullinger called Anna his beloved “Hausfrau,” generally translated as “housewife” but meaning something more like “home mom.” She fed and served everyone, from her husband’s theology students to persecuted people to the great thinkers of the Zurich Reformation and their wives; even Genevan reformer Calvin ate at her table.

Heinrich Bullinger called his family life “a joy” and mourned deeply when his wife died after caring for him and others when the plague struck Zurich in 1564. He wrote to his friend Ambrose Blaurer (see “Christ is the master,” p. 33) in Constance, “You know that the Lord has taken the staff of my old age, my loyal, chosen, and exquisitely godly wife. But the Lord is righteous, and his judgment is righteous.”

Anna Adlischwyler Bullinger was later referred to as the “Mother of Zurich,” and her strength and passion for her family and church served as a model for





homes in which pastoral families lived and cared for others throughout the centuries.

#### **CHARLOTTE ARBALESTE DUPLESSIS-MORNAY (1550–1606)**

The magisterial Reformation and the radical Reformation involved people with the same central conviction of *sola scriptura*, the conviction that the Scriptures are the sole authority for faith and practice. But they went in two directions as they left Catholic doctrine and organization behind. The French ethnic Reformed, referred to as Huguenots, boasted innovative, brave, and pioneering women (see “Like mother, like daughter,” pp. 12–15) like those from the German and Swiss regions.

Charlotte Arbaleste was born in Paris in a time of crisis and conflict between French Catholics and Protestants. Though her father was Catholic and her mother Protestant, her well-to-do family was peaceable. Arbaleste chose the Protestant faith and married her first husband, Jean de Pas, Lord of Geuqueres, when she was only 17 years old. De Pas was killed at war before he saw their daughter, who was born in 1568.

Arbaleste got caught in the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre in Paris in 1572, when assassins and mob violence broke out against the Huguenots while the leading figures of the Reformed movement gathered for a wedding in Paris. She managed to flee to Sedan, where she became famous for publishing her accounts of the massacre. There she met and married author Philippe de Mornay, Lord of Plessis-Marly (1549–1623). Philippe and Charlotte had eight children, but only three survived.

While Philippe argued in writing for the Huguenot faith, his wife raised their children

**AT THE CENTER OF ZURICH** Above left: The Bullingers served at the Gross Münster, which still sits beside the river today.

**DEDICATED WIFE** Above right: Charlotte Duplessis-Mornay devoted herself to a biography of her husband, Philippe; images of him have survived, but we have none of her.

and her daughter from her first marriage. She ran the household, and, just like Anna Adlischwyler Bullinger, entertained public figures—all in support of her husband while he wrote tracts to further the understanding of Reformed Christianity.

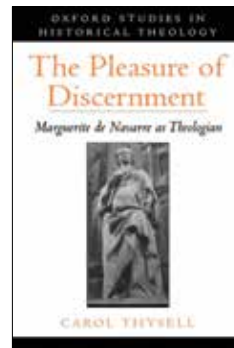
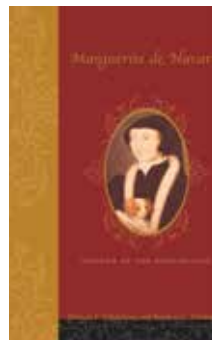
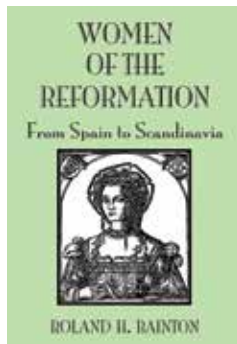
Charlotte Duplessis-Mornay also found time to write her husband’s biography, *Memoires de Messire Philippe de Mornay, Seigneur du Plessis-Marli*, continuing to work on it until she died in 1606 (seven months after the death of their only son).

The memories she shared of her husband’s life provide a significant and detailed chronicle of the historical circumstances and religious experiences of the French Huguenot movement, and they still aid us today in understanding the lives and roles of Huguenot women in the Reformation. Philippe outlived her, dying in 1623. ¶

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# Recommended resources

WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT LESSER-KNOWN WOMEN OF THE REFORMATION? CHECK OUT THESE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OUR EDITORS AND FROM THIS ISSUE'S AUTHORS.



## BOOKS

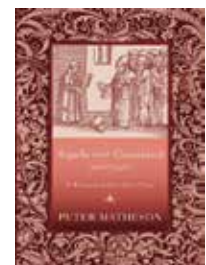
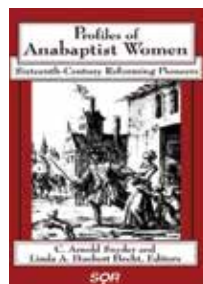
For many years the most famous series of books telling the specific **stories of Reformation women** has been Roland Bainton's *Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy* (1971); *Women of the Reformation in France and England* (1973); and *Women of the Reformation: From Spain to Scandinavia* (1977). They still make engaging reading and, as with the general surveys below, include profiles of some women from this issue.

More recent treatments of **women's roles in the Reformation** include Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled* (1983); Lorna Jane Abray, *The People's Reformation* (1985); Jane Dempsey Douglass, *Women, Freedom, and Calvin* (1985); Arnold Snyder and Linda Huebert Hecht, eds., *Profiles of Anabaptist Women* (1997); Susan Karant-Nunn and Merry Wiesner-Hanks, eds., *Luther on Women* (2003); Kirsi Stjerna, *Women and the Reformation* (2008); Marjorie Plummer, *From Priest's Whore to Pastor's Wife* (2016); Rebecca VanDoodewaard, *Reformation Women* (2017); and Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (2019).

For more on **Marguerite of Navarre and Jeanne d'Albret**, consult Nancy Lyman Roelker, *Queen of Navarre* (1968); S. Amanda Eurich, *The Economics of Power* (1994); David Bryson, *Queen Jeanne and the Promised Land* (1999); Barbara Stephenson, *The Power and Patronage of Marguerite de Navarre* (2004); Patricia and Rouben Cholakian, *Marguerite de Navarre* (2006); Carol Thysell, *The Pleasure of Discernment* (2007); Gary Ferguson and Mary McKinley, eds., *A Companion to Marguerite de Navarre* (2009); Jonathan Reid, *King's Sister—Queen of Dissent* (2009). Some of Marguerite's correspondence is in *The Mirror of All Christian Queens* (2015), edited and translated by Valerie Foucachon, and some of Jeanne's writings are collected in *Letters from the Queen of Navarre with an Ample Declaration*, edited and translated by Kathleen Llewellyn, Emily Thompson, and Colette Winn (2016).

You'll find **Marie Dentière's** works in *Epistle to Marguerite de Navarre and Preface to a Sermon of Calvin*, translated and edited by Mary McKinley (2004).

There is much more on **Argula von Grumbach** in Peter Matheson's *Argula von Grumbach (1492–1554/7): A*







*Woman Before Her Time* (2013). Matheson has translated her works in *Argula von Grumbach: A Woman's Voice in the Reformation* (1995).

The **queens of the English Reformation**—and other Englishwomen—feature in Norman Jones, *Faith by Statute* (1982); David Loades, *Mary Tudor* (2006); John Guy, ed., *The Reign of Elizabeth I* (1995); Wallace MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I* (1993); Sharon Jansen, *Dangerous Talk and Strange Behavior* (1996); Andrew Pettegree, *Marian Protestantism* (1997); David Starkey, *Elizabeth* (2000); Paul Zahl, *Five Women of the English Reformation* (2001); Christine Peters, *Patterns of Piety* (2003); Eric Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn* (2004); Alison Plowden, *Elizabeth I* (2004); Charles Beem, *The Lioness Roared* (2006); and Eamon Duffy, *Fires of Faith* (2009) and, with David Loades as co-editor, *The Church of Mary Tudor* (2006).

Read more about **Katharina Schütz Zell** in Elsie McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell* (1998) and in McKee's edition of her writings, *Church Mother* (2007).

For some of our really lesser-known women, there are no full-length books. This includes Margaret Blaurer, Margarethe Prüss, Ursula Jost, Katharina von Zimmer, Helena von Freyberg, and Anna Adlischwyler Bullinger. You'll find **short profiles** of many in the books above by Bainton, Snyder and Hecht, Stjerna, and VanDoodewaard. Charlotte Duplessis-Mornay left us her husband's biography (with a bit about her as well) in *A Huguenot Family in the XVI Century* (2018).



### CHRISTIAN HISTORY ISSUES

Here are past issues on some topics related to this issue's themes. You can read them all online, and some are still available for purchase:

- 4: Ulrich Zwingli
- 5: The Anabaptists
- 12: John Calvin
- 17: Women in the Early Church
- 21: Caspar Schwenckfeld
- 30: Women in the Medieval Church
- 34 and 39: Martin Luther
- 46: John Knox
- 48: Thomas Cranmer and the English Reformation
- 83: Mary in the Imagination of the Church
- 115: Luther Leads the Way
- 118: The People's Reformation
- 120: Calvin, Councils, and Confessions
- 122: The Catholic Reformation

In addition, CHI's *Great Women in Christian History* has a profile of Katie Luther.



### VIDEOS FROM VISION VIDEO

Videos related to this issue's stories include *Pioneers of the Spirit: Teresa of Ávila*; *The Forgotten Martyr: Lady Jane Grey*; *The Morning Star of Wittenberg: The Life of Katie Luther*; *The Radicals*, and of course our Reformation series video, *This Changed Everything*.

### WEBSITES

All the websites we mentioned in our original Reformation series remain good sources. These include the [Christian Classics Ethereal Library](#), the H. Henry Meeter Center [Post-Reformation Digital Library](#) (which includes Reformation texts as well), the [Medieval Sourcebook](#) and [Modern History Sourcebook](#) hosted at Fordham University, [Project Gutenberg](#), [Project Canterbury](#), the [Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online](#), William Harmless's [Bibliographies for Theology](#), the [Pitts Theology Library](#) at Emory University, and the [Cranach Digital Archive](#). ☐





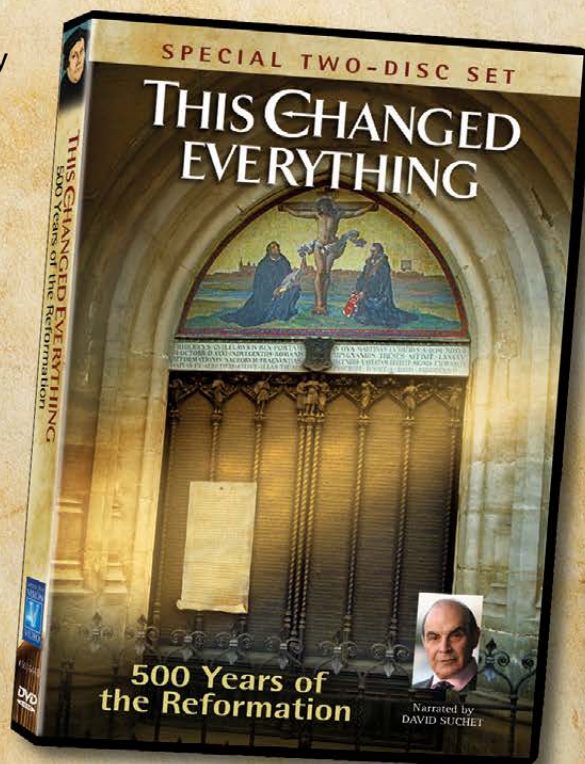
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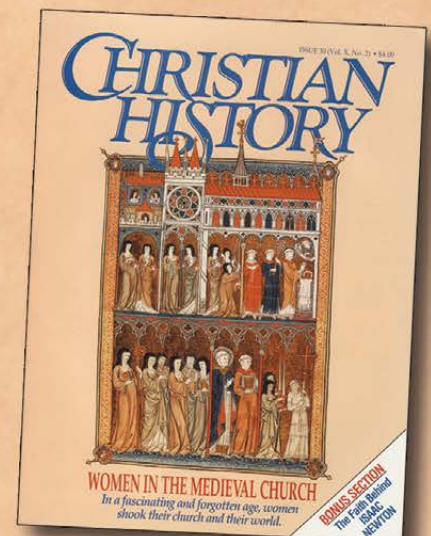
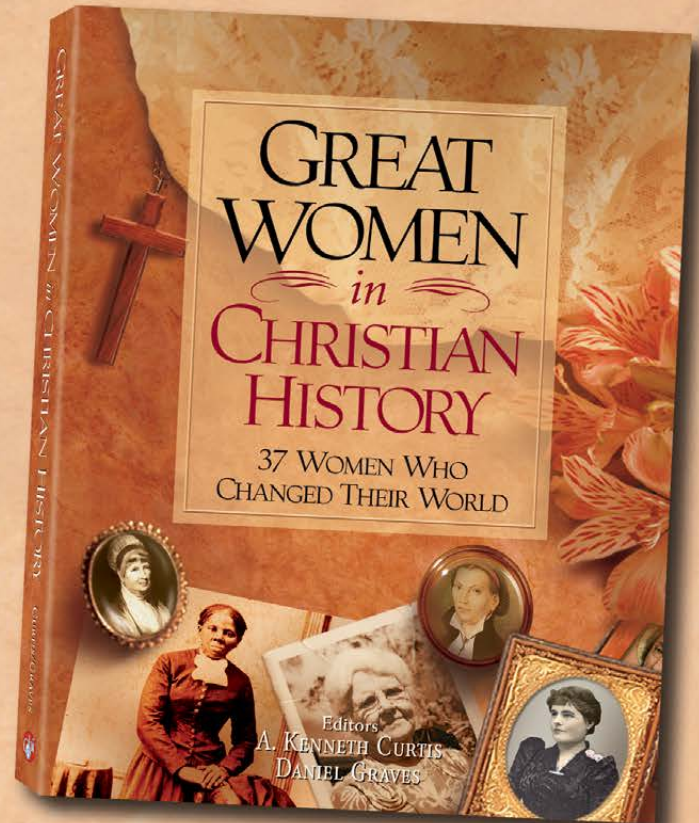
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