

*Maria Bogucka*

## WOMEN AND RELIGION IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

In his book on women in Bohemia before the Battle of White Mountain (1620), Josef Janaček writes: “For noble women and townswomen, rich and poor, religion provided a certain amount of intellectual freedom. In moments of joy and sorrow, [women] turned directly to God and because they did so without the participation of their husbands and fathers, they felt more free. Faith reinforced their moral code, gave meaning to the values they recognized and sustained their ambition—even when they felt themselves at a loss. Often this faith degenerated into hysteria and fanaticism and even more frequently, it vanished in the face of worldly temptation; but faith did in fact always comfort women in difficult situations and provide a mystical explanation of incomprehensible calamities”<sup>1</sup>. This seems to be a very astute observation. It would be a mistake to explain the religious fervor of women only by their more emotional character and to ignore the degree of freedom that participation in religious life offered them. Religion made it possible for women to leave the house, forget their daily duties and satisfy ambitions of a higher order. In the Middle Ages as well as the early modern period, religion was the only sphere of public life where there was any room for women.

Thus, as early as the Middle Ages, women played an important role in every religious movement in Europe. There were many women among the Cathars, Albigenses and Lollards, and in the late Middle Ages, thousands

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<sup>1</sup> J. Janaček, *Białogłowy rozważają żywot w czasie burzliwym (A Prudent Woman's Life in a Stormy Time)*, Warszawa 1982, p. 291.

of women joined the Beghards' associations<sup>2</sup>. Women also took part in every revolt in Europe, especially in towns, and in particular in those places where the disturbances took the form of food riots<sup>3</sup>. Being in charge of supplies for the family, women were extremely sensitive to price increases and shortages. That women were less liable for their actions and could expect to be pardoned may have encouraged their activism; this undoubtedly explains why the leaders of some riots disguised themselves as women. Researchers, however, are quite cautious in appraising the role of women in peasant uprisings, though the participation of women in them can be detected in many sources<sup>4</sup>.

The beginning of the Reformation witnessed an extraordinary outburst of activity of the part of women. All over Europe, women took part in street demonstrations and joined iconoclastic movements. They regularly criticised the clergy and joined in theological discussions, thereby raising the question of the place of women in the Church and society. Many women gave their lives for the Reformation, especially in its early stages. The numerous writings by women give us an idea of how important a role women played in the early Reformation.

### *Women Writers*

Even in the centuries before the Reformation, women had been in the practise of writing religious works, for example, the great mystics: St. Brigitta in Sweden and Catherine of Sienna, as well as illiterate women, such as Margaret Kempe in England and Dorota of Montau (Małowy), Pomerania, who dictated their visions to priests. These, however, were always individual cases isolated in space and time. It was only at the beginning of the 16th century religious that women began to practise writing on a greater scale, a testimony to their deep involvement in the great religious movements of those years. In the 1520s and 1530s, large number of women in Germany were particularly active in publishing their ideas on matters of faith. In an analysis of 39 pamphlets written between 1523 and 1524, Paul

<sup>2</sup> Cf. U. Bejick, *Die Katharerinnen. Härasieverdächtige Frauen im mittelalterlichen Süd-Frankreich*, Freiburg–Basel–Wien 1993; G. Koch, *Frauenfrage und Ketzertum im Mittelalter*, Berlin/O 1962; M. L. King, *Frauen in der Renaissance*, München 1993, esp. pp. 139 ff., 167 ff.; M. L. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge 1993, esp. pp. 186–192; U. Weinmann, *Mittelalterliche Frauenbewegungen*, Pfaffenweiler 1990.

<sup>3</sup> Yves-Marie Berce, *Les femmes dans les revoltes populaires*, in: *La femme à l'époque moderne XVI<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> ss.*, Actes du colloque de 1984, les 11 et 12 mai 1984, Paris 1985, pp. 57–64.

<sup>4</sup> Negative opinions on women's participation in peasant revolts have been expressed by Y.–M. Berce, see fn. 3; slightly different views have been presented by M. Kobelt–Groch, *Von "armen Frauen" und "bösen wibern" — Frauen in Bauernkrieg zwischen Anpassung und Auflehnung*, "Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte", 79, 1988, pp. 132 ff.

Russel, an expert on the early Reformation, claims that 11 of them, i.e. over 30%, were published by women<sup>5</sup>. Further research by Albrecht Claussen<sup>6</sup> has uncovered about a dozen more pamphlets written by women, which means that there must have been several dozens such authors. The most active and prolific of these female writers was Argula von Grumbach, the author of eight pamphlets and printed letters, some of which ran into several editions. A noblewoman from Bavaria and well-versed in the Scriptures, Argula von Grumbach corresponded with Luther, Osiander, George Spalatin as well as Duke Frederick of Saxony and John, Palatine of the Rhine. Since her brother, Marcellus, was a student at Ingolstadt, she was familiar with the quarrel between Luther and Rector Eck and the affair surrounding a student named Seehofer, who had been oppressed for spreading Luther's writings. Argula became involved in these disputes and in a letter to the university authorities, criticised St. Paul's opinion that women should keep silent in church, recalling that the Bible said "whosoever believes in me I will take as my own and I will send women and children to rulers and women will govern them"<sup>7</sup>.

Told to go back to the kitchen and the spinning wheel, Argula responded sharply. She produced a polemic which roused the indignation of many people in Germany and even frightened some by its reference to the prophet Jeremiah, who had proclaimed that on the eve of Judgement Day, women would be called upon to prophesy. Pressure was exerted on Argula's husband to silence his wife. It was suggested, for example, to cut off her fingers in order to make it difficult for her to write or to immure her so as to shut her off from the world. A conflict erupted between man and wife, and the less fortunate husband, who could not tame his wife, was ultimately relieved of his posts by the Duke of Bavaria. Argula separated from her husband, and after his death in 1532, remarried.

When she became a widow for a second time, Argula again became a public figure, for example by delivering sermons at cemeteries during burials—but this time without interference. Argula's theology was very simple. As noted, she was well-versed in the Bible; thus she based her pronouncements on it. She hated the clergy, but conceded the existence of saints and even read stories of their lives; this indicates that she did not accept all the principles of the Reformation. She stood up for gender and class

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<sup>5</sup> P. A. Russel, *Lay Theology in the Reformation. Popular Pamphleteers in Southwest Germany 1521–1525*, Cambridge 1986, p. 185, ff.

<sup>6</sup> A. Claussen, *Frauen in der deutschen Reformation. Neufunde von Texten und Autorinnen sowie deren Neubewertung*, in: *Die Frau in der Renaissance*, hrsg. P. G. Schmidt, Wiesbaden 1994, pp. 179–201.

<sup>7</sup> P. A. Russel, *Lay Theology*, p. 185.

equality and asserted that women and peasants were also given the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Engaging in propaganda and politics instead of charity work, Argula von Grumbach was extremely active throughout her life in a way untypical of women at that time. For her contemporaries, such activity was, of course, quite shocking<sup>8</sup>.

Other women also took part in public life during the early years of the Reformation. The case of Catherine Zell, nee Schütz, was very well-known. The wife of a pastor in Strasbourg, Zell defended her marriage in print in 1524. She also maintained contacts with Melchior Hoffman, and helped political and religious émigrés by, among other things, publishing a letter to console them in 1524. She recalled brave women from the Old Testament, such as Judith and Deborah, and argued that although St. Paul had written to the Corinthians, “Let your women keep silent in church”<sup>9</sup>, he had also told the Galatians, “There is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus”<sup>10</sup>. Strasbourg was at that time also a centre of the Anabaptists, a movement in which women were extremely active. It was there that female prophets, such as Barbara Rebstock, Ursula Jost and Margaret Lienhardt, also emerged.

Other towns were in similar turmoil. Ursula Weyde, wife of a tax collector in Eisenberg (Saxony) engaged in polemics with Abbot Simon Plick in Luther’s defence. The nuns Catherine and Veronica Rem—mother and daughter—sided with the Catholic Church against the Reformation and in a letter to a cousin, they defended monastic life. In 1523, Caritas Prickheimer, a nun from the order of St. Clare in Nuremberg who had saved her convent from being dissolved, wrote Father Bock Emser a learned letter, in which she proved her good knowledge of the Church Fathers. The letter was published and widely read, as is demonstrated by the crude invectives hostile to women in the margins of a copy kept at the Wolfenbüttel library<sup>11</sup>.

In addition to these best known female authors, historians, such as A. Claussen, A. P. Russel and M. Wiesner, mention many other examples, to say nothing of writings by women who remained anonymous. Without a doubt, women broke their silence during the first phase of the Reformation. In the course of heated debates, their opinions counted. Their writings were accepted by publishers and read by both advocates and opponents of the Re-

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. A. Classen, *Footnotes to the German Canon: Maria von Wolkenstein and Argula von Grumbach*, in: Jean R. Brink, Allison P. Coudert, Maryanne C. Horowitz, eds., *The Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*, Kirksville, Missouri 1989, pp. 139 ff.

<sup>9</sup> 1 st Cor. XIV, 34.

<sup>10</sup> Gal. III, 28.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. A. Classen, *Frauen*, p. 191.

formation<sup>12</sup>. This lasted only for a short time, however, as society remained essentially conservative, and—as we shall see—the leaders of the Reformation began to change their attitude toward women.

Elsewhere in Europe, women also engaged in writing and took an active part in debates on the need for changes in religious doctrines and social relations. In France, Marguerite of Navarre, the sister of Francis I, openly supported religious reform at her court and in her writings, she criticized the traditional marriage. Louise Labé, a resident of Lyon, repeatedly argued in her works that women should not conceal their education. Madeleine and Catherine de Roches, another mother and daughter team, played a central role in a humanistic circle in Poitiers and had the courage to publish their writings<sup>13</sup>.

Using the Gospels, Marie Dentière, a Geneva abbess who renounced the cloistered life, asserted that men and women were equal. What is more, she accused men of betraying Christ. Dentière published an original protest against St. Paul's injunction that women should keep silent, adding that since women were prevented from proclaiming God's word by mouth, they should do so by pen. She wrote an anonymously edited pamphlet, *La guerre et deslivrance de la belle ville de Genève*. In a letter to Marguerite de Navarre, which was published in 1539, Dentière also sharply criticized the position of women in the Church. "Have we two Gospels, one for men and the other for women?" she asked. And she asserted, "He has revealed to both men and women"<sup>14</sup>.

### *Ambivalence of Protestant leaders*

The burst of activity by women and their increasingly bold statements with time became inconvenient for the leaders of the Reformation. As late as 1523, Luther had praised Argula von Grumbach and encouraged her to publish her writings, but soon he began to withdraw his support. At first, he jokingly asked what would happen if women wanted to preach in church and what kind of turmoil and confusion might ensue<sup>15</sup>. Researchers have

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<sup>12</sup> CfB. Becker-Contarino, *Frauen in den Glaubenskämpfen. Öffentliche Briefe, Lieder und Gelegenheitsschriften. Zur Rolle der Frau in der Reformation*, in: *Deutsche Literatur von Frauen*, Bd. I, *Vom Mittelalter bis zum Ende des 18. Jhs.*, hrsg. G. Brinker-Gabler, München 1988, pp. 149–172; M. E. Wiesner, *Nuns, Wives and Mothers: Women and the Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe*, in: *Public and Private Worlds*, ed. S. Marshall, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1989, pp. 6–28.

<sup>13</sup> M. E. Wiesner, *Women*, pp. 130–131.

<sup>14</sup> T. Head, *Marie Dentière: a Propagandist for the Reform*, in: K. M. Wilson (ed.), *Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation*, Athens 1987, pp. 260 ff.

<sup>15</sup> *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Weimar 1883, Bd. 10, III, pp. 31–34.

recently stressed that Luther's attitude toward the issue of gender and toward women in general was ambivalent<sup>16</sup>.

According to Luther, women were undoubtedly physically and intellectually weaker than men, though they could be more fervent in their faith<sup>17</sup>. Marriage gave woman the place for which God had preordained her. It was her mission to bear children and, by her humility, piety and the beauty of her soul, encourage man to improve his behaviour. Nevertheless, because of their weak character, women frequently resorted to magic. Only if they accepted their mission as wives and mothers and gave up attempts to leave home, would they be strong and not succumb to the temptation of practising magic<sup>18</sup>. This shows that in Luther's teaching, woman was already on the verge of becoming a witch—dangerously close. A witch, for Luther, was simply the opposite of the pious and submissive wife. Beliefs of this kind could have deadly consequences for women in the 16th century.

In his teachings about supremacy, Luther differentiated among three areas of authority: *status oeconomicus* (the home), *status politicus* (the state) and *status ecclesiasticus* (the Church). According to him, the home was the model structure of authority. Luther combined divine and human economics and as a result, assigned to the father (*Hausvater*) a position modelled on that of God. The mother (*Hausmutter*), and this was the only role in which a woman could have any social significance or enjoy important social status, was regarded not as an individual but rather as an element of marriage, its integral part. The position of the wife—mother in marriage corresponded to that of a state's subjects in the secular realm and to that of the faithful, the members of a Church community, in the spiritual realm<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. I. Ludolph, *Die Frau in der Sicht Martin Luthers*, in: *Vierhundertfünfzig Jahre lutherischer Reformation 1517–1967*. Festschrift für Franz Lau zum 60. Geburtstag, Göttingen 1967, pp. 204–221; D. Lorenz, *Vom Kloster zur Küche: Die Frau vor und nach der Reformation Dr. Martin Luthers*, in: B. Becker–Contarino (hrsg.), *Die Frau von der Reformation zur Romantik*, Bonn 1980, pp. 7–35; M. E. Wiesner, *Luther and Women; the Death of Two Marys*, in: A. Loades (ed.), *Feminist Theology: A Reader*, London 1990, pp. 123–137. "In the early stage of Protestantism the towns people's ideal of woman took it for granted that women should be attached to the house, According to Martin Luther, "women should stay at home, keep silence in it, run it, bear and bring up children" (*Tischreden*), rightly points out the Polish researcher W. Pałubicki, *Martin Luter a społeczny status kobiety (Martin Luther and the Social Status of Woman)*, in: *Protestantyzm i protestanci na Pomorzu*, ed. J. Iluk and D. Mariańska, Gdańsk–Koszalin 1997, p. 141.

<sup>17</sup> In *Tischreden* he wrote: "If women adopt the teaching of the Gospels they are stronger and more ardent in faith", quoted after W. Pałubicki, *Martin Luter*, p. 140.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. S. Brauner, *Martin Luther on Witchcraft. A True Reformer?*, in: J. R. Brink, A. P. Coudert, M. C. Horowitz (eds.) *The Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*, Kirksville, Miss., 1989, pp. 29 ff.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. R. van Dülmen (hrsg) *Arbeit, Frömmigkeit und Eigensinn*, Frankfurt/M 1990, p. 38 (preface).

Recent research also shows that Luther's views on the equality of men and women before God and their joint responsibility in marriage may have included points which would have led one to question the asymmetry of the genders<sup>20</sup>. But Luther himself did not go so far and as the years went by, he stressed more and more forcefully the husband's supremacy over the wife and the father's supremacy over the children<sup>21</sup>. As a result, the centuries-old asymmetry between the genders was retained, and even strengthened, during the Lutheran Reformation through a categorical invocation of divine order<sup>22</sup>.

Luther's acknowledgement of marriage's high standing also featured in his teachings. In his opinion, virginity did not deserve the status it was given by the Roman Church. For Luther, there could be no higher state of being in the eyes of God than that of marriage<sup>23</sup>. This led to a re-evaluation of attitudes toward virginity in all Protestant Europe<sup>24</sup>, and made it impossible for women in those lands to attain a better social position and a degree of independence through asceticism and sexual abstinence.

An ambivalent attitude to women can also be found in the teachings of another leader of the Reformation, John Calvin<sup>25</sup>. Calvin's opinions represent a mixture of traditional views of woman's subordinate place in society and the more modern discovery of the dignity of woman and marriage. Although traditional patriarchy stands at the centre of Calvin's theology, Calvin nonetheless rejected the popular 16th-century view of woman as a necessary evil<sup>26</sup>. His formulations reflect the influence of the learned women with whom he was in contact: Marguerite de Navarre, Marie Dentièrre and Renée de France, the sister-in-law of Francis I<sup>27</sup>.

Calvin held the view that an exceptional woman could even be a ruler, and he was clearly embarrassed by John Knox's brutal attack on government

<sup>20</sup> G. Scharffenroth, *Die Beziehung von Mann und Frau bei Luther in Rahmen seines Kirchenverständnisses*, in: G. Scharffenroth, K. Thraede (hrsg.), "Freunde in Christus werden...". *Beziehung von Mann und Frau als Frage an Theologie und Kirche*, München 1977, pp. 183–302.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. H. Lauterer-Pirner, *Vom "Frauenspiegel" zu Luthers Schrift "Vom ehelichen Leben". Das Bild der Ehefrau im Spiegel einiger Zeugnisse des 15. und 16. Jhs.*, in: A. Kuhn, J. Rüsen, *Frauen in der Geschichte*, 3, 1983, pp. 63 ff.

<sup>22</sup> S. C. Karant-Nunn, *The Transmission of Luther's Teaching on Women and Matrimony. The Case of Zwickau*, "Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte", 77, 1986, pp. 31–46.

<sup>23</sup> M. Luther, *Predigt von ehelichen Leben*, 1522.

<sup>24</sup> S. Burghertz, *Jungfräulichkeit oder Reinheit? Zur Änderung von Argumentationsmustern vor dem Basler Ehegericht im 16. und 17. Jh.*, in: R. van Dülmen (hrsg.), *Dynamik der Tradition. Studien zur historischen Kulturforschung*, IV, Frankfurt/M 1992, pp. 13–40.

<sup>25</sup> J. D. Douglas, *Women, Freedom and Calvin*, Philadelphia 1985; M. Potter, *Gender Equality and Gender Hierarchy in Calvin's Theory*, "Signs" 11, 1986, pp. 725–739; J. L. Thompson, *John Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah. Women in Regular and Exceptional Roles in the Exegesis of Calvin, His Predecessors and His Contemporaries*, Genève 1992.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. J. L. Thompson, *John Calvin*, p. 34.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 38–49.

by women, especially since he wanted to maintain good relations with Elizabeth Tudor. In a 1554 letter to Lord Cecil, he writes that although rule by women was contrary to nature and symbolized God's punishment for the ineptitude of men, it should be endured. He did not advocate rebellion against female rulers<sup>28</sup>. One can hardly imagine a more confusing and inconsistent pronouncement. Calvin's antipathy toward women is also reflected in his vehement opposition to the practice of midwives baptising dying infants, something Luther sensibly permitted<sup>29</sup>.

The British researcher J. L. Thompson has spotted and best described Calvin's inconsistencies. Thompson has shown that Calvin held four different opinions on the place and role of women in the Church:

1. A woman can never teach men or express her opinions in public. This has been so ordained by the laws of God and Nature as well as by St. Paul.

2. An exceptional woman, called upon by God, may preach, as did Deborah of the Old Testament.

3. A woman may preach the Gospel in exceptional cases when no qualified man is available.

4. A ban on teaching by women is a problem of politics; it depends on custom and need.

The last formulation is especially important for it bases the ban on teaching by women on custom and tradition, not on God's law<sup>30</sup>, and custom, of course, may change over time and according to society's needs. In this way, Calvin opened some prospects to women, unlike Luther whose concept of society rested on the idea that woman's status was unchangeable.

These were, however, but small differences, matters of nuance. Generally speaking, both Luther and Calvin asserted that the subordination of woman to man was the result of God's will. Women were spiritually equal to men and on equal terms with them in God's presence, but in all other aspects, their subordination to men was indisputable. The Protestant attitude toward the sin of the first mother, Eve, cast a shadow over all women and on their image in general. As a result, only the Anabaptists offered women greater possibilities for public activity<sup>31</sup>, and in 17th-century England, only

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 50–54.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 54–55.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 267 ff.

<sup>31</sup> In the 16th century there were many women among the Anabaptist leaders in Holland (especially in Amsterdam) and in Germany (especially in Strasburg). In the first half of the 17th century these traditions revived in Holland and England; women predicants appeared in both countries, cf. A. Fraser, *The Weaker Vessel. Woman's Lot in 17th Century England*, London 1989, pp. 274 ff.



the Levellers' movement and the Quakers drew from some more liberal Anabaptists' views of women<sup>32</sup>. The leaders of the English Reformation, including the Puritans, as well as Zwingli adopted Luther and Calvin's views.

In addition to breaking with celibacy and commending marriage, Protestant theologians wrote numerous treatises—addressed mainly to men—on how to run the house and family. This pro-marriage literature contains many opinions favourable to women, though some of them are formulated in a surprising way. For instance, the Lutheran pastor Johannes Mathesius, borrowing from Calvin, wrote in the middle of the 16th century that a man without a wife was only a half-person lacking help and support<sup>33</sup>. According to Mathesius, the creation of Eve from Adam's rib indicated that she should stand by her husband's side. As she had not been created from Adam's foot, she should not be trampled upon. But a woman could not rule; if she had been destined to rule, he asserted, she would have been created from Adam's head. Readers so much liked this picturesque argumentation that Mathesius's work went into international circulation and, at the beginning of the 17th century, re-emerged in an English debate on women<sup>34</sup>.

As protests on behalf of women were weak and inconsistent, the Protestant marriage remained built on subordination, not on equality. The Protestant husband wielded authority, and the wife was obliged to show him full obedience. The husband had the right to punish his wife and to resort to brute force in doing so. Such a relationship between the genders could not but influence attitudes toward female writers, who publicized their views on questions of faith and the status of women.

The first phase of encouraging and tolerating women's active role within the Protestant movement was soon followed by a total boycott of female writings. Not wanting to get into trouble with the local authorities, publishers ceased to publish female authors. Writings on women were replaced by a literature hostile to women. Hundreds of caricatures, satires, poems and treatises presented females as stupid, vixenish, gossipy, lazy creatures, as spendthrifts and slaves to fashion, as creatures who threatened the patriarchal family and the patriarchal social order.

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<sup>32</sup> M. E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge 1993, pp. 203 ff; A. Fraser, *The Weaker Vessel. Woman's Lot in 17th Century England*, London 1989, pp. 261 ff., pp. 402 ff.

<sup>33</sup> J. Mathesius, *Ehstand und Hauswesen*, Nuremberg 1564, vol. XIII, p. XX.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. S. Shepherd (ed.), *The Women's Sharp Revenge. Five Women's Pamphlets from the Renaissance*, London 1985, p. 68.

### *Effects of the Reformation*

Assessing the influence of the Reformation on the situation of women is not easy. As late as the 1970s and 1980s, historiography attributed a positive role to the Reformation. Most researchers believed that the Reformation had improved the situation of women by raising the status of marriage and the wife and by postulating that all parishioners should be eligible to preach the Gospel, a doctrine which led to the development of education for women so that they could read the Bible<sup>35</sup>. In the 1970s, however, Kathleen Davies raised doubts about the innovative nature of the Reformation's views on marriage<sup>36</sup>. Almost ten years later, Alan Macfarlane claimed that the character of marriage was the same in pre-capitalist and capitalist society and that the Reformation and the early modern period changed little<sup>37</sup>. Finally, in 1989, Lyndal Roper fundamentally challenged the traditional historiography in her well-known work, *The Holy Household*<sup>38</sup>.

Roper argued that although the Reformation at first proclaimed the evangelical equality of men and women, it soon replaced this notion with the idea of a patriarchal hierarchy. The Reformation began with dynamic female prophets and ended with submissive wives. An ideal Protestant household was a patriarchal structure reflecting a painful inequality of its members. Recently, Armanda Shephard has sharply criticized Laurence Stone, refuting his argument that Protestant marriage represented a real partnership<sup>39</sup>. Richard van Dülmen has stated outright that between the 16th and 18th centuries women were reduced to cooks, witches and inmates and has also joined the group of historians opposed to the idealisation of gender relations during this period<sup>40</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> R. Bainton, *Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy*, Minneapolis 1971; S. Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe*, Cambridge Mass. 1983; L. Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, London 1977 (the claim that Protestantism introduced the partnership of marriage); L. Green, *The Education of Women in the Reformation*, "History of Education Quarterly" 19, 1979, pp. 93–115 wrote about the Reformation's favourable influence on the education of women.

<sup>36</sup> K. Davies, *The Sacred Condition of Equality. How Original Were Puritan Doctrines of Marriage?*, "Social History", 5, 1977, pp. 563–580.

<sup>37</sup> A. Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England 1300–1840*, London 1986.

<sup>38</sup> L. Roper, *The Holy Household. Women and Morals in Reformation Augsburg*, Oxford 1989.

<sup>39</sup> A. Shephard, *Gender and Authority in Sixteenth Century England. The Knox Debate*, Keele 1994, pp. 9 ff. S. Cahn, *Industry of Devotion. The Transformation of Women's Work in England 1500–1800*, New York 1987, esp. pp. 128 ff. also says that the Reformation led to the deterioration of women's situation in England.

<sup>40</sup> R. van Dülmen, *Arbeit, Frömmigkeit und Eigensinn. Studien zur historischen Kulturforschung II*, Frankfurt/M 1990, preface.

Van Dülmen's views are shared by Margharet L. King, who has asserted that in Protestantism, those women who wanted to have a spiritual life had to develop it amidst the bustle of housework and the rattle of pots and pans<sup>41</sup>, and by M. B. Broda, who has written that man's authority over woman was an important slogan of the Reformation<sup>42</sup>. Even so moderate and cautious a researcher as N. Z. Davis says that although women did play an important role in the Reformation, their situation did not improve<sup>43</sup>.

Within the framework of discussions of the Reformation, a separate debate continues over the consequences of closing convents, and more broadly, the effect such closings had on the situation of women. In the 19th century and in the early 20th century, historians frequently presented convents as "a form of male control over the surplus of women in the population", as a place of oppression, a prison on the one hand and a place of deprivation and vice on the other. These historians stressed family pressure, usually coming from the father or a brother, to force women to choose the cloistered way of life. In more recent research, however, convents are presented as an alternative for many women who wanted to avoid marriage. Convents came to be seen also as a place of self-fulfillment, where women could gain access to education and could engage in intellectual pursuits, something which could not be achieved within the family structure of the day. Consequently, a majority of researchers now see the closing down of convents in a negative lights and believe that closing convents had unfavourable results on the situation of women in Protestant countries. What is more, it turns out that many women protested against closing convents.

Nuns were not always eager to go out into the world, and for many of them, the dissolution of convents was a real tragedy. In 17th-century England, we find expressions of regret that women had been deprived of the possibility of choosing monastic life (Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle, and Margaret Godolphin)<sup>44</sup>. There were cases in Germany of nuns continuing to live in a group after the dissolution of their convents, and even after converting to Lutheranism. In Brunswick-Lüneberg, for instance, at least 14 Lutheran quasi-convents survived until the 19th century. Such convents

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<sup>41</sup> M. L. King, *Frauen in der Renaissance*, München 1993, pp. 163 ff. A similar opinion is held by S. Lesemann, *Arbeit, Ehre, Geschlechterbeziehungen. Zur sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Stellung von Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Hildesheim*, Hildesheim 1994, p. 74.

<sup>42</sup> M. B. Broda, *Herr über Sie. Ein Versuch über die Typisierung der Frau in der Reformation*, "Feminist. Studies", 5, 1986, pp. 46–58.

<sup>43</sup> N. Z. Davis, *Städtische Frauen und religiöser Wandel*, in: N. Z. Davis, *Humanismus, Narrenschaft und die Riten der Gewalt. Gesellschaft und Kultur im frühneuzeitlichen Frankreich*, Frankfurt/M 1987, pp. 99–100.

<sup>44</sup> A. Fraser, *The Weaker Vessel*, p. 162.

functioned in other parts of Germany as well<sup>45</sup>. In 17th- and 18th-century Britain, groups of women chose life together in order to avoid marriage<sup>46</sup>.

N. Z. Davis, who believes that the Reformation had an unfavourable impact on female life, says that contrary to Catholicism, "the specific feminine spheres of life" disappeared in Protestantism<sup>47</sup>. Luise Schorn-Schütte has disputed this view. She believes that Protestantism gave women new important opportunities by offering them the role of the pastor's wife, thereby becoming the assistant in taking care of a parish<sup>48</sup>. In Poland, W. Pałubicki has recently expressed similar views on the role of the pastor's wife<sup>49</sup>.

As the Reformation intensified reflection on gender relations, all reformers took a great interest in sexuality. This interest, together with the endeavours to discipline society in states undergoing modernization, led to the sharpening of regulations concerning sexual life. In many West European countries, "offices for moral issues" were set up in the 16th century (in Germany, these were called *Frauenämter*). These offices controlled the whole population, of course, not only women, but since moral offences committed by women could result in highly visible consequences (pregnancy), women were summoned to these offices more often than men<sup>50</sup>. In many towns, the authorities did their best to expel single women who were regarded as a threat to order and morality or to include them in households under the authority of a man<sup>51</sup>. They also issued more and more ordinances and instructions regulating sexual behaviour and imposing "good morals" in everyday life. Prostitution, which was tolerated by law in the Middle Ages<sup>52</sup>, became a punishable offence in many countries. In practice, the condemnation of sexuality introduced by the Reformation, and later adopted by the Counter-Reformation, amounted to a general condemnation of women, for in the 16th century women were regarded as the personification

<sup>45</sup> M. L. Wiesner, *Women*, p. 194.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. B. Hill, *A Refuge from Men: the Idea of a Protestant Nunnery*, "Past and Present", 117, 1987, pp. 107-130.

<sup>47</sup> N. Z. Davis, *Städtische Frauen*, pp. 102-104.

<sup>48</sup> L. Schorn-Schütte, *Pfarrfrauen in der hansestädtischen Gesellschaft der Frühen Neuzeit*, in: B. Vogel, U. Weckel (hrsg.), *Frauen in der Ständegesellschaft. Leben und Arbeiten in der Stadt vom späten Mittelalter bis zur Neuzeit*, Hamburg 1991, pp. 201-225, esp. p. 204. P. A. Russel, *Lay Theology*, p. 187 also drew attention to the fact that the Reformation had created new roles for women, such as a pastor's wife engaged in social work in the commune and in charitable work.

<sup>49</sup> W. Pałubicki, *Marcin Luter*, p. 141.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. S. Lesemann, *Arbeit, Ehre, Geschlechterbeziehungen*, pp. 131-143.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. P. Schuster, *Das Frauenhaus. Städtische Bordelle in Deutschland 1350-1600*, Paderborn-München-Wien-Zürich 1992, pp. 155 ff.

of sex. According to Renaissance medicine, women were more easily sexually aroused than men; they were said to be “under the power of the uterus”<sup>53</sup>. All of this had unfavourably affected the situation of women on the eve of the modern era.

According to recent research, it is a myth that the Reformation exerted a favourable influence on the education of women. M. William has shown that for a long Calvinist Geneva did not care about the education of girls despite verbal declarations to this effect. As a result, literacy among women was very low in Geneva during the 16th and 17th centuries<sup>54</sup>. William’s views are shared by Geraldine Strauss and Susan Karant-Nunn<sup>55</sup>.

The rejection of the cult of the Holy Virgin and the saints, among whom were many women, also had some unfavourable results. Catholics regarded the Virgin Mary as a second Eve who made up for the sin of the former; in Protestantism, Eve’s sin continued to encumber women. As a result, the woman–sex–sin–death stereotype was stronger in Protestantism than in Catholicism<sup>56</sup>. Mary and St. Anna were powerful women admired by Catholics, but a powerful woman was a dangerous woman for the Protestants. The pictures of St. Anna, Mary and the infant Jesus, images so popular in Catholic churches and in fact, indicative of a matriarchal family, do not exist in Protestant countries<sup>57</sup>. The ambivalence and tension in the Protestant understanding and interpretation of womanhood were the reason why the Protestant image of woman was darker and more ominous than the Catholic one.

According to some historians, this is why charges of witchcraft occur more frequently and the verdicts were more harsh in Protestant countries. The harsher verdicts in Protestant countries arose also because local authorities passed sentences without referring the matter to a central authority such as the parliament in France or to Rome itself<sup>58</sup>. Today, scholars are of the opinion that indicted women were treated more leniently by the Inquisi-

<sup>53</sup> Cf. A. Zimmerli-Witschi, *Frauen in der Reformation*, Zürich 1981.

<sup>54</sup> E. W. Monter, *Women in Calvinist Geneva 1550–1800*, “Signs” 6, 1980, pp. 204 ff.

<sup>55</sup> G. Strauss, *Luther’s House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in Luther’s Germany*, Baltimore 1978; S. Karant-Nunn, *The Reality of Early Lutheran Education: the Electorate District of Saxony — a Case Study, in: Responsibility of the World: Luther’s Intentions and their Effects*, Göttingen 1990, pp. 128–146.

<sup>56</sup> A. P. Coudert, *The Myth of the Improved Status of Protestant Women: The Case of Witchcraze*, in: J. R. Brink, A. P. Coudert, M. C. Horowitz (eds.), *The Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*, Kirksville, Miss., 1989, pp. 85 ff.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 86. Cf. also T. Brandenburg, *St. Anne and Her Family. The Veneration of St. Anne in Connection with Concepts of Marriage and the Family in the Early Modern Period*, in: *Saints and She-Devils. Images of Women in the 15th and 16th Centuries*, ed. L. Dresent Coenders, London 1987.

<sup>58</sup> A. P. Coudert, *The Myth*, pp. 64–65.

tion than by Protestant courts. W. E. Monter explains this by the “macho” character of the Inquisition. The inquisitors made light of women. They did not regard them as a genuine danger and did not take their statements as seriously as Protestant judges did<sup>59</sup>. The Reformation made women responsible for their salvation and, as a consequence, for their deeds. This view was later adopted by the administration of justice in Catholic countries. As a result, the sanctions applied to women were harsher in the modern era than in the Middle Ages<sup>60</sup>.

As this brief survey of problems and opinions shows, the view that the Reformation had an unfavourable impact on the situation of women prevails, but there are also researches who think that in reality little changed. Irwin Joyce says bluntly, “After looking beyond the superficial evidence, most writers tend to agree... that the more things change, the more they remain the same”<sup>61</sup>.

### *The Reformation in Poland*

The question of women and the Reformation in Poland has not yet been sufficiently analysed, although scattered remarks on this subject can be found in various studies. The scarcity of sources presents the greatest obstacle to further research in this field. For example, the records of the dissident synods, which M. Sipayłło published in 1972, refer only to men. Judging from the subject matter of the debates, however, women also came under discussion. At a synod held at Bełżyce in March 1569, four points of the proceedings concerned women<sup>62</sup>. But since the discussion is not recorded in the Koloszwár manuscript, which contains a report on this synod, we do not know what was said about women and what decisions were taken.

As for Polish women themselves, they kept silent during the Reformation in Poland. Unlike Germany, Poland did not experience a upsurge of female authors. Nonetheless, Polish women were greatly interested in theological polemics as is demonstrated by the writers of that time, such as Father Stanisław Reszka (Hosius’s secretary) and Marcin Bielski. Reszka writes, Ochino had to leave Poland “*fremitu mulierum reprobatus*”, that is

<sup>59</sup> E. W. Monter, *Women and Italian Inquisition*, in: *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, pub. M. B. Rose, Syracuse 1986, p. 115.

<sup>60</sup> J. L. Flandrin, *Families in Former Times: Kinship, Household and Sexuality*, Cambridge 1979, pp. 127–129; J. Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women and Female Power in the Street Literature of Early Modern England and Germany*, Charlottesville–London 1992, p. 16.

<sup>61</sup> I. Joyce, *Society and the Sexes*, in: S. Ozment (ed.), *Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research*, pp. 343–359, esp. 344, 354.

<sup>62</sup> Point 11 — On believing spouses, Point 20 — On Protestant Women, Point 21 — On Protestant Widows, Point 22 — On Unmarried Protestant Women, M. Sipayłło, *Akta synodów różnowierczych w Polsce (Documents of Synods of Dissidents in Poland)*, vol. II, Warszawa 1972, p. 223.

to say, women protested in church against his sermons<sup>63</sup>. On the other hand, religious innovations did reach Polish women. Reszka wrote, “womankind is not stable but subject to change” for it “appreciates intellectual acrobats”<sup>64</sup>.

Weiglowa, a townswoman from Cracow, stands at the center of the Polish Reformation’s beginnings. In a statement of faith before a bishop’s court in 1539, she demonstrated her capacity for abstract thinking by describing God as an absolute being completely separate from defective human concepts. Asked whether she believed that Christ was God’s son, she replied, “God had neither a wife nor a son. He does not need him for only those who die need sons. God is eternal. He was not born and will nor die. He has us as His sons, and all those who follow the road prescribed by Him are His sons”<sup>65</sup>. Some scholars regard Weiglowa as a Judaizer, others think she was an Antitrinitarian.

A woman from the middle of the 16th century, who undoubtedly belonged to the Antitrinitarian, wrote her parents a letter which was known to the scholar W. Sobieski. The letter contains numerous quotations from the Bible and show that its author was well-versed in theological literature<sup>66</sup>. This was not exceptional as Antitrinitarian women were said to be well-educated and ardent in faith. This branch of Protestantism gave women a rather high position. The Antitrinitarians were even reproached for allowing women to deliver sermons. Before her departure from Poland, Queen Bona sharply criticized this practice in a conversation with cardinal Hosius. “I hear that even women are preaching”, she said angrily. “Were my late husband alive, I would tell them what preaching means. I am a Christian queen! I have never let myself be drawn into such silliness”<sup>67</sup>. This is a surprising view for a female politician whose ambition to rule far exceeded the role ascribed to Polish women in the 16th century.

In their polemical writings, the Jesuits also scorned the Antitrinitarians for allowing “women doctors” to hold sway over their community and called the widow of the Antitrinitarian Andrzej Dudycz “a female Pope” for whom “they play the courtier”, that is to say, who was excessively fawned over by her associates<sup>68</sup>. In his writings, the Jesuit Marcin Smiglecki frequently emphasized St. Paul’s opposition to women preaching<sup>69</sup> and declared mock-

<sup>63</sup> Quoted after W. Sobieski, *Modlitewnik arjanki (An Antitrinitarian Woman's Prayer-Book)*, “Reformacja w Polsce”, vol. I, 1921, p. 58.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted after S. Morawski, *Arianie polscy (Polish Antitrinitarian)*, Lwów 1906, p. 11.

<sup>66</sup> W. Sobieski, *Modlitewnik arjanki*, pp. 59–60.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 59.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>69</sup> M. Smiglecius, *Refutatio vanae dissolutionis*, Cracoviae 1614, p. 36.

ingly that anybody could be an Antitrinitarian pastor, even a craftsman, a butcher, a boy, or a woman (emphasis mine — M. B.)<sup>70</sup>. The Antitrinitarian Walenty Smalc replied that neither boys nor women decided Church matters in their communities<sup>71</sup>.

As late as 1671, Aleksander Lorencowic, a Jesuit, delivered a sermon reminding the faithful that although St. Paul had ordered women to keep silent, this injunction was being broken by “heretics”. “The wives of ministers and women preach openly to infidel Christians, Lutherans, Calvinists and other; they teach the ministers themselves, correct them, write sermons for them. St. Paul does not want such disorder”<sup>72</sup>. Lorencowic asserted that women had the right to teach children, servants and even their husbands, but only in private (at the fireplace). “In private, in their homes, they should not preach, but teach what is good; they may admonish and reprimand children and servants and even their husbands, when necessary, but they should do so sensibly”<sup>73</sup>.

Rumours of women preachers should probably be attributed to a desire to discredit the Antitrinitarians in the eyes of the public. Their detractors also accused them of appearing naked during the marriage ceremony<sup>74</sup>, in other words, of violating generally accepted norms of morality. As a result of the high level of culture and education of Antitrinitarian families, such as the Stojańskis, Przypkowskis, Otwinowskis and Czaplices, women came to occupy a higher position in Antitrinitarian families than in the average Polish family. Antitrinitarian women were well-educated as well as ardent believers. One need mention only Katarzyna Potocka, née Morsztyn, wife of the well-known poet, Waclaw Potocki. Upon her death, her husband wrote an elegy which depicts a person who possessed a rich inner-life and strong character, a talented poet who could critically evaluate her husband’s works and help him in writing, a woman engaged in community service, a patroness solicitous for the welfare of the common people in neighbouring villages<sup>75</sup>. Katarzyna was not an exception among Antitrinitarians.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 67.

<sup>71</sup> W. Smalcus, *Notae in libellum M. Smigleci*, Rakoviae 1614, p. 33.

<sup>72</sup> *Kazania na niedziele całego roku Aleksandra Lorencowica, Prowincjała Polskiego Societatis Jesu (Sermons for a Year’s Sundays by Aleksander Lorencowic, Polish Provincial of the Society of Jesus)*, Kalisz 1671, part II, p. 8.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>74</sup> In 1566 Hieronim Filipowski, an adherent of Antitrinitarism, married his niece, Zofia, to Jan Gnojeński; the Cracow Calvinist minister, Szymon Zacjusz, complained in a sermon delivered on the wedding day that Filipowski had ordered the newlyweds to stand naked under a spruce tree in the garden, cf. Filipowski’s biography by S. Szczęka in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, vol. VI, Kraków 1948, p. 450.

<sup>75</sup> R. Połlak, *Od renesansu do baroku (From the Renaissance to the Baroque)*, Warszawa 1969, p. 299.



The status of Antitrinitarian women was undoubtedly influenced by this denomination's attitude toward the original sin and Eve's guilt. In his *Christian Conversations*, Marcin Czechowic, an Antitrinitarian writer, said simply, "Adam... broke God's interdictions because of his wife who led him astray, having herself been deceived by Satan", but he did not draw any pejorative conclusions for women from this statement<sup>76</sup>.

The Antitrinitarians regarded marriage as a partnership. In religiously mixed marriages, tolerance was to prevail; there was to be no coercion of the partner<sup>77</sup>. In 1633, Jan Stoiński, in a prayer book for Antitrinitarians, admonished the "sisters" to act with discretion, for they were accused of excessive freedom of manner. Christian women should hold their husbands in "esteem and respect and never usurp supremacy over them; they should rather submit in everything to their will" so as not to give cause for rebuke. "On the other hand, Christian husbands should govern their wives in accordance with [God's] wise, just direction, not as slaves but as heiresses to [God's] grace... they should live with them "skilfully", be indulgent and comply with their wishes as far as possible; they should not rant and rave at them, be eccentric or take offence for no reason, but should rather respect their wives as a weaker vessel and always be ready to be kind to them, and thus, show how respected they are"<sup>78</sup>.

The appeal that women should not assume authority over their husbands may indicate that there were couples among the Antitrinitarians in which women dominated. Although they regarded women as a "weaker vessel", the Antitrinitarians wanted marriages to function on the basis of mutual understanding and respect. Domination, whether by the husband or the wife, was regarded as a distortion of marriage.

Antitrinitarian women had the reputation of being unusually committed to their faith<sup>79</sup>. In many cases, it was women who converted their husbands to Antitrinitarianism, and sustained their devotion and their aversion to

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<sup>76</sup> Marcin Czechowic, *Roznowy Chrystyjańskie (Christian Conversations)*, ed. A. Linda et al., Warszawa-Łódź 1979, p. 101.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>78</sup> W. Sobieski, *Modlitewnik*, pp. 60-61; the Antitrinitarian attitude to women is also reflected in the fact that in 1589 Erazm Otwinowski, a prominent Polish Antitrinitarian, wrote a book *Sprawy albo Historyje znacznych niewiast (The Matters or Stories of Significant Women)*, dealing with Biblical, antique and contemporary women and another book of this type (extinct) entitled: *Wszystkie niewiasty Starego i Nowego Testamentu cnotliwe i bezbożne (All the Women of the Old and the New Testament, Virtuous or Godless)*.

<sup>79</sup> For instance, Elżbieta Pilecka persevered in her faith despite the fact that all her children had converted to Catholicism. When she was dying in 1639 her family tried in vain to persuade her to convert. According to the diary of J. Kochowski, Captain Orzechowski would have converted to Catholicism in 1658 for he was in danger of being executed, had not an old woman strengthened his faith, cf. W. Sobieski, *Modlitewnik*, p. 60.

converting to another religion. This seems, however, to have been a major feature of all women at the time, Protestants as well as Catholics — hence both camps' aversion to mixed marriages. *A Synod of Heretical Ministers*, a mischievous pamphlet published between 1611 and 1616, wrote jokingly that all “heretics” would have expressed a desire for reconciliation and agreed to return to the Catholic Church had they not been afraid of their wives<sup>80</sup>.

The expulsion of the Antitrinitarians from Poland in 1658 soon proved to be ineffective as Antitrinitarian women stayed behind. Only in 1662 did the Sejm decide that the law of 1658 also applied to Antitrinitarian women as they were spreading their faith, corresponding with their clergy abroad and bringing up their children as Antitrinitarians<sup>81</sup>. Although threatened with the confiscation of their property if they clung to their “fallacies”, many did not renounce their faith. The year 1693 saw the death of probably the last female Antitrinitarian in Poland, Zofia Potocka, née Taszycka, the sister-in-law of the poet Waclaw Potocki. True to her faith till the end, Zofia had been secretly bringing up her granddaughter as an Antitrinitarian<sup>82</sup>.

Women also played an important role in other Polish Protestant movements. In the middle of the 16th century, Zofia Oleśnicka, the wife of Mikołaj Oleśnicki, and Regina Filipowska, the wife of Hieronim Filipowski (who had initially dabbled in Calvinism), played an active part in the work of Reformation in Little Poland<sup>83</sup>. In the 17th and 18th centuries, women acted as protectors of Protestant ministers, thus enabling the latter to do their work<sup>84</sup>, and also founded and watched over Protestant churches. Thanks to women, Protestantism survived in many places in Poland<sup>85</sup>, and the death of a female protector often meant the end of a Protestant community<sup>86</sup>.

It is worth adding that in neighbouring Bohemia, women also played an important role in religious struggles at the turn of the 16th century. Some

<sup>80</sup> A. Brückner, *Cechy literatury szlacheckiej i miejskiej w XVII w., Księga pamiątkowa ku czci B. Orzechowicza (The Characteristic Features of Noblemen's and Townsman's Literature in the 17th Century, Commemorative Book in Honour of B. Orzechowicz)*, vol. I, Lwów 1916, p. 176.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. W. Sobieski, *Modlitewnik*, p. 60.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>83</sup> B. Chlebowski, *Udział kobiet polskich w życiu duchowym narodu (The Participation of Polish Women in the Nation's Spiritual Life)*, in: *idem, Pisma*, vol. I, Warszawa 1912, p. 80.

<sup>84</sup> For instance, the widow Wylamowska, née Cukowska, looked after Andrzej Wiszowaty, L. Chmaj, *Bracia polscy. Ludzie, idee, wpływy (The Polish Brethren. People, Ideas, Influences)*, Warszawa 1957, p. 198.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. the latest works on Protestantism: J. Dworzaczkowa, *Bracia Czeszczy w Wielkopolsce w XVI i XVII w. (The Czech Brethren in Great Poland in the 16th and 17th Centuries)*, Warszawa 1997 and W. Kriegseisen, *Ewangelicy polscy i litewscy w epoce saskiej (Polish and Lithuanian Protestants in the Saxon Period)*, Warszawa 1996, *passim*.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibidem*. Cf. also L. Chmaj, *Bracia polscy*, esp. pp. 360–361.

of them were even accorded the sobriquet “predicants”. Although they could have stayed in their homeland after the Battle of White Mountain, thousands of Czech women emigrated, although many had no money and did not know foreign languages<sup>87</sup>.

### *The Counter-Reformation and Women*

Women also played no small role in the Catholic camp, most notably after 1572, i.e. during the so-called Counter-Reformation or the Catholic Reform. Women frequently persuaded their husbands to return to the Catholic Church. For example, Prokop Sieniawski, a Calvinist, converted to Catholicism under the influence of his wife Elżbieta, née Gostomska. Women also built and financially supported churches and convents and set up religious brotherhoods and foundations. Women, especially widows, were far more generous than men. Thus, religious orders, especially the Jesuits, tried to find favour with them.

Many women practised asceticism and mortification of the flesh by fasting, self-flagellation, night vigils and by wearing sackcloth. The most famous among these ardent women were the aforementioned Elżbieta Sieniawska, Anna Alojza Chodkiewiczowa, née Ostrogska<sup>88</sup>, and Krystyna Lubomirska<sup>89</sup>; as they all stemmed from magnate families, their activity is well-documented. The first two in particular were very generous protectors of the Catholic Church — mainly the order of the Jesuits. They were, however, despotic and domineering and were often a nuisance to those under their wing, often meddling in their affairs and trying to rule and dominate them<sup>90</sup>.

Among the prosperous and middle nobility, many women, discontent with family life and housekeeping, also sought self-fulfillment in religious fervour. They too acted as patrons and founders and supported charitable causes, either privately or within various religious brotherhoods. Townswomen, especially widows, often surrendered to religious bigotry, took an active part in the life of religious brotherhoods, founded liturgical ornaments and endowed convents, hospitals, orphanages and homes for poor girls. A. Karpiński has recently discussed these activities of townswomen in detail<sup>91</sup>. It is also worth recalling that in the eastern and southern borderlands of the

<sup>87</sup> J. Janáček, *Białogłowy rozważnej żywot*, pp. 215–217, 292–293.

<sup>88</sup> Z. Kuchowicz, *Wizerunki*, pp. 160–182 and 183–201.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. J. S. Bystroń, *Dzieje obyczajów w Polsce XVI–XVII w. (A History of Customs in Poland in the 16th and 17th Centuries)*, vol. I, Warszawa 1976, p. 302.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. K. Górski, *Od religijności do mistyki. Zarys dziejów życia wewnętrznego w Polsce (From Religiousness to Mysticism. An Outline of the History of Spiritual Life in Poland)*, part I, 966–1795, Lublin 1962, pp. 92 ff.

<sup>91</sup> A. Karpiński, *Kobieta*, pp. 208 ff.

Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, women frequently came out in defence of the Union of Brest or, conversely, defended Orthodoxy by strengthening their family's allegiance to Orthodoxy and establishing Orthodox churches. Those Orthodox women who owned landed estates frequently issued regulations instructing the population to attend religious services.

Sponsoring charitable institutions and working with religious brotherhoods not only met the Gospel–inspired spiritual needs of women, but also enabled them to be active outside the home. Religious brotherhoods multiplied in town and villages all over Poland in the 17th and at the beginning of the 18th century, and the strong position of women within these brotherhoods compensated for their insignificant role in the Church and the community. Making donations to charitable institutions gave women the possibility of being included in administrative and supervisory bodies. Moreover, this kind of work did not clash with the traditional Polish model of womanhood, a model in which piety and charity played an important role. Therefore, society did not frown on such forms of activity; on the contrary, these pursuits consolidated and expanded the role of women in society.

The revival of convents after a period of decline and depopulation in the 16th century, was of great importance to Polish women. Many new religious orders for women were set up, such as the Augustinians, the Discalced and Calced Carmelites, the order of the Sisters of Charity, and the order of the Visitation<sup>92</sup>. The reform of convents revived and deepened spiritual life and in the 17th century, led to the emergence of Polish mysticism, the most prominent representatives of which were Mother Magdalena Mortęska, who carried out reforms in the Benedictine order with great vigor, and Anna Maria Marchocka, a Carmelite<sup>93</sup>. Energetic prioresses tried to free convents from the tutelage of male religious orders, and set up larger congregations subordinated directly to a bishop. This emancipation movement was accompanied by the development of intellectual and artistic life in convents<sup>94</sup>. It is not surprising therefore that many women chose monastic life. They frequently had to overcome the family's opposition. Mortęska had to run away from home, and Marchocka narrowly escaped death when her father, upon learning that she wanted to take the veil, unsheathed his sword. There were, of course, also opposite cases when girls

<sup>92</sup> *Kościół w Polsce (The Church in Poland)*, ed. J. Kłoczowski, vol. II, 16th–18th Centuries, Kraków 1969, p. 740.

<sup>93</sup> K. Górski, *Od religijności do mistyki*, pp. 77 ff., 104 ff.

<sup>94</sup> Extensive information on this subject has recently been contributed by M. Borkowska, *Życie codzienne polskich klasztorów żeńskich w XVII–XVIII wieku (Everyday Life in Polish Convents in the 17th and 18th Centuries)*, Warszawa 1996. The author presents the intellectual life of nuns, the books they read, their literary production, artistic activities, including the organization of theatricals.

were pressured into taking the habit against their will and inclination. Elżbieta Sieniewska forced both of her daughters to become nuns; despite the intervention on their behalf by the family, and even King Sigismund III, the despotic mother had her way<sup>95</sup>. But Halszka, the daughter of Stanisław Radziwiłł, predestined by her father for a convent, defied her father's will and married (ca. 1610) Andrzej Jerzy Sapieha<sup>96</sup>.

The choice of monastic life always represented a dramatic step, and the decision was difficult even for very pious girls. In her autobiography, Marchocka describes how, when she was a novice, she began to doubt whether monastic life was really her vocation. One evening she thought of knocking over a candle so as to start a fire and escape in the ensuing commotion. Nevertheless, many women decided to choose this difficult road because of the benefits of a life "behind bars". Paradoxically, they sometimes could enjoy more freedom in a nunnery than within their family if they had a despotic parent, husband or brother. A nunnery also offered greater opportunities for education and participating in cultural life.

### *Conclusions*

As in the whole of Europe, religion provided ample opportunities for women in Poland for activity outside their home and the family, the only opportunities in the early modern period. Women took up the causes of the Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, the Uniate Church and Orthodoxy, and they frequently determined the family's religious profile by strengthening their husband's faith, or converting him, and by raising their children in a particular faith. In many cases, they determined whether a denomination would survive or disappear in some regions.

The weakness of the Reformation in Poland, its short-life and limited appeal, primarily to the nobility and magnates, explain why it failed to have a decisive impact on the structure and character of the old-Polish family. Theoretically, the old-Polish family was patriarchal, but in practice, the woman (wife and mother) played an important role. Moreover, Polish Antitrinitarianism must have helped popularize the concept of a partners' marriage which dominated in Poland, especially in the 17th century. In this respect, Poland was closer to England, where marriage, as L. Stone put it, was a partners' union, than to neighbouring Germany, where Lutheranism resulted in the construction of extremely patriarchal family structures in which, according to L. Roper and other researchers, woman was fully subordinated to man.

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<sup>95</sup> K. Górski, *Od religijności do mistyki*, pp. 92 ff.

<sup>96</sup> A. Sajkowski, *Staropolska miłość*, p. 106.