

Summaries*

Irmtraud Götz von Olenhusen: The Feminisation of Religion – Theses on Gender History in Germany in the Modern Age

As an introduction to the topic Irmtraud Götz von Olenhusen presents some basic findings and an overview of historic research. Her starting point is the idea that a feminisation of religion took place at a stage in which the christian churches lost secular influence. The author explains what in church and religious history is meant by "feminisation": the relevance of female elements in church ceremonies; the presumption of religiousness being a typically female personality trait; more women acting as church functionaries; an increasing affinity with the church among women. Such a process of feminisation of religion by no means was a linear one, it reached its peak in Europe and the USA in the 19th century. The institutional churches' loss of economic and cultural power resulted in a lessening engagement of men and opened up spaces for women. They found their way into the political sphere of society especially by engaging in welfare work. Nowadays hardly any gender specific differences can be noted as religiousness and commitment to the church are on the decrease. Therefore a stronger relation to church and religion is not an anthropological characteristic of women.

Sabine Holtz: Denominational religious culture and social life. The praxis pietatis of women in the Early Modern Age

In her article Sabine Holtz examines the question whether one can also find gender specific forms of the different religious cultures which had developed after the protestant Reformation and the reform in the Roman Catholic church. First she acquaints us with women of the early Protestant Movement and the Roman Catholic reform who had a thorough biblical knowledge and courageously expressed their beliefs. As the denominations became institutionalized, on the protestant side the focus of social interest shifted to the family. This meant that the value of family life increased but also that a woman's scope for acting became restricted and confined to the family. In catholic areas likewise marriage and motherhood was the socially approved way of life for women. Entering an order for most remained no more than a theoretical option as membership often depended on social status. Looking at examples from protestant and catholic environments, Holtz

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finds religious expressions typical of different denominations but none typical of women. Only in the context of certain situations of life such as childbed did the practices differ from those of the men, but stayed within the framework of their denomination. It took the rise of individualism in the development of society in the 18th century for individual religious practices to become possible and therefore those specific to women, as Holtz shows with reference to the Pietist Movement.

Relinde Meiwes: Life, work and prayer in christian communities: an answer to the women's issue in the 19th century?

Taking the development in Prussia as an example, Relinde Meiwes presents the organisation of roman catholic women's cooperatives. Due to the secularization of monastic orders in the 1830ies only a few monasteries survived, a fact that in its turn caused a virtual boom in the founding of catholic women's congregations, a phenomenon that proved to be a genuine feminine issue. In contrast to nuns the members of these communities were not subject to the strict papal clause. Furthermore, unlike the traditional women's orders, they placed more emphasis on worldly offices such as care for the sick, social and educational work, rather than a life of contemplation. This enabled women living in a catholic milieu to combine their social, their religious as well as their professional interests. To many women life in a congregation proved a real alternative to marriage and motherhood. Although they were acting within a strictly conservative environment, life in a cooperative opened up a freedom of action for women that would not have been possible in the framework of bourgeois projects of the modern era, Meiwes emphasizes. The author concludes that women who were able to identify with the roman catholic church in the 19th century had a real opportunity of participation by living in a congregation.

Bettina Kratz-Ritter: "Channah": three commandments for women – and what it must have been like to be a German Jewish woman

In her article Bettina Kratz-Ritter describes how it has become the task of women – as the "priestess of the home" – to prepare a new generation to take their place in German society during the period of modernisation in Jewish religious and everyday life during the second half of the 19th century. It appears that a "feminising of religion" took place particularly among the Jewish community, as women were responsible for preserving traditional Jewish values "inside the home", whereas the man had to face the non-Jewish world "out there".

The author looks for evidence of this in women's prayer books of the 19th century, mostly written by rabbis, which were intended to educate their readers to become "good Jewish women" and "good Germans", and compares these texts with pre-enlightenment prayers of the 16th-18th century, many of them written by women. As these are rooted in a popular tradition, in the 19th century they no longer agreed with the middle-class views of German Jews. Many issues – mainly concerning the biological topics of fertility, pregnancy and birth – now were felt to be indecent and were treated less extensively in the new prayer texts or dropped entirely.

Nowadays young Jewish women have begun to search for their "own, genuine modes of expression", the author adds as a concluding remark.

Irene Leicht: Church, role model and theology: tensions in the lives of christian women

The feminist theologian Irene Leicht discusses the present situation of christian women in Germany on the basis of the three subject areas "church", "role models" and "theology". By using data of membership numbers and on arrangements through which women participate in church organizations she takes a closer look at the position of women in church structures. She also draws attention to the attempts of women to effect changes within the limits of these structures. These proved that demands for equality or the acknowledgement of alternative ways of life collided with traditional role models in both the main denominations, if to a different extent. Without feminist theology, which originated in the second women's movement, such a revolt not only against the structures of the church but also against a male dominated image of God would not have been considered possible. Feminist theology was at the beginning of a search for a new spirituality women could relate to, which on the one hand led many women to leave the established churches but on the other hand helps to motivate and inspire those who stayed. The importance of religion will probably increase in the future, so the author presumes, and so will the relevance of the churches as religious institutions.

Andrea Kittel: Hearth and Heaven – Woman and Soul. A report about two exhibitions

"Hearth and Heaven" and "Woman and Soul" are two exhibitions featuring the history of protestant women in Baden-Württemberg. They were shown at the Landeskirchliches Museum in Ludwigsburg in 1997 and 1998.

Andrea Kittel first discusses in her article the questions, which were important for the concept of the exposition: Where and how women could practice their beliefs in a male dominated church and how they could form this institution, if at all.

Because they were excluded from higher functions, women tried alternative forms of expressions and arrangements within the hierarchy of the institution of church. Especially in the 18th century women could integrate easily in the pietistic currents, because of the development of religious practice based on sentiment, which benefited women. In the 19th century women could leave their community to work in missionary stations abroad.

The central theme of the exposition "Hearth and Heaven" was the concrete life situation of women and their role in public church life. The exposition "Woman and Soul" showed the specific female forms of believing. The exhibition group found out that the world of female belief is hardly represented in a material respect. The author describes in her contribution, how the exhibition could be realised in spite of the lack of material. Textile material accompanied women through their lives. Because of this textiles play a central role in the exhibition. Some ideas, which were developed in the course of this project can serve as an example in the context of illustrating women's history.

Andrea Hähnle: Pictures – Symbols – Signs. A Virtual Journey to the Topics of Woman and Christianity

Andrea Hähnle's photos of statues in house niches, statues of the Virgin and wall pictures taken in mainly catholic Oberbayern show the presence of Christian symbols in a society which regards itself as secular. The objects are from a time when religion was not a private matter, but a state of mind pervading the whole of society.

The author looks at pictures and symbols with Christian background, as the Virgin and female saints and analyses their history. Her discussion of religions symbolism can serve as an incentive to reflect upon how to make women's history come alive.

Meral Akkent: Visible Muslim professional women in Germany – a wasted treasure

In her essay Meral Akkent discusses the problems Muslim professional women face in German society if they have decided to wear a headscarf as a token of their faith. As soon as they want to take up work they will encounter difficulties, such as having to change to less qualified jobs. Fears as to that the head scarf is being used as a

means to subvert the liberal democratic order of society in Germany are unfounded, she states. On the contrary these visible Muslim professional women are critically and democratically minded persons who are being denied the opportunity of a career due to the controversy regarding the head scarf. Akkent presents a linguistic analysis of misogynist passages in the Koran by female Muslim experts and their new readings of these passages. This shows how strongly Muslim professional women oppose the patriarchal orientation of their religion. She pleads stronger to engage in an intercultural and interreligious dialogue with these experts than to date and to take up a discussion as equal partners.

Nadja Bennewitz/Juliane Brumberg/R. Johanna Regnath: "...each after her own fashion?" The controversy regarding the head scarf and its social implications – Panel discussion

The panel discussion focussed on the question, put by Beate Rau, who was being chair, why the controversy regarding the head scarf of Muslim women was such a difficult issue for emancipated German women with a Christian background. But, as was to be expected, the following, lively discussion could not present any ready answers to this. The sociologist Meral Akkent refuted the opinion about Muslim women wearing a head scarf as being repressed or as expressing a fundamentalist attitude. She stated that women had various different reasons for wearing a head scarf. The integration representative of Konstanz, Zekine Özdemir confirmed that most people associate the head scarf with oppression. Certainly these Muslim women no longer are willing to work only in little qualified jobs. Dr. Sophia Karwath, a member of the Franciscan Order, brought to mind that the covering of women's hair always has been an issue in Christian culture as well. Feminists indeed regard a veil as backward, whereas she asks of western European women not to define "backward" and "progress" according to western standards only.

In the dialogue with the audience it appeared that the "head scarf" has become a symbol rather than a mere piece of clothing which for many is heavily fraught. The discussion was closed with the demand for an intercultural dialogue on an equal footing among women.