
This title is drawn from Martin Luther’s view that a woman is “like a nail driven into the wall” which Catherine Stimson, editor of the “Women in Culture and Society” series in which this book appears, interprets as “her obligation to hold up a heterosexual household in which she is her husband’s cherished but obedient, submissive partner” (“Foreword,” viii). The members of the three Dominican convents in Strasbourg, on which this study chiefly focuses, appear the antithesis of this interpretation, and with her extensive use of German and other sources, Leonard demonstrates that her three chosen communities were not unique. Like those in Spear’s study, each convent was autonomous, its nuns the daughters of the city’s elite classes and ready to use social and political networks to defend their interests. All three communities, the only female Dominican houses to survive in Strasbourg, had responded to the fifteenth-century monastic reform movement, a strength, Leonard notes, when extinction threatened. She examines the anti-cloister theories of Protestant reformers, basing her analysis on numerous pamphlets and the many preserved letters of Protestant family members enticing daughters and sisters home. The nuns, however, answered with equal spirit, defending their choice and the right to make it. As Leonard distinguishes, the German situation differed basically from the English, where a centralised government and a ruthless public policy were able to effect complete destruction. Each German city made its own decisions, with the compromises demanded by the checks and balances in any local socio-political situation. In Strasbourg, given the obduracy of the three communities — where leading citizens still sent their daughters for schooling and acquiesced in their becoming nuns — they were suffered to survive in pragmatic acceptance of their educational service. Leonard raises the question of how far the Protestant programme penetrated city life and exactly what adherence it entailed, especially when challenged by these women. The council’s willingness to compromise, she claims, modifies theories of rigid confessionalisation.

The Peace of Augsburg led to increasing Catholic influence in Alsace. In one convent, the prioress became more publicly outspoken while community disaffection undermined what Leonard pinpoints as another of the nuns’ strengths — their communal solidarity. Allegations, inconclusively proven, of administrative and sexual misconduct amongst the nuns, led in 1592 to municipal disbandment, with provision to join another convent for those willing, and in 1681, Strasbourg’s Dominican nuns were there to welcome Louis XIV and the public restoration of Catholic practice.

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This edited collection, produced by Hugh V. McLachlan, incorporates a selection of texts ranging from facsimile reproductions of nineteenth-century historical accounts to previously unpublished seventeenth-century manuscript material. The book focuses primarily on texts generated by the series of witchcraft allegations revolving around Christian Shaw during the 1690s in Renfrewshire, Scotland. However, it also incorporates material from arguably the most famous of all witchcraft prosecutions: those in Salem, New England, in 1692. McLachlan’s purpose in combining these sources is to allow a