

STUDIES IN
CHURCH HISTORY

VOLUME 27

WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

EDITED BY W. J. SHEILS AND DIANA WOOD

For the Ecclesiastical History Society
BASIL BLACKWELL

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Volume 27

Women in the Church

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This volume offers a historical assessment of the role of women in the Christian Churches – their actions, thoughts and reputations – from their position in the fourth-century Church to the twentieth century. The emphasis is upon ordinary women, as they provide the domestic setting for the spiritual life of the family, as they go to church (there to be segregated from male worshippers), or to confession, or to be churched after childbirth, or to give hospitality to male itinerant preachers. However, there is also discussion of the influences of royal women, such as the Empress Judith, wife of Louis the Pious, and Queen Victoria.

The female saints of illuminated manuscripts, stained-glass window, and rood-screen, also evoke home and family. Yet not all women were conventionally pious: some drifted into heresy, superstition, or fanaticism, such as Elizabeth of Spalbeek in the thirteenth century, or the Anabaptist Frena of Appenzell, both of whom saw themselves as reincarnations of Christ. The contemplatives too feature here: they range from the noble nun Immena, in the Carolingian period, to working-class women in Victorian convents. But many preferred a more active life: perhaps as Quaker itinerant Ministers, overseas missionaries, founders or members of religious sects, or as evangelists in Victorian cities.

The book's scope is broad, ranging across Europe from the nuns of the Middle Ages to female Puritans of the seventeenth century and social Catholics in turn-of-the-century France, to the first Englishwoman to be ordained, in 1917. The authors reveal how throughout the history of the Christian Churches, women have had to struggle against theological prohibition and contemporary prejudice, how they have been consistently undervalued but how, despite this, they have triumphed and made their own vital contributions to ecclesiastical life.

WOMEN IN THE CHURCH



Sano di Pietro preaching in the Piazza del Campo, Siena (Siena, Duomo)
photo: Scala, Florence

WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

PAPERS READ AT
THE 1989 SUMMER MEETING AND
THE 1990 WINTER MEETING OF
THE ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY SOCIETY

EDITED BY

W. J. SHEILS AND
DIANA WOOD

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