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WOMEN AT THE CRADLE OF THE REFORMATION: SOME EXAMPLES OF LITERARY INVOLVEMENT[1]

The growing wave of criticism of the Church in the late Middle Ages had many sources and took a varied course. It can hardly be questioned that the criticism was justified in most cases. The papal schisms of the second half of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century (there were as many as three rival popes for some time), most often resulting from the rivalry among European powers, caused anxiety and indignation in the Christian world. The popes' return from Avignon to Rome did not help much. Attempts to restore unity with the Eastern Church failed. Indeed, the unstoppable expansion of the Ottoman Turks and the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 had already put a symbolic end to the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire and threatened other areas of Europe, especially in Central Europe (the Balkans had already been incorporated into the Ottoman Empire). Any kind of organised armed resistance or the resumption of the Crusades (which popes and preachers sometimes called for) were out of the question. It is true that crusades were launched several times in the first half of the fifteenth century, but these were aimed not at the Muslim powers but at the Czech Hussites, and their failure undoubtedly revealed the weaknesses and none too pleasant traits of those who organised them.

In investigating the causes of the decline in papal and Church authority, one may, or indeed should, take account of the independent external circumstances. As is widely accepted by scholars and was beyond doubt in people's minds then, the fourteenth century was the time of a deep crisis in vast areas of Latin Europe. Deterioration of the climate (the Little Ice Age, as it is commonly known, began in the fourteenth century and lasted for several hundred years) had adverse effects on agriculture. Unlike before, when famine had been frequent but local in its nature, in the fourteenth century it was widespread and recurrent. Diseases, including those caused by malnutrition, were naturally as common then as they had been before; they also included epidemics. Thus far, however, Europe had not experienced anything close to the Black Death, which caused dying on an unprecedented and unimaginable scale. Although these "external" circumstances and causes could be discussed at length, it seems reasonable to focus on

[1] This is a much shortened and somewhat modified version of a chapter from the forthcoming third volume of my book *Pióro w wątłych dłoniach. O twórczości kobiet w dawnych czasach. Różnorodność (od Agnieszki Blannbekin do Małgorzaty z Nawarry)*. Where possible, I try to maintain essay form.

the troubles and ills of the Catholic Church itself, as they were the subject of criticism and a trigger for the actions of Reformers.

At the close of the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church was seemingly more powerful than it had ever been before. Almost all of Europe, neglecting the advance of the Turks into the Balkans, professed the Christian religion, although the division into Western (Roman, Avignon) Church and Eastern, only briefly and unsuccessfully threatened by the Turks, continued and even deepened in the long run. Thus it is perfectly understandable that people in various countries called for fundamental reforms, and postulated that *in capite et in membris*, "in the head and in the limbs", should be the watchword of the reform. In the face of the decline in papal authority, particularly evident in the case of the schisms, the view that there was a need to resurrect the long dead ecumenical council – a representation of the whole Church and Christian rulers – and to equip it with supreme authority in the Church was becoming more and more common. For a time, the proponents of this view, conciliarists, even seemed to have gained the upper hand. Eventually, however, the papalists prevailed in the fifteenth century, and the question of an ecumenical council was buried for more than a century. Although scholars have sometimes done so, it is hard to blame the popes of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries for all of the evil, as there were remarkable and devoted individuals among them, but even the most ardent apologists for the papacy cannot deny that they did not have the features needed to conquer the hearts of the faithful at that time. The same that can be said about the Roman Curia – with some exceptions of course – can be said about the European episcopate and, even more broadly, the diocesan and monastic clergy.

In a strongly clericalised Church, which had almost ceased to be perceived as a community of believers, lay people were deprived of any influence on spiritual matters, and in practice the Church was conceived as being limited to the clergy, if not exclusively to the episcopate. For centuries, the Papacy and particular churches had struggled to free themselves from the dominance, or even influence, of secular power. Apparently, this goal had been achieved, but it turned out that in the late Middle Ages, the monarchs who no longer had to take the position of the Church into account found ways to continue to influence the appointment of bishops and abbots, and even the election of popes. The powerful organisational machine of the Church needed enormous material resources for its maintenance. The Church rulers, particularly since the time of the "Avignon Captivity", showed incredible ingenuity and creativity in acquiring such resources. Thus, the "commercialisation" of the Church progressed, and more and more matters could or had to be settled for money, both in the Roman Curia and in particular churches. Rulers cannot have approved of this, since they were aware that considerable sums of money were regularly flowing out of the realm to pay Peter's Pence and various fees as commission for nominations to church dignities. Similarly, for many regular believers the Church's fiscalism, often reinforced by the plain greed of its representatives, was a source not only of annoyance (when it affected them directly), but even of shame. One example of such practices, so important that it became a slogan of Martin Luther's proclamation of 1517, was the sale of in-

dulgences, namely a possibility offered by the Church to purchase a plenary or partial remission of one's punishment in Purgatory.

Analysing in the most general terms the situation of the Church and Christianity on the eve of the Reformation, it can be stated that they had suffered a profound loss of spirituality. Having hardly any rivals, the satiated and rich Church was moving away from the faithful, their problems and their worries. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the Late Middle Ages, dissenting movements questioning the current, seemingly inviolable, state of affairs and calling for change sprang up or grew in importance in various places in the Christian world. Some of them, like the mendicant orders earlier (in the thirteenth century), especially the Franciscans and Dominicans, stayed within the Church or were "tamed" by it, but others could not find a place there and were more or less violently dealt with. This was the case with the Albigensians (Cathars) and the Waldensians, the English Lollards, the followers of John Wycliffe's teachings in the Late Middle Ages, and – most important from a historical perspective – the adherents of the Czech reformer Jan Hus (the Hussites).

It is not the task of the present study to discuss the causes or the course of the historic events of the Protestant Reformation in Latin Europe, initiated but by no means intended by the Augustinian monk Martin Luther in Wittenberg at the end of 1517.[2] Over the course of several decades, the Reformation's storm swept across most of Europe, bringing about the division of Western Christianity into two great and still surviving branches, Catholic and Protestant (Evangelical). Indeed, the latter soon underwent a split with regard to both doctrine and organisation. In addition to the form given to the movement by Luther himself, commonly known as Lutheranism and for some time officially referred to as the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, there were also (to list just the most important) the Evangelical Reformed Church (founded by the French reformer John Calvin) and the Anglican Church, beside which many other confessions and denominations were established over time. The reach of the Roman Church and the power of its popes were reduced to those countries that had not accepted the Reformation. It is a reasonably accurate simplification to state that northern and parts of western Europe became Protestant, while southern Europe and Poland – together with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – continued to be Catholic, despite various disruptions and with some exceptions.

An objective assessment of the Protestant Reformation has always been a difficult task. Its opponents will always regret the fact that it broke up Christian unity. They will also continue to emphasise that the split was at the core of decades of wretched religious wars in Europe, particularly severe in Germany, France and England. The situation in Europe and the Church on the eve of the Reformation will be assessed differently depending not only on the observer's confession, but also the accuracy of

[2] Although the list of Polish-language sources on the "father of the Reformation" is not long, I would mention his biography by H. Schilling, *Marcin Luter. Buntownik w czasach przełomu*, translated by J. Kałążny, in collaboration with M. Kałążna, Poznań 2017 (Poznańska Biblioteka Niemiecka) (German edition 2012). See this book's review in the *Przegląd Zachodni* (*Western Review*) No. 3/2017, p. 289 [editorial note].

their research. The opponents of the Reformation will put forward arguments showing the positive changes that had already taken place in the Church before 1517 or would be introduced in the following years. Others will resort to the paradoxical claim that the situation was so bad that nothing else but the Reformation could have saved the Catholic Church, which was then forced to begin a profound renewal process as a result of confrontation with and the fight against the Reformation ("Catholic reform[ation]").

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After this rather long introduction, which still barely touched upon many complex issues, let us take a closer look at the role and position of women in the early stages of the Reformation. However, a few observations of a more general nature should first be made. Did the Reformation have any significant influence on the social and legal position of women? The question is not easy to answer. Undoubtedly, it raised the status of marriage; previously, although according to church doctrine marriage had been an indispensable and worthy institution, the status of wife and mother was lower than that of virginity and religious life. Protestantism did not approve of monastic life; thus monasteries were dissolved, and nuns were often urged or sometimes forced to marry monks who had abandoned monasteries or priests who had accepted the new doctrine (Protestants denounced priestly celibacy). Martin Luther himself set an example by marrying the former nun Katharina von Bora. The claim that the "reformation revolution" was not always a smooth process is supported by the interesting example of Caritas Pirckheimer of Nuremberg[3] (we shall also consider some other similar cases). Although Pirckheimer received support from an influential family and from such an outstanding reformer as Philip Melanchthon, this did not prevent the fall of her convent, although at least it staggered it over time. There are few accounts of similar cases, which some scholars would attribute to the rather poor intellectual and spiritual condition of the majority of nunneries that were closed down. It seems that one should refrain from making hasty generalisations, because there were cases of quite intense intellectual activity at individual convents, as evidenced by the significant number of visionary and pious works written by women in German-speaking countries, and by the so-called sister-books (*Schwesternbücher*), which chronicled the life and activities of some convents, sometimes over generations. The fact that similar pre-Reformation manifestations of intellectual activity have rarely survived to our times can certainly be explained by the lack of interest and understanding on the part of the triumphant Reformation. Barbara Becker-Cantarino mentioned the unfortunately relatively unknown abbess Elisabeth Gottgabs from Oberwesel, a gifted,well-read and at the same time deeply religious representative of pre-Reformation female monasticism, and the author of the anti-Reformation tract *Ein christlicher Bericht, Christum Jesum im Geist zu erkennen, Allen gläubigen und catholischen Christen zu Nutz, Trost und Wolfart*

[3] See J.Strzelczyk, *Caritas Pirckheimer na tle wczesnego humanizmu niemieckiego*, in: *Stilo et animo. Prace historyczne ofiarowane Profesorowi Tomaszowi Jasińskiemu w 65. rocznicę urodzin*, Poznań 2016, pp. 281–287.

verfasset, published in 1550. The author justified her unusual decision to write such a tract by claiming that this had been the only way available to her to defend her Catholic faith:

> Leider wissen wir viel zu wenig über diese Elisabeth Gottgabs und über die vielen Frauen in ähnlichen Lage, die sich in einem begrenzten Kreis durch Briefe und Eingabe oder in der breiteren Öffentlichkeit durch Publikation einer Schrift geäußert haben.[4]

The Reformation, at least in its early stages, seemed to have given women hope for more active participation in religious life. Although convents were being dissolved, a shift towards the Holy Scriptures and the officially emphasised equality of men and women in the eyes of God could theoretically herald the appreciation of women's role in the Church. However, there was no question of allowing women to be priests – either in Lutheranism (Luther was very clear about that) or in Calvinism, or even in the most radical branch of the Reformation, Anabaptism. Here only at the early stage of untrammelled growth was women's participation in the preaching and teaching of the new faith tolerated, but that can be said to have been out of necessity. As time went by, women were excluded from any serious theological disputes or considerations of a dogmatic nature. Nevertheless, the Reformation was a great lifetime opportunity for many women, especially those who had married Protestant pastors and were extensively involved, in the early stages, and again out of necessity due to the lack of pastors, in their husbands' pastoral work. A pastor's wife was held in high esteem, the more so because in Luther's teachings family life was considered the only respectable kind of life for women. This does not mean that the Protestant family was supposed to be based, as is fashionable now, on mutual affection, but it was expected to be based on the spouses' mutual respect. Also, there could be no question of equality in the family; this "basic Protestant unit" was a community of life, economy and religion under the undisputed leadership of the husband-father of the family.

> In such a patriarchal family, the father was, following the biblical example, the absolute power, the wife was his assistant, the man stood as domestic priest to his wife, children and servants (B. Becker-Cantarino).

Thus, opportunities for women to advance intellectually were limited, but there was a certain potential in them, which in favourable circumstances could have a positive impact. This refers to the veneration of the Bible, which is so fundamental in Protestant churches that it manifests itself in reading of and reflection on the scriptures in both families and communes of the faithful. What had been inaccessible to all women

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[4] Barbara Becker-Cantarino, *Frauen in den Glaubenskämpfen. Öffentliche Briefe, Lieder und Gelegenheitsschriften*, in: *Deutsche Literatur von Frauen*, vol. I: *Vom Mittelalter bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, G. Brinkler-Gaber (ed.), Munich 1988, p. 150 and 523, footnote 6. An abridged version of Gottgabs' tract appears in: Franz Falk, Literarische Gegnerinnen Luthers, *Historisch-politische Blätter für das katholische Deutschland* 139, 1907, pp. 375–385.

(with the partial exception of nuns) in the Catholic Church became not only permitted to Protestant women, but even imposed on them.

By ordering that religious and moral education be based on texts, the Reformation contributed first to literacy and later to increased levels of reading and spiritual formation, especially among women. With the Bible and the prayer book, beginning with listening and learning by heart, women went on to read for themselves, and even to write. Thus began the "long road to maturity", through writing as a starting point for political and social emancipation, to the creation of their own autonomous "I".[5] Along this road we can meet several significant female personalities, women deeply involved in the promotion and defence of the new faith. Most certainly there were many more such women, but only some of them left lasting traces of their lives and struggles in the form of their own writings.

We know quite a lot about some of these women thanks to their surviving writings. It was a special kind of writing, perhaps inconspicuous from the perspective of literary history, but extremely important at that particular time. Ephemeral writings played an invaluable role especially at this early stage of the German Reformation. Although the triumphant march of the printed book had been continuing for several decades, the cost of even ordinary books remained so high as to effectively prevent the less prosperous from accessing them. It was the emergence of ephemeral writings, in connection with early Reformation arguments and disputes, that revolutionised the ways in which thoughts and ideas would spread. They may be thought of as the real "mass media" of the time, as they were incomparably cheaper, reproduced and distributed in great numbers, and written not in Latin, but in a language understood by the masses. Had it not been for Gutenberg's invention and the recognition of the value of ephemeral materials, it is doubtful whether the Reformation would have been possible at all – and in any case it would certainly not have developed so rapidly and been so successful. Of course, there was no place for complex theoretical argument in ephemeral publications, because only a few could have understood and appreciated them. They included comments on current affairs, polemics and insults aimed at the writer's opponents. This was also the way in which Luther's views were propagated in the first years after his proclamation. Almost instantly, they reached the farthest ends of the Holy Roman Empire, and no bans imposed by the Emperor or bishops could prevent this.

The figures and data provided by Silke Halbach speak for themselves.[6] Within a few years, starting with 1519, the number of ephemeral publications in Germany increased tenfold, reaching its peak in 1524. Then their growth slowed down slightly, to increase again after 1530 and in the years 1547–1555 – not on such a scale as before, but keeping pace with the tumultuous events. Not only was the number of letters and writings increasing, but also their circulation. Estimating that more than

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[5] B. Becker-Cantarino, op. cit., p. 152.

[6] S. Halbach, Legitimiert durch das Notmandat. Frauen als Verfasserinnen frühreformatorischer Flugschriften, *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 27, 2000, 3, pp. 365–387, here p. 366.

10,000 ephemeral letters were published in the German-speaking countries in the years 1500–1530, and assuming realistically that on average each was printed in 1000 copies, one may conclude that the average person who had mastered the art of reading might have had the opportunity to peruse around 20 different such publications.

For the first time in the history of European culture, also lay people[7] – and among them, although rarely, women[8] – participated in this real explosion of "utilitarian" literature of propaganda type, which was also joined by the most prominent theologians on both sides of the confessional divide. Some such women played a significant role at the initial stage of the Reformation. Based on their example, it is possible to show what opportunities opened up to active and committed women, what conditions had to be met so that they could develop their social and literary activities, but also what circumstances restricted their activity and why it was often abandoned after a short time.

One of the first Protestant women activists was **Argula von Grumbach**.[9] She came from the powerful noble Bavarian von Stauff family.[10] She was born in 1492, northwest of Regensburg in Ernfels castle, which belonged to her family. Argula's father was Bernhardin von Stauff, and her mother Katharina von Thering. Her father was not only a religiously engaged person, but he also played a significant political role, which was something of a tradition in his family. Argula Grumbach had many siblings, and her parents' ingenuity in naming their children is particularly noteworthy. In that regard they were clearly influenced by early humanism, and even more by German court poetry, as several of their daughters (Gramaflanz, Ferafiz, Sekundilla and Orgeluse [i.e. Argula]) were given names taken from works of the great German poet Wolfram von Eschenbach. Sidonie was named after a character in a French heroic epic, and only the sons, the eldest Bernhardin and Marcell, were given typical Christian names. Their gift to the 10-year-old Argula of a copy of the German Bible is evidence of her parents' intellectual and spiritual aspirations. No later than 1508, Argula became a lady-in-waiting to the duchess Kunigunde in Munich. In 1516, she married a Franconian nobleman (though clearly of lower social status), Frederick von Grumbach, who shortly before had been appointed to the post of administrator

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[7] For a more general description of the role lay people played in the Reformation see: Paul Albert Russell, *Lay theology in the Reformation. Popular pamphleteers in Southwest Germany 1521–1525*, Cambridge 1986.

[8] See Robert Stupperich, Die Frau in der Publizistik der Reformation, *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 37, 1955, pp. 204–233; B. Becker-Cantarino, *Der lange Weg zur Mündigkeit. Frau und Literatur in Deutschland 1500–1800*, Stuttgart 1987; Hellmut Zschoch, Bileams Eselinnen. Frauen in der Publizistik der Reformationszeit, *Pastoraltheologie* 83, 1994, pp. 477–497; Roland H. Bainton, Marion Obitz, *Frauen der Reformation. Von Katharina von Bora bis Anna Zwingli. 10 Porträts*, Gütersloh 1995.

[9] Of the rich scholarly literature on Argula, see: Peter Matheson, *Argula von Grumbach. A woman's voice in the reformation*, Edinburgh 1995; Silke Halbach, Argula von Grumbach als Verfasserin reformatorischer Flugschriften, *Europäische Hochschulschriften* XXIII, 468, Frankfurt a. M. 1992; S. Halbach, *Legitimiert durch das Notmandat* (cf. fn. 5), p. 368 ff.; Johannes Merz, Argula von Grumbach und die Anfänge der Reformation in Bayern, *Zeitschrift für bayerische Landesgeschichte* 69, 2006, 3, pp. 872–886.

[10] Of course, there is no connection with the imperial Staufen (Hohenstaufen) family, which had become extinct in the thirteenth century.

(*Pfleger*) on the Dietfurt estate, west of Ernfels. In addition, the family had an estate in Lenting near Ingolstadt. Argula had four children whose names are known, but the only child to survive his parents was their son Gottfried.

Argula was genuinely interested in current events, such as the expulsion of the Jews from Regensburg and the persecution of adherents of the Reformation in the Netherlands. She maintained contact, personal or by correspondence, with such eminent activists and authors as Paul Speratus, a preacher of the cathedral church in Würzburg, Georg Spalatin, a close collaborator of Martin Luther (he used to send her Luther's texts in German and facilitate contact with the master), and Andreas Osiander, who later became the real reformer of Nuremberg. Arsacius Seehofer, a young teacher from Ingolstadt, turned out to be the immediate cause of Argula's literary – or more precisely, journalistic – activity. Coming from Munich, he studied theology at Wittenberg, where he made contact with Luther and Philip Melanchthon. When he returned to Bavaria and obtained a master's degree in Ingolstadt at the turn of 1522 and 1523, he began zealously to spread Melanchthon's views. Since the dissemination of Luther's teachings had been banned in Bavaria since the beginning of 1522, Seehofer was denounced, and an investigation against him began in the autumn of 1522. Banned texts were found in his apartment. Seehofer tried to defend himself for some time, but eventually he broke down, recanted his heretical views, and was exiled to a monastery to do penance.

The recantation took place on 7 September 1523, and as early as 20 September Argula von Grumbach wrote two open letters which soon, copied as ephemera, sparked widespread reaction, inaugurating a series of letters in Seehofer's case (one of them written by Luther himself). One of Argula's letters (this customarily long letter began with the words: "Wie eyn Christliche fraw des adels in Beiern [...]") was addressed to Ingolstadt University, and the other ("Ein Christennliche schrifft einer erbarn frawen vom Adel")[11] to Wilhelm IV, Duke of Bavaria. "Something unheard of at the time has happened: Argula von Stauff, a lay woman with no theological education, suggests an equal discussion between herself and the prestigious university professors" (S. Halbach). This was only the beginning of her writing activity, and subsequent letters written by Argula von Grumbach were soon published. In October 1523 she penned a letter to the city council of Ingolstadt. On the last day of November of the same year, she visited Prince Johann von Simmern in Nuremberg, and the very next day she wrote a letter to him with an appeal to defend divine matters – namely to support the pursuit of reforms – in the Reichstag. Moreover, on the same day she sent a letter to Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony, of whom Martin Luther was a subject. In December 1523, she also wrote to her relative Adam von Thering. All of these six letters were written in direct or indirect relation to the case of the aforementioned Arsacius Seehofer, but Argula's seventh letter, dated 29 June 1524 and addressed to the city council of Regensburg, was of a different nature. Its aim was to counteract the

[11] I henceforth refrain from quoting the original archaic German titles of Argula's and other reformers' works, giving only brief information about their content and possible fate.

tendencies – already noticeable and indeed soon to increase – towards a confessional division of Germany, which culminated in the Peace of Augsburg (1555) establishing the principle *cuius regio, eius religio* ("whose realm, his religion").

In the late summer of 1524, Argula put pen to paper for the last time. She was responding to an earlier attack by an anonymous author, purporting to be a student named Johannes (it is not known if this was his real name or a pseudonym). In her letter, she defends herself against his allegations, demonstrates the primitiveness of her adversary, and takes the opportunity to attack the Catholic Church once again.

As has been shown, the extremely intense writing activity of Argula von Grumbach covered only the years 1523–1524. "Just as quickly as Argula came to public light in 1523, she disappeared from the scene within a year" (J. Merz). Her eight ephemeral letters are believed to have had a very wide reach, since there were as many as 30 editions, and thus they may have reached more than 30,000 readers and listeners. It remains a mystery why Argula went silent after the second half of 1524; at least no later text is known to us. She probably lived until 1554.[12]

What is known about her later life may help to explain this silence, at least to a certain extent. To begin with, Argula was not the only member of her family to have Reformation leanings. Her brother Bernhardin (junior), heir to the Ernfels estate, who died in 1542, made decisive moves related to church organisation as early as 1521. After Frederick von Grumbach's death, Argula married Count von Schlick, a descendant of a noble Czech family, but her second husband died after two years of marriage. Twice widowed, she had to deal with both household and family matters on her own. According to surviving sources, she lived on the Lenting estate for some time, and most probably on the family estates in Franconia in her later years. She also suffered from an unknown serious disease. Still, her new life situation and the hardships associated with it do not seem to explain her giving up writing. Similarly, the situation in Bavaria, which had changed unfavourably for the reforming party, was hardly such as to cause Argula's silence, because if needed, she could have published without any problems even in the not-so-distant Nuremberg. Furthermore, there is no indication that her pro-Lutheran views became any less enthusiastic. Shortly after her first husband's death, Argula met Martin Luther, with whom she had previously been in correspondence, face to face in Coburg. The changing situation in the Reformation camp, which was becoming stronger and stronger, may have been the main and deeper reason for Argula von Grumbach's abandonment of writing activity. The Reformation was gradually moving from its "pioneer" period, in which all hands and minds, including women's, were greatly needed, into a stabilisation phase. At the same time, debates and disputes of both organisational and doctrinal nature were becoming more and more significant. Educated theologians sensitive to doctrinal subtleties were now more in demand than ardent polemicists of Argula von Grumbach's type. Obviously, Argula, like other female Reformation activists, could not satisfy such require-

[12] S. Halbach moves the year of her death to 1563, but according to J. Merz there is no sufficient justification for this.

ments. Education, especially academic, was still strictly a male prerogative. Protestant churches began to resemble the Catholic Church in this respect – women were no longer expected to be intellectually independent. On the contrary, such independence started to be seen as something undesirable and suspicious. If at all, they could express themselves in areas that were "safe", from the patriarchal churches' perspective, such as popular hymnals (communal singing in church has always occupied a prominent place in Protestantism) and inspirational children's and youth literature, guides to living a goodlife, and the like.

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Katharina Zell née Schütz, of Strasbourg, lived and worked almost at the same time (1497/1498–1562)[13] as Argula von Grumbach. Unlike Argula, who was descended from an aristocratic family, Katharina was born into an artisan family of considerable means. Nevertheless, the life and activity of both women were similar in many respects. Since her early adolescence, Katharina had shown a lively interest in religious issues, and even at the end of her life she wrote about her concerns and sufferings associated with them in a letter addressed to the residents of her home town. She admitted that it was only thanks to the sermons of Reformation preachers and the reading of Martin Luther's texts that she had freed herself from these hardships. At the end of 1522 she married Matthew Zell, a much older pastor who had been working in Strasbourg for several years. Their wedding drew a lot of attention and was a clear sign of her joining the Reformation camp, all the more so as Matthew Zell and several other Strasbourg clergymen were excommunicated for marrying. The couple remained childless. Katharina became her husband's faithful life companion and helper (which Matthew himself emphasised), and at the same time an active campaigner for the new faith. It is believed that during the terrifying Peasants' War she visited villages in the vicinity of Strasbourg, offering words of encouragement to the wives and children left at home.

In mid-1524, Katharina Zell began her writing activity. The pretext was the expulsion of Evangelicals, 120 of whom found refuge in Protestant Strasbourg, from Kenzingen (in Breisgau), which was within the Habsburg sphere of influence. The Zell family took in eighty men from this group and they stayed in the parish house for some time. Katharina offered words of consolation to the emigrants' wives, who suffered from forced separation from their husbands, persuading them to believe patiently and persistently in Providence. Also later, when the need arose, she did not hesitate to take in refugees and exiles expelled for their faith.

In the same year 1524, Katharina wrote a letter in which she referred to an attack by the Augustinian provincial Conrad Treger against the Strasbourg followers of the

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[13] S. Halbach, *Legitimiert durch das Notmandat*, pp. 376–383; Marc Lienhard, *Cathérine Zell, née Schütz*, in: *Bibliotheca dissidentium*, vol. I, Baden-Baden 1980, pp. 97–125; Martin H. Jung, Katharina Zell geb. Schütz (1497/98–1562), *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 107, 1996, pp. 145–178; Thomas Kaufmann, Pfarrfrau und Publizistin. Das Reformatorische „Amt" der Katharina Zell, *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 23, 1996, pp. 169–218.

Reformation. Here the pace at which the events took place is noteworthy. In March 1524, Treger presented 100 theses against the reformers' doctrine, demanding that a disputation be held. As if on behalf of the Strasbourg reformers, Capito immediately issued a polemic, in response to which, as early as May, Treger wrote another. However, the pamphlet had to wait until August to be printed, because the Catholic side had trouble finding a printer willing to print it at that time. When the friar began to circulate his text in his own monastery, he faced strong opposition from the Reformation adherents, as a result of which the crowd captured Treger on 5 September and handed him over to the city council. As can be seen, any kind of religious tolerance on either side of the confessional barricade was simply unthinkable.

Katharina Zell's letter *Entschuldigung* ("Apology") must have appeared soon after 5 September 1524. It reflects well on its author as a lay theologian who does not restrict herself to defending her own marriage, but critically discusses general problems relating to Catholic celibacy. It turns out, however, that despite the predominance of Reformation followers, the atmosphere in Strasbourg was not entirely conducive to religious discussions, especially to those in which women took part. In September 1524, the city council forbade printing and sale of a "pamphlet" (*Schmachbüchlein*), most probably the letter penned by Katharina Zell and directed against Treger. The existing copies were soon confiscated. Matthew Zell seems to have been treated similarly to Frederick von Grumbach; the Strasbourg city council ordered him not to allow his wife to publish any further letters (which had in fact been heralded in *Entschuldigung*). It is not certain whether this order was successfully enforced at once – Katharina may have published anonymously later – but beyond any doubt, from that moment on she devoted herself to pastoral work with her husband. Prominent reformers such as Caspar Schwenckfeld, Zwingli, Oecolampad and Calvin were among their guests, and engaged in scholarly debates in which Katharina (somewhat humorously called Doctor Katharina) took an active part. She and her husband travelled to Switzerland, Swabia, Nuremberg and the Palatinate, and in 1538 she met Luther and Melanchthon in Wittenberg and maintained a lively correspondence with them. Although she ceased her activity as a pamphleteer, she did not give up on other types of literary activity. In 1534, she published a hymnal (a church song book) in four volumes (to significantly reduce printing costs and thus make it available also for the poor) for her commune, containing mainly altered versions of hymns from the Bohemian Brethren's song book. Her paraphrase of the Book of Psalms, written to comfort a friend who was seriously ill, with a commentary to the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed, was published in 1558. When her husband died in 1548, she gave a eulogy at his funeral. The most extensive work (almost 170 printed pages) by Katharina Zell is a "letter" to the townspeople of Strasbourg published in 1557, in which she described and justified her and her husband's activity for the cause of the Reformation. This letter, or rather a treatise, contains much information about her life. It was provoked by a public statement by Protestant preacher Ludwig Rabus in which he attacked Katharina in an abusive manner, referring to her "shameless mouth" and accusing her of devilish inspiration. Her last years were not easy, and her deteriorat-

ing health was not the only reason. After Matthew's death, she had to leave the parish house which, in confessionally mixed Strasbourg, was taken over by a Catholic priest. She devoted the rest of her life to the terminally ill. In 1555, she was admitted to a community hospital (called *Blatterhaus*), from where she filed petitions to the city council calling for improvements to the situation of the sick and the institution's management. Only some of Katharina's suggestions were taken up. She died on 5 September 1562 in Strasbourg.

Like Argula von Grumbach, Katharina Zell adopted a purely Lutheran perspective on religion: *Sola scriptura...* – only the Holy Scripture is a reliable authority for Christians. The writings of both ladies were full of quotations (verbatim or paraphrased) or at least references to the Scriptures (known to them from Luther's translations), which were generally quite correct, even when quoted from memory. It is characteristic, especially of Katharina, to refer to examples of biblical women (Judith, Anne, Sarah, Rebecca, Martha and Mary Magdalene). Katharina's world view is remarkably Christocentric, devoid of any visionary aspects, ecstasy or the like. Distancing oneself from worldly pleasures such as extravagant clothes and dances did not mean an inclination towards contemplative life, but – in the spirit of the Reformation – towards charity for the poor and the sick. Although unity in the Reformation camp was bygone, Katharina represented an irenic trend and Luther, Zwingli and Schwenckfeld were equally "pious teachers and preachers" to her. However, when in 1529 Luther refused to compromise with the Calvinists on the Eucharist doctrine, Katharina did not hesitate to write a letter to the Father of the Reformation appealing for unity. Unfortunately, her letter has not survived, but we know Luther's reply, which was rather a reprimand containing no sound counterarguments. "A woman was not a partner in discussion with regard to dogmatic issues" (B. Becker-Cantarino).

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A third female early Reformation activist who put pen to paper is an almost unknown figure, unlike the previous ones, and would have most probably remained completely obscure if it had not been for her writing. Her year of birth and origin are unknown; nothing is known about her education or whether she had children. While Argula von Grumbach came from and was active in Bavaria and Franconia, and Katharina Zell in Strasbourg – hence their activity covered the south and west of Germany – **Ursula Weide**, from the town of Eisenberg in Saxony, represents the east part of Germany. Her husband Johannes Weide was a tax collector (*Schösser*) in the city, and therefore Ursula was referred to in the literature as Schösserin.[14] After Johannes' death she married Franz Pehem, a writer, in Altenburg in Saxony in 1541. Nothing is known about her later life, and one can only hypothesise that she died (in Altenburg?) around 1550.

[14] Scholarly sources related to Ursula Weide are modest, apart from an older work by Otto Clemen, *Die Schösserin von Eisenberg*, in: Otto Clemen, *Kleine Schriften zur Reformationsgeschichte (1897–1944)*, vol. I: *(1897–1903)*, ed. E. Koch, Leipzig 1982, pp. 83–91, and a brief description in: S. Halbach, *Legitimiert durch das Notmandat*, pp. 383–387.

Once again the focus will be on the year 1524. In that year an anti-Lutheran pamphlet ostensibly authored by Simon Blick, the Abbot of Pegau,[15] was published in Leipzig. It tried to demonstrate that Luther's teachings were pernicious not only for souls, but also for worldly matters. According to its author, not only do those teachings lead to condemnation in eternal life, but also for many people who lived off various types of work associated with the Catholic religion (such as painters, woodcarvers, manufacturers of devotional and liturgical objects, as well as printers refusing to print Lutheran writings and teachers of various levels associated with the traditional faith) to loss of livelihood. Ursula responded immediately and violently with a pamphlet (*Wyder das vnchristlich schreyben von Lesterbuoch des Apts Simon zu Pegaw vnnd seyner Brueder...*) controverting Blick's arguments. The list of charges against him is extensive, and the language as well as the style of her polemic are quite unrefined. She uses such epithets as "beer drinker" (*Bierbruder*) and "donkey head" (*Eselskopff*) to describe her adversary, and argues that the only thing he cares for is his own belly – his true god and friend. She also asserts his ignorance and lack of knowledge of the Holy Scriptures (the abbot knows as much as a "cow about dancing"). Only the Word of God matters and no one – neither the pope nor the council – can represent true religion, which is not of earthly but spiritual character. Ursula is indignant and amused by Blick's concern for the economic and social risks that the Reformation allegedly poses, which is, in her opinion, unworthy of a serious polemic: her adversary resembles a fishwife selling eggs at a market. Much of Ursula's pamphlet criticises Catholic extolling of the virtue of chastity and monastic life, which is the invention of the Church (she even mentions fake devilish chastity), whereas God's command is the marriage of a man and a woman. She does not shrink from appealing to priests, monks and nuns to abandon celibacy and to marry, or to gentlemen and noblemen not to have their children enter the clergy or monastic orders.

The story did not end there. In keeping with the pace of the early Reformation, an anonymous polemic criticising Ursula Weide's views (*Antwurt wider das vnchristlich Lesterbuch Vrsula Weydyn der Schossserin tzy Eyßenbergh...*) was published the same year (1524). Her husband, Johannes, was not spared because he allowed his wife to speak out against the Catholics. Ursula, whose views were severely but not so meaningfully criticised, was not spared either. As far as we know, this verbal duel ended with another pamphlet, albeit anonymous but this time in Ursula's defence. The possibility that she penned it herself cannot be excluded. The author of *Apologia Fur die Schösserin zu Eysenbergh* repeated the accusations against the Roman Church, defended her husband, and argued that Ursula had not been a heretic but a true conveyor of God's Word. An interesting idea was conceived then: that maybe someday women would get together and act together as one. In any case, nothing more was heard from Ursula Weide; only her passionate anti-Catholic pamphlet prevented her from fading into oblivion.

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[15] The Abbot's authorship is not entirely certain.

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Another figure that I would like to present is **Duchess Elizabeth of Brunswick-Lüneburg**,[16] a representative of the highest aristocracy of the sixteenth-century Holy Roman Empire. Her life, however, can by no means be considered happy. She lived between1519 and 1558 and was descended from the Hohenzollerns. Her father, Joachim I, Elector of Brandenburg, a man who had received a humanistic education, did not succumb to the temptations offered by the Reformation and remained faithful to Rome. Thus, Elizabeth was brought up in the Catholic tradition. She was quite well-read, as evidenced by the surviving inventory of books in her library dated 1539. Her education, however, was not of a humanistic but rather a practical and moral nature. Extensive correspondence in German, written by Elizabeth herself, testifies to her good education. In 1525, at the age of fifteen, she was married to Eric I, Duke of Brunswick-Calenberg (forty years her senior!) and the marriage produced four children: a son and three daughters. Eric proved to be a tolerant man and did not object when in 1538 Elizabeth accepted Luther's teachings, but this led to a political rift in the family. While Eric, at the instigation of his relative Duke Henry of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, joined the Catholic Three Cities' League, Elizabeth supported her Lutheran co-religionist and southern neighbour Philip I, Landgrave of Hesse and the Protestant Schmalkaldic League (though she did not formally join it). The two opponents, Henry and Philip, waited for Duke Eric's death, hoping to take possession of the Duchy of Brunswick-Calenberg. When the 70-year-old duke finally died in 1540, Elizabeth managed to gain custody of her son, who was still a minor, and to maintain the independence of the duchy – which though small was still important, as it lay between the Catholic and Protestant camps. For the five years of her regency (1540–1545) she proved to be both an energetic administrator of the inherited estate and a keen propagator of Luther's teachings. She kept in touch with Protestant scholars, including the well-known preacher Antonius Corvinus, and corresponded with Luther himself. She wrote political texts, instructional books, proposals for the state assembly (*Landtag*), letters, etc. Before we move on to discuss her writing, let us take a look at Elizabeth's later life. In 1545 she handed over power over the Duchy to her son Eric II. He turned out to be both a poor ruler (moreover, he left no heir) and a bad son. He reverted to Catholicism, and in 1554 he made his mother waive the right to

[16] Of the rich scholarly sources on Elizabeth, I have chosen to mention only: IngeMager, *Reformatorische Klosterpolitik im Dienste der Bildung. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Herzogin Elisabeth von Calenberg-Göttingen und des Herzogs Julius von Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel*, in: *Kloster und Bildung im Mittelalter* (Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte, 218 = *Studien zur Germania Sacra*, 28), Göttingen 2006, pp. 559–573; Andrea Lilienthal, *Die Fürstin und die Macht. Welfische Herzoginnen im 16. Jahrhundert: Elisabeth, Sidonia, Sophia*, Hannover 2007; I. Mager, *Das Vermächtnis der Laientheologin Elisabeth von Braunschweig-Calenberg-Göttingen (1510–1558) für ihre Untertanen und für ihre Kinder*, in: *Fürstinnen und Konfession. Beiträge hochadeliger Frauen zur Religionspolitik und Bekenntnisbildung*, ed. D. Gehrt, V. von den Osten-Sacken (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz, Beiheft 104), Göttingen 2015, pp. 151–167.

her personal property. In 1546, Elizabeth remarried; her second husband was the Protestant Count Poppo XII of Henneberg.

We shall not be concerned here with the purely pragmatic writings of Elizabeth of Brunswick and Lüneburg, but rather her didactic and moral tracts, which enabled her to play a role in the history of women's literature. The first one of these tracts is related to her regency. In 1534, she wrote *Christliches Sendbrief* – a kind of open letter or rather instructional treatise for her subjects, in which she appealed to clergymen, councillors, knights, cities and other residents of the duchy to act in accordance with the reformers' teachings and to give up luxuries and usury. Her religious argumentation goes hand in hand with her social and political reasoning. "Elisabeths 'Sendbrief' gewinnt als Dokument ihrer Regierungsabsichten und der Intentionen ihrer Reform eine einmalige Bedeutung" (B. Becker-Cantarino).

This was not Elizabeth's only tract. On handing over the principality to her son Eric II in 1545, she wrote a kind of a ruler's manual for him, similar to the already known *Fürstenspiegel* ("mirrors for princes"). Having made a fair copy in her own neat hand (195 pages of quite large format) and had a precious silver binding made for the manuscript, she presented it to her son as a gift and a collection of religious truths, moral principles and practical life tips. It deals with a variety of topics, such as marriage education and political and financial advice that would be important to the prince (particularly given that the country had become immensely indebted during his father's reign). The manual ends with a useful table of contents and the family chronicle. It seems that Eric did not care much about his mother's advice, but in any case, Elizabeth's tract, not intended for publication, was, according to her will, handed down from generation to generation within the family. Elizabeth's tract is the earliest Protestant "mirror for princes".[17]

Despite her particularly difficult situation, Elizabeth cared for her daughters. The Duchess managed to marry one of her daughters, Anna Marie, to Duke Albert of Prussia (Poland's vassal) of a Hohenzollern side line. The caring mother used the occasion to compose a marriage manual, *Mütterlicher Unterricht* (1550, 136 pages of smaller format), in her own hand and gave it to her daughter as a kind of dowry. Deeply imbued with Lutheran religiosity, the tract recommends that the daughter live and act decently and piously, and stresses parents' obligations towards each other and their children and those of their children towards them. Elizabeth emphasises the moral and biological role of women in a way that is interesting and at the same time different from the medieval view.

Another area of Duchess Elizabeth's writing activity was religious song. The apogee of this coincided with her stay in Hanover, where she lived in extremely modest if not miserable conditions, and was burdened with an unrepayable debt which she had incurred for her ungrateful son. Suffering from almost physical pain (hunger,

[17] A few more were written in the sixteenth century. Duke Albert Hohenzollern of Prussia wrote one for his sons in 1562; similar works were written in the following year by his second wife (and Elizabeth's daughter) Anna Marie, and in 1579 by Duke Julius of Brunswick-Lüneburg.

severe illness), abandoned by those around her, the Duchess was forced to consent to cede her private property. By that act she gained freedom, but had to fight for survival. Having left Hanover, she went to live in Ilmenau, which belonged to her second husband. The songs composed by Elizabeth reflect the hardships of her life. Some of them are adaptations of popular folk songs or borrowings from other Protestant hymnals. Among Elizabeth's songs is one dedicated to her youngest daughter, Katharina, expressing fear of forced separation from her mother and marriage. Indeed, in 1557, Eric married his sister to a Catholic burgrave from Rosenberg. As has already been mentioned, Elizabeth had no money of her own. She tried to get financial help from her son-in-law, the Prussian prince, to have her songs published. Despite all her efforts, the songs were not published during Elizabeth's lifetime. At the end of 1555, still during her stay in Ilmenau, Elizabeth wrote another text, a book of consolation for widows (*Der Witwen Handbüchlein*). It was much smaller in size (46 printed pages). This work gained immediate popularity. It was printed for the first time in the following year, and there were five more editions up to 1609. "An aging lady,[18] who as a widow and a woman has experienced being vulnerable time and again, consoles herself with the company of similarly vulnerable women. New teaching which called for a reformed Christian change of life in accordance with the Gospel should save them from social injustice" (B. Becker-Cantarino).

Unlike the three women discussed thus far, Duchess Elizabeth of Brunswick-Lüneburg was not an active "soldier" in the service of the Lutheran Reformation. Among other things, the goal of her writing was different from theirs. While those women expressed their views in up-to-date pamphlets, intended for a mass audience, she wrote her tracts in the form of moral and practical guides for a specific recipient or recipients. Therefore, it is hard to expect Elizabeth's writings to have been widely known.[19] The 450th anniversary of her death in 2008 and the 500th anniversary of her birth in 2010 significantly increased public interest in Elizabeth as a person and in her work.

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The religious song that is well known to have been widely cultivated in Protestantism was an area of literary activity in which women played an important role. It seems that the emotional charge associated with it matched their mentality and spirituality. From the perspective of the Protestant clergy, who, as has already been discussed, followed their Catholic counterparts in restricting, or even eliminating, women's participation in what were seen as more fundamental areas of religious dispute and literary output, religious poetry was in a sense a safe area, as it did not threaten men's dominance in any way. The kind of writing that is of interest to us

[18] This should be taken *cum grano salis*, as Elizabeth had died before the age of forty.

[19] *Ein christicher Sendbrief* was printed in 1545, *Der Witwen Handbüchlein* in 1556, *Unterricht für Herzog Erich des Jüngeren* and *Mütterlicher Unterricht für Anna Maria* as late as in 1899; *Lieder der Herzogin Elisabeth von Braunschweig-Lüneburg*, ed. von der Goltz, *Zeitschrift für niedersächsische Kirchengeschichte* 19, 1914, pp. 147–208; *Elisabeth von Braunschweig-Lüneburg und Albrecht von Preussen. Ein Fürstenbriefwechsel der Reformationszeit*, ed. I. Mengel, Göttingen 1954.

has been studied for a long time, especially in Germany – the cradle of the Reformation. And from the second half of the 19th century, this literature was also analysed in a purely scholarly sense. Nevertheless, it remained a proverbial *terra incognita* as far as women's literary activity was concerned. This kind of literary output is often not spectacular or conspicuous enough – apparently, at least – and its content more often than not follows the same pattern. Additionally, very rarely can female authorship be conclusively determined. Most often, an analysis of the content and searching for typical (or at least considered as such) features of women's literature can lend credence to female authorship. Only recently, primarily due to in-depth research and the publications of Albrecht Classen,[20] a German medievalist working in the USA, has the research material available to historians been greatly expanded – and thus so has our knowledge about women's achievements in this kind of literary activity. Although the sources are quite rich, let us focus on one example only, one which appears to be related in a way to Poland's history.

The case of **Elisabeth Cruciger**, considered the first female author of Protestant church song in the history of German literature, shows that not only ladies from the highest aristocratic circles made an effort to compose religious songs. She was born around 1500 into a minor noble Pomeranian family from Meseritz, now Międzyrzecz near Świdwin, although she was formerly associated with the more prominent town of Międzyrzecz in western Greater Poland (on the Ober), which belonged to the Kingdom of Poland in the sixteenth century. It is not clear on what basis it was assumed in German scholarship in the second half of the nineteenth century that Elisabeth came from a Polish noble family. In 1903, Stanisław Kossowski,[21] a Polish literary historian and teacher, hypothesised that she may have been related to Stanisław Myszkowski,[22]starost[23]of Międzyrzecz in the years 1531–1543. Almost simultane-

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[20] The most important of them are: Deutsche Frauenlieder des fünfzehnten und sechzehnten Jahrhunderts. Authentische Stimmen in der deutschen Frauenliteratur der Frühneuzeit oder Vertreter einer poetischen Gattung (das „Frauenlied")? Einleitung, Edition und Kommentar, *Amsterdamer Publikationen zur Sprache und Literatur*, 136, Amsterdam–Atlanta (Ga) 1999; „Mein Seel fang an zu singen". Religiöse Frauenlieder des 15.–16. Jahrhunderts. Kritische Studien und Textedition (*Studies in Spirituality*, Supplement 6), Leuven–Paris–Sterling (Virg.) 2002; *Late-Medieval German Women's Poetry: Secular and Religious Songs. Translated from the German with Introduction, Notes and Interpretative Essay*, Cambridge 2004.

[21] See a biographical note by Jan Hulewicz in PSB XIV, 1968–1969, pp. 320–323. The above-mentioned view was expressed by Kossowski in his work *Christophorus Hegendorphinus in der bischöflichen Akademie in Polen*, published in *Jahresbericht des k.k. zweiten Obergymnasiums in Lemberg* (p. 31), which was also published in Polish in 1905 as *Krzysztof Hegendorfin z Akademii Lubrańskiego w Poznaniu w latach 1530–1535. Monografia z dziejów odrodzenia i reformacji w Polsce* (in *Przewodnik Naukowy i Literacki*).

[22] See a biographical note by Adam Kamiński in PSB XXII/2, 1977, pp. 393-394; and Kasper Miaskowski, Słów kilka o Stanisławie Myszkowskim, kasztelanie międzyrzeckim i stosunku jego do Reformacji, *Reformacja w Polsce* 6, 1934 (1935), pp. 161–164. According to Kossowski, Elisabeth married Myszkowski in 1530.

[23] Międzyrzecz was not the seat of a starost; Myszkowski was a castellan (*Urzędnicy wielkopolscy XVI–XVIII w. Spisy*, ed. Adam Bieniaszewski, Wrocław etc. 1987, p. 100 and p. 219).

ously, first in 1902 and then in his comprehensive work *Die Geschichte der evangelischen Gemeinde Meseritz bis zu dem Verluste ihres Gotteshauses 1604*,[24] the German scholar Theodor Wotschke speculated that Elisabeth had been a daughter of a different starost of Międzyrzecz (Stanisław Tomicki, 1516–1527),[25] although he later became more cautious with regard to that claim. In 1966, Hans Volz[26] convincingly disproved the suggestions of Kossowski and Wotschke, pointing to the irrefutable source-based arguments for Elisabeth's Pomeranian origin. In a letter dated 8 June 1524, written by a Wittenberg student on the occasion of Elizabeth's wedding to Caspar Cruciger, she was referred to as "monialis Pomerana", while in another letter addressed to her at the beginning of the same year by a Jewish convert named Joachim she was called "Jungkfrauen Elizabeth Meßeritzen Pomeryn". Międzyrzecz can hardly be considered to lie in Pomerania; but it turns out, as first pointed out by Otto Vogt in 1896 (and apparently was not given due attention later), that about 30 kilometres southeast of Trzebiatów (Treptow) on the Rega and 17 kilometres northwest of Świdwin there is another Meseritz (incomparably smaller than Międzyrzecz on the Ober), which was in the possession of one of the branches of the noble von Kleist family[27] in the fifteenth century. Although, strictly speaking, this Meseritz was not in Pomerania, it was located in the extreme northeast of the March of Brandenburg and surrounded by areas belonging to Pomerania on three sides, and the family also owned property on the Pomeranian side, which meant that Elisabeth could quite justifiably be called Pomeranian. According to Hans Volz, the use of "Meseritz" in reference to Elisabeth Cruciger does not mean that she came from the ("Pomeranian") locality of Meseritz, only that she descended from the "Brandenburg-Pomeranian noble family von Meseritz".

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[24] *Zeitschrift der Historischen Gesellschaft für die Provinz Posen* 21, 1906 (pp. 65–143), especially footnote 2 on p. 71. Wotschke rejected Kossowski's assumption. With excessive confidence, not citing any sources, he wrote about Elisabeth Cruciger's song: "Das Magdeburger Gesangbuch vom Jahre 1534 nennt unsere Elisabeth als die Verfasserin, und da das Lied frühzeitig ins Polnische übersetzt und von den polnischen Gemeinden gern gesungen wurde, seine Melodie auch an die nationale polnische Singweise anklingt, halte ich es für gewiss, dass wir in ihm das Glaubenszeugnis der frommen Tochter der Stadt Meseritz haben" (p. 72). And further (p. 73): "Wir können es für die Erstarkung des reformatorischen Geistes in Meseritz nicht hoch genug werten, dass die Bürger eine Tochter ihrer Stadt in Wittenberg wussten und durch sie und ihre Briefe immer fester mit dem neuen Glauben verknüpft wurden. Mit welcher Freude mögen sie das Lied ihrer Landsmännin begrüsst und gesungen, mit welchem Stolz auf sie geblickt haben, wenn sie gedachten, dass Luther ihr Lied der Aufnahme in sein Gesangbuch gewürdigt hatte."

[25] See footnote 24 (*Urzędnicy wielkopolscy*, p. 100 and p. 234). The author of Caspar Cruciger's biographical note in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, vol. III, Munich 1957, pp. 427–428 (Ernst Kähler), still maintained that Elisabeth may have come "aus der polnischen Adligen Familie Tomicki aus Meseritz [Hinterpommern]", thus displaying a fair amount of ignorance.

[26] Hans Volz, Woher stammt die Kirchenlied-Dichterin Elisabeth Cruciger?, *Jahrbuch für Liturgik und Hymnologie* 11, 1966, pp. 163–165.

[27] See Berthold Schulze, *Brandenburgische Besitzstandskarte des 16. Jahrhunderts. Der ritterschaftliche, geistliche, staädtische und landesherrliche Besitz um 1540* (Historischer Atlas von Brandenburg, NF, Lief. 1), Berlin 1962, Blatt 2. For the earlier history of the Kleist family see: Krzysztof Guzikowski, *Obce rycerstwo na Pomorzu Zachodnim do początku XIV w.*, Szczecin 2013, pp. 225–226 in particular.

Elisabeth entered the Premonstratensian Abbey in Treptow (today Trzebiatów) on the Rega, and there she met the outstanding reformer Johannes Bugenhagen,[28] who introduced her to Luther's teachings. In 1522, Elisabeth fled the cloister and found her way to Wittenberg, where she was taken in by Bugenhagen and his wife. In 1524, she married Caspar Cruciger the Elder (1504–1548). He was a strong advocate of the Reformation and a close associate of Luther. He studied in Leipzig, witnessed the disputation between Luther and Johann Eck, and for some time was Rector at Magdeburg's Johannisschule. In 1528, he became a professor and served as a preacher to a congregation of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. He also assisted Luther in his translation of the Bible, published his sermons and took part in the famous religious dispute in Marburg (1529) between Luther and Ulrich Zwingli. He later received a doctorate in theology and contributed significantly to the success of the Reformation in Leipzig. An interesting description of the wedding ceremony of Cruciger and Elisabeth, which was officiated by Martin Luther himself,[29] has been preserved. From John Bugenhagen's letter to Georg Spalatin, we also learn about some of the problems associated with the preparation of the Crucigers' wedding reception. Since Elisabeth came from a noble family, the wedding ceremony had to be truly sumptuous. Thus Bugenhagen took account of the need to prepare up to 10 banquet tables, and therefore asked the recipient of the letter to supply enough venison for the occasion.[30] The couple had two children: a son, Caspar ("the Younger") (1525–1597), also a theologian, who became embroiled in a conflict with Lutheran orthodoxy due to dogmatic differences, which caused him troubles later on;[31] and a daughter, Elisabeth, who on the death of her first husband married John, Luther's son and a Brandenburg court councillor.

Elisabeth died in Wittenberg on 2 May 1535. It is recorded in *Table Talk* that Luther himself, in the presence of Cruciger, highly praised her exemplary piety. Only one song, *Eyn Lobsanck von Christo* ("Lord Christ, the only Son of God"), which was probably written by Elisabeth at the end of her life, is known. Luther included it in

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[28] On Bugenhagen and his connections with Treptow (today Trzebiatów) and the cloister in Belbuck (today Białoboki) at the beginning of the Reformation see: Zygmunt Szultka, *Rola byłych zakonników z Białoboków w rozwoju Reformacji w południowej strefie Morza Bałtyckiego*, in: *Balticum. Studia z dziejów polityki, gospodarki i kultury XII–XVII w. ofiarowane Marianowi Biskupowi w siedemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin*, Toruń 1992, pp. 327–339; Hans-Günter Leder, *Sacerdos Christi, ludimagister Treptovii. Johannes Bugenhagen in Treptow bis zu seinem Anschluss an den Schul- und Bibelhumanismus (1504–ca.* 1515), in: *Land am Meer. Pommern im Spiegel seiner Geschichte. Roderich Schmidt zum 70. Geburtstag*, Köln–Weimar–Wien 1995, pp. 375–404. See also a brief outline of the Belbuck's cloister's final years by Rafał Simiński in: *Klasztor premonstratensów w Białobokach. Archeologia i historia*, ed. Marian Rębkowski, Felix Biermann, Szczecin 2015, pp. 191–193.

[29] The text (*Wie Doctor Martinus Luther Caspar Creutziger und Elisabeth von Meseritz Dienstag vor Viti, vor der Pfarrkirchen zu Wittenberg zusammengegeben hat*), whose authorship is attributed to Spalatin, was published in 1717 by Joachim Müller and cited by Elisabeth Schneider-Böklen in the appendix to her article *Elisabeth Cruciger – nun, minister's wife and first Lutheran poetess* (as in footnote 36).

[30] See: Rudolf Thommen, Drei Briefe des Johannes Bugenhagen, *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 12, 1891, pp. 154–159, here p. 158.

[31] On Caspar the Younger see: Robert Stupperich, *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, vol. III, p. 428.

the hymnals that he compiled and published in 1524, but did not identify the author.[32] Later, opinions on the authorship of the song were divided, but nowadays it is usually credited to Elisabeth.[33] Her song, repeatedly included in the Protestant hymnals and still present in them today, can be considered her posthumous triumph.

Because of the hymn generally attributed to her, Elisabeth Cruciger enjoyed great acclaim. Cyriacus Spangenberg confirmed this in 1571:

> Hie haben wir einen sehr schönen Geistreichen Betpsalm, den ihr billich eure Kindlein und Gesinde sollet lernen und offt singen lassen... Und hat diesen Psalm ein recht fromb Gottfürchtiges Weib gemacht Elisabeth Creutzigerin geheissen... und hat dem doctor martino so wohl gefallen dass er ihn selbst hat in sein Gesangbüchlein zu setzen befohlen.[34]

Not long afterwards (1526) the hymn was transcribed into Low German, and in this form was incorporated into Joachim Sluter's hymnal published in Rostock in 1531. It was also popular in sixteenth-century England.[35]

Just as Caspar Cruciger closely collaborated with Luther, his wife became friends with Luther's wife Katharina Bora, who was also a former nun. The two ladies even used to exchange gifts. In a letter of December 1532, Luther informed Cruciger that Elisabeth had sent Katharina a gold ornament and that he, Luther, in return had sent Elisabeth a necklace. In another letter she was described as an intelligent and prudent lady.

A letter, the one already mentioned, written to Elisabeth at the beginning of 1524 by a Jewish convert named Joachim from Szczecin, has survived. This was a reply to Elisabeth's letter which has not been preserved (but was extensively quoted by Joachim), and is addressed to "Jungkfrau" Elizabeth Meßeritzen Pomeryn, thus confirming her Pomeranian origin and being a testimony to her commitment to proliferating the principles of Protestant teaching.[36]

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[32] Once Elisabeth wrote to Luther asking him how a good Protestant should behave on accidentally witnessing a Catholic mass with the Eucharist given. Luther replied in a somewhat jocular tone: "Liebe Els, nim nur den pfaffen nicht vom altar, lessch auch die kertzen nicht aus" ("Dear Liz, do not take the priest away from the altar, do not put the candle out either").

[33] Mary Jane Haemig gave a detailed account of the controversy over the hymn's authorship in *Elisabeth Cruciger (1500?–1535)* (as in footnote 36), pointing to various reasons for refusing to credit Elisabeth with its authorship. Her most serious "rival" was the reformer of Riga Andreas Knoepken (1493–1539), who also wrote religious hymns; see Wolf-Günter von Schnakenburg, Die Lieder des Reformators in Riga Andreas Knopken, *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 40, 1943, pp. 221–246.

[34] A. Classen is quoted from *„Mein Seel fang an zu singen"* (as in footnote 20), p. 264.

[35] See M. White, *Women's hymns in mid-sixteenth-century England* (as in footnote 36).

[36] Otto Clemen, Ein Brief eines getauften Juden in Stettin aus dem Jahre 1524, *Pommersche Jahrbücher* 9, 1908, pp. 175–180. Important references and sources related to Elisabeth Cruciger: H. Volz (as in footnote 26); E. Schneider-Böklen, Elisabeth Cruciger – die erste Dichterin des Protestantismus, *Zeitschrift für Gottesdienst und Kirchenmusik* 2, 1994, pp. 32–40; E. Schneider-Böklen, *Der Herr hat Großes mir getan. Frauen im Gesangbuch*, Stuttgart 1995, pp. 11–26; E. Schneider-Böklen, Elisabeth Cruciger – nun, minister's wife and first Lutheran poetess, *Reformation and Renaissance Review* (in print); Mary Jane Haemig, Elisabeth Cruciger (1500?–1535). The case of the disappearing hymn writer, *Sixteenth*

Nothing or little is known about some of the authors of religious songs, but **Magdalena Heymair** is quite a well-known figure in German literature. Her writing was of an exceptional kind in Germany in the second half of the sixteenth century, primarily because of her vast literary output and its nature.[37] Her writing was pedagogically oriented and imbued with religiosity.

Life did not exactly spoil Magdalena. She was a teacher, which at that time was only possible for a woman in the form of private tutoring, in her own or the pupil's home. Her husband was also a teacher. His income must have been modest, as she complained in one of her letters that it had not been enough to support the family. Perhaps this was the reason why she was also compelled, as we would say today, to become professionally active. For two years Magdalena taught reading and writing to the daughters of Katharina von Degenwerg in Straubing on the Danube. She gained the trust and even friendship of Katharina, who supported her financially. What is more, the two women must have touched upon religious matters in their conversations, as Magdalena, previously a Catholic, became convinced of the value of the new teaching (she said later that these conversations led her "from papism to the true [i.e. Lutheran] church"). The situation was not without its risks, since religious relations in Germany after the Peace of Augsburg (1555) were far from stable, the related emotions still kindled minds, and besides Catholics and Lutherans there was also a Calvinist faction. Around 1564, the Heymairs obtained their desired position of school teachers in Cham (now in eastern Bavaria). Frederick III, Elector of the Upper Palatinate (*Oberpfalz*), under whose authority the city came, was a determined Calvinist, and he naturally endeavoured to introduce Calvin's teachings to that part of his country, which persistently followed Luther's doctrine. Although this did not lead to any direct ill-treatment of the Heymairs, a Calvinist teacher was sent to Cham with permission to establish another school. As the educational "market" in the little town was quite small, for the Heymairs this meant not only a certain degree of humiliation, but above all a deterioration in their professional position and income. In fact, the income of city teachers most often did not depend on the municipal treasury, but on the fees paid by the students' parents. Although the city council responded favourably to the Heymairs' complaint, the Elector's representative upheld the decision allowing the Calvinist newcomer to start teaching in Cham.

Given the circumstances, the Heymairs decided to leave Cham (1570) and move to the not-so-distant Regensburg, where most probably they lived a better life, and

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Century Journal 32, 2001, 1, pp. 21–44; A. Classen, *„Mein Seel fang an zu singen"* (as in footnote 20), pp. 258–265; A. Classen, *Deutsche Frauenlieder des fünfzehnten und sechzehnten Jahrhunderts* (op. cit.), pp. 173–174; Micheline White, Women's hymns in mid-seventeenth England: Elisabeth Cruciger, Miles Coverdale, and Lady Elizabeth Tyrwhit, *AND. A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews* 24, 2011, no. 1–2, pp. 21–31.

[37] For more on Magdalena Heymair, apart from the articles by A. Classen cited in fn. 20, see: Cornelia Niekus Moore, *Biblische Weisheiten für die Jugend. Die Schulmeisterin Magdalena Heymair*, in: *Deutsche Literatur von Frauen*, vol. I: *Vom Mittelalter bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, ed. G. Brinkler-Gaber, Munich 1988, pp. 172–184.

where Magdalena's first works were written. From their prefaces we know that Magdalena was living there in 1571 and 1578. It is not known, however, whether her husband was there with her all of the time. He may have died, because his name ceases to be mentioned in the sources. For a few years the sources also remained silent about Magdalena. When her name resurfaced (1585) she was living in Grafenwörth in Austria, and in the next year she lived in Kaschau (now Košice) in Slovakia. This may indicate that she had attained some balance in her life. In Kaschau she was offered the position of governess in the household of Judith Reuber, widow of a local landowner. Her main responsibility was to teach and raise her employer's daughters. Nothing further would be heard of Magdalena, and just as her date of birth remains unknown, nobody knows when she died.

Magdalena Heymair is the author of four books which were highly appreciated in the second half of the sixteenth century, as is proved by the number of official editions. These are not original works in our sense of the word, but rather poetic adaptations of biblical texts. The earliest text is *Die Sontegliche Epistel* ("Sunday Epistles"), published in 1566; this was followed by *Das Buechlein Jesu Syrach*s ("The Book of Jesus Syrach", 1571), *Die Apostel Geschichte* ("The Book of Apostolic Stories", 1573) and *Das Buch Tobiae* ("The Book of Tobias", 1580). She was inspired to write the first book by the popular didactic work *Sontags Evangelia* by Nikolaus Hermann (1480–1561). It was intended to be a loose poetic attempt to make the content and the message of St. Paul's letters known to listeners and readers. This was sometimes remarked upon by the author in the introductory passages. The length of the individual Letters varies, ranging from 6 to 17 stanzas, and – significantly – they are adapted to the melodies of well-known religious or secular songs. The author sometimes enriches her poetic disquisition with excursuses taken from the lives of saints, especially the female martyrs for the faith. More complex theological issues are not to be found, as the author focused primarily on moral education, guidelines for living in the spirit of Christian teaching. As noted by C. N. Moore: "Disregarding the conversion [to the Lutheran faith] mentioned in the introduction, the emphasis placed on Christian life could not have met with opposition from either the Catholic or Calvinist side."

Living in humble conditions, Magdalena would probably not have been able to finance the printing of her first work herself, but eventually it was printed and proved a publishing success. The dedication of the manuscripts to the Duchesses-Electresses of Palatine Dorothy and Elisabeth seems to imply that they had participated in or supported the publication of the work. The *Sunday Epistles* were first printed in 1568 in Nuremberg. The next edition, supplemented and partly amended by the Augsburg preacher Georg Sunderreuter, was published in 1578 in Augsburg.

The biblical poem *Jesus Sirach* achieved even greater success. It refers to the author of the Old Testament book commonly called the Wisdom of Sirach or the Book of Ecclesiasticus. Being a vast collection of maxims and proverbs, this biblical book was exceptionally well-suited as a basis for moral instructions and directions on how to live a godly life. While the *Sunday Epistles* were the fruit of Magdalena's stay in Cham, *Jesus Sirach* was written during her years in Regensburg. The author

dedicated the latter to four young Duchesses of Palatine. The foreword was written by a preacher from Cham, Joshua Opitz (1542–1571), to whom Magdalena's ideas must have been close, as he himself was the author of a children's Bible. The first four editions of the work were published at rapid pace in Regensburg (1571, 1572, 1573, 1574). The fifth edition, this time "corrected" and slightly modified by Sunderreuter, appeared in 1578. This version was reprinted in 1586 and again in 1609. *Jesus Sirach* gives the impression of being more homogeneous than the *Epistles*. Magdalena, most probably inspired by the success of her first work, felt more confident, and she did not hesitate to incorporate New Testament excursuses into the Old Testament work; for example, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Admittedly, the Old Testament poet Sirach outclasses the diligent song writer from Regensburg. Perhaps, as a city dweller, she had a poorer understanding of the biblical language, deeply imbued with images of nature. "Trees, flowers, mountains, an eagle and a lark, the whole world of Sirach filled with the Creation is completely lost in Heymair's version. This is clearly noticeable in those chapters in which Sirach lyrically praises the wisdom of God and his prophets [...] Heymair's version is less ornate, less refined and therefore more naïve, less sophisticated but more sincere, and it was this that must have appealed to her contemporaries" (Moore).

It is worth noting that she was also more prudish than her biblical models. Examples of immoral behaviour were carefully toned down, and a mention found in the Wisdom of Sirach of unmarried girls becoming pregnant was omitted. Likewise, the biblical author's negative reflections on women were either toned down or ignored altogether. In order to make her works more appealing, Heymair often made good use of melodies of secular songs that were popular at that time. Although Joshua Opitz claimed that in this way Heymair's songs replaced the unrefined ditties sung in the streets, not everyone liked the fact. Georg Sunderreuter, just in case, preferred to replace the secular melodies with religious ones in the versions that he published.

The *Book of Apostolic Stories* was published for the first time in 1573. Heymair's last work, the *Book of Tobias*, supplemented by her adaptation of the *Book of Ruth*, had to wait another seven years (1580) to be published. These two books were later also modified by Sunderreuter. In the prefaces dedicated to her patrons – Princess Dorothea in the former, friends from Kaschau and the Degenwergs in the latter – Magdalena points to the role of women in the New Testament. The New Testament *Apostolic Stories*, as noted by Moore (1988: 180), were the biblical equivalent of the medieval legends of the saints, referred to as "Lügenden"[38] by Luther, and replaced them in Lutheran teaching. The *Book of Tobias*, full of adventures and good advice, could have been regarded as an educational novel among the biblical books, and the *Book of Ruth*, which Magdalena combined with it, "whose heroine supports her mother-in-law in her worries and misfortunes was an ideal educational textbook for girls".

Thus, it can be assumed that the works of Magdalena Heymair enjoyed considerable popularity. However, it was restricted to southern Germany and short-lived.

[38] A play on words: *Legenden–Lügenden* ("lies").

Shortly after 1600, her writings faded into almost complete oblivion, and they and their author have been very rarely mentioned in specialised scholarly studies. We are familiar with them only thanks to their sixteenth-century prints, as none of them seems to have been reprinted in modern times.

The most characteristic feature of Magdalena Heymair's writing was that it was clearly intended for young people of both sexes. Since much teaching had to take place at home in those days, and adults, according to Lutheran teachings, had a special role and responsibility in the process, Magdalena's religious and pedagogical books were equally useful for them as well. This undoubtedly became the cause of her writing success. In some respects, her educational views did not differ from those commonly accepted at that time: Magdalena believed that even harsh punishment of pupils was justified. Treatises and studies on the education and upbringing of the young multiplied as the Reformation progressed. "Nevertheless, women among the authors of school textbooks, except for Heymair, were quite rare, although many of them were active teachers" (Moore). Was it because they could read, but not necessarily write? Interestingly though, Opitz, who has already been mentioned a few times, emphasising the uniqueness of Heymair's writing, regarded it (seriously or rather humorously?) as a sign of the coming end of the world.

LUTHER'S LITERARY OPPONENTS

The title of this section is taken from the work of a German author of the early twentieth century.[39] Let us take a brief look at an issue that has not yet been thoroughly examined by scholars and which shows another side of women's participation in the Reformation disputes. Little literary evidence of their endeavours has survived, which can be put down to both the poor intellectual and spiritual condition of many convents (as well as monasteries) before the Reformation[40] and undoubtedly a lack of understanding on the part of the triumphant Protestantism. Caritas Pirckheimer was one of the best-known examples of this attitude. Another example can be found in sixteenth-century Switzerland. The beginnings of the Reformation in the Swiss cantons were complicated. Luther's teachings were of secondary importance there (although the Catholic polemicists most often called their adversaries Lutherans) and Ulrich Zwingli should be considered the father of the Swiss Reformation. Only later did John Calvin come to the fore. The cities in Switzerland, like their neighbours in southwestern Germany, were rich and aware of their importance. One of the most important was Geneva, where in 1521 eighteen-year-old **Jeanne de Jussie**, born in 1503 in Jussy-l'Évêque (in the former province of Chablais) as the last child of a noble fam-

[39] Franz Falk, Literarische Gegnerinnen Luthers, *Historisch-politische Blätter für das katholische Deutschland* 139, 1907, pp. 375–385.

[40] This view has often been challenged or relativised (with various, not always convincing justifications); see older sources: Franz Falk, *Literarische und künstliche Tätigkeit in deutschen Nonnenklöster im ausgehenden Mittelalter*, op. cit. 118, 1896, pp. 644–656.

ily with an estate near Geneva, joined the only convent in the city, that of Saint Clare. Her father Louis had died before 1519. Before she entered the Poor Clares, Jeanne had attended a school for girls in Geneva, and so not surprisingly, she was appointed the convent's scribe or secretary, and also became a chronicler. Her work, modestly referred to as *Petite Chronique* ("The Short Chronicle")[41] describes (apart from the excursuses) the years 1526–1535, and is an important source of information about the turbulent beginnings of the Reformation in Geneva and the ultimately ineffective resistance of the Catholic side.

The Convent of Saint Clare in Geneva was founded in 1473 by Yolande de Valois, daughter of the French King Charles VII and sister of Louis XI, who married Amadeus IX, the Duke of Savoy. There were also close links between the convent and the House of Savoy. At the time of Jeanne's writing, the abbess was the venerable but still – as it turned out later – energetic and fearless Louise Rambo, who was assisted in her managerial responsibilities by vicaress Pernette de Montluel de Châteaufort. Pernette succeeded to the position of abbess after Louise Rambo's death in 1538, and Jeanne de Jussie was elected abbess in 1548. Before these changes, in 1535 the community had had to leave Geneva and move to Annecy.

The first harbingers of the new faith reached Geneva around the mid-1520s. Zwingli's followers were mainly rich burghers. As Geneva was struggling for sovereignty against Charles III the Duke of Savoy and Prince-Bishop Pierre de la Baume, the religious circumstances were linked to political ones. In order to achieve sovereignty, Geneva's authorities entered into an alliance with two other rich and influential cities, Bern and Fribourg. The supporters of the Duke and the Prince-Bishop, also from the city's rich merchant class and contemptuously called the "Mammelukes" by the Reformation supporters, were gradually forced to leave Geneva. Jeanne described several such events, and in one of them as many as fifty-two venerable citizens had to leave the city.

Although the rule of the Poor Clares was strict, and the sisters were not allowed to leave the cloister walls or even communicate with the outside world except in a locutory, such contacts, as the *Short Chronicle* well proves, were not that uncommon. Helmut Feld, an indisputable expert in the field, has shown that there are four thematic areas in Jeanne de Jussie's work, ranging from broad ones to those closest to the author. The broadest area concerned significant matters related to European politics, which had to have implications for Geneva, as it was a flashpoint for rivalries between France and the Habsburgs. The second area relates to the Swiss cantons and

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[41] Its critical edition with comments and its German translation were published in 1996 in Mainz: *Jeanne de Jussie, Petite Chronique; Jeanne de Jussie, Kleine Chronik* – edited by and with comments added by Helmut Feld, who is also the author of the German translation. In fact, Feld repeated his comprehensive (pp. XXVIII–XLVII) introduction written for the French edition in his article: *Jeanne de Jussie. Der Stand der Jungfräulichkeit und das Große Gut der Ehe*, in his own *Frauen des Mittelalters. Zwanzig geistige Profile* (*Beihefte zum Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, 50), Köln–Weimar–Wien 2000, pp. 308–325 and 408–412. The English translation was published a few years later in the United States: Jeanne de Jussie, *The Short Chronicle*, translated by C. F. Klaus, Chicago 2006.

their often conflicting interests. Bern, which had already accepted the Reformation in 1528, came to the fore and successfully extended its influence to the south, at the expense of the Duchy of Savoy. The third area relates to Geneva and its surroundings, where the faction struggling for autonomy allied itself with Bern. Jeanne, in a conversation with a representative of the city council, made it very clear that she did not consider Geneva her spiritual and political homeland, because she felt attached to the Duchy of Savoy. Finally, the fourth and the closest area of Jeanne's interest was the Convent of Saint Clare itself, which as the Reformation progressed became one of the last strongholds of Catholic resistance.

As to the European "great politics", Jeanne gave a lot of attention to the struggles of the Christian world against the Ottoman Empire's expansion, as the Turks had already managed to conquer much of Hungary. She cited a letter (undoubtedly inauthentic) allegedly written in 1532 by Suleiman the Magnificent to the Pope, and used it to describe the situation in the Ottoman Empire, its laws and customs, especially those pertaining to the Sultan's court. The information about the Turks does not seem to be reliable, but still it deserves attention, being a reflection of commonly held beliefs about Europe's dangerous enemy in the first half of the sixteenth century. Jeanne knew about the meeting between Pope Clement VII and the French King Francis I and his family in Marseilles in 1533, during which the marriage of Henry and the Pope's relative, Catherine de'Medici, was confirmed. Jeanne wrote with satisfaction of the Battle of Kappel in 1531, won by the Catholics, in which the hated Zwingli had been killed. At the same time she expressed her hatred of Luther, the first person to blame for the split in the church:

> The prince and grand heresiarch of that damnable sect was an Augustinian monk named Martin Luther. In the year 1518, filled with wickedness and great self-pride, set his mind to all sort of malice and errors that had existed ever since the apostles' death, and he had them printed in Basel and carried straight away through almost all of Christendom, and so his pestiferous venom poisoned all the kingdoms and lands of the Catholic Church. If kings and princes had not severely punished people who followed that accursed sect, the souls bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ Our Lord would have been in grave danger of eternal damnation.

Luther's excommunication by Pope Leo X and the symbolic burning of his portrait at the Roman Campo de'Fiori did not put an end to the activity and influence of this "perfidious dog". It is no wonder that the "plague" did not spare Geneva, to which, after all, Jeanne was not really emotionally tied. She saw that it would be unrealistic to expect the Christian rulers to act in unison with regard to heretics, as the (Habsburg) Emperor and the French king were divided by an insurmountable conflict of interests, which could be clearly seen at the Swiss–Savoy border and which was the main cause of all disputes and regional tensions. In March 1526, the Genevans, as has already been mentioned, allied with Bern and Fribourg with the aim of gaining independence from Savoy. The Prince-Bishop of Geneva felt compelled to leave the city in the summer of 1528.

In the autumn of 1530, the representatives of Bern sent a predicant, Guillaume (Wilhelm) Farel, to Geneva with the task of preaching in tune with the Reformation at

the cathedral. He revisited Geneva two years later accompanied by two other French predicants. The months and years to come would decide the confessional future of Geneva. Influenced by the Protestant preachers, the citizens of Geneva were gradually leaning towards them. Yet, not all attempts to take over the Catholic churches were successful, and the city council remained undecided and sometimes issued anti-heretical decrees. The year 1533 was to mark a major breakthrough. The forces in both camps seemed to be even. That year saw armed skirmishes and deaths. In the summer of 1533, Bishop Pierre de la Baume returned to his capital from exile. He tried to preach in the cathedral, but when a few days later he went as far as to imprison ten leading "Lutherans", the outrage was so great that he fled the city again, never to return. Guy Furbity, a well-known Dominican theologian, sent to Geneva from Paris, tried to win the city residents over to Catholicism, but his sermons were drowned out by the shouts of the then main adherent of the new doctrine, Antoine Froment. Although Froment and his associates were banned from the city, they soon returned. The reformers decided to interrupt the upcoming Catholic Christmas celebrations as much as they could, viewing them as devoid of any biblical justification. Although the Catholics' bold defiance prevented these plans from being carried out to their full extent, with the new year the scales definitely tipped in favour of the Zwinglians. The city authorities began persecuting the adherents of the "old faith". The most ardent supporters of the bishop were executed, and more and more Catholic families left the city. Many priests and monks accepted the teachings of the Reformers. Churches and monasteries fell into the hands of the Reformers, paintings and liturgical objects were destroyed, and the ringing of church bells and celebration of the holy mass and divine offices were officially banned on 11 August 1535.

And what of the city's Poor Clares? The community was affected by the changes somewhat later. An alleged reason for the city authorities to interfere in the convent's affairs was the case of one of the nuns, Blaisine Varembert, extensively described by Jeanne de Jussie in her chronicle. In April 1534, Blaisine's sister, who lived in the city and had already converted to Protestantism, appeared at a locutory and demanded that Blaisine be allowed to leave the convent, which she eventually managed to achieve with the help of the city officials. Blaisine's apostasy caused Jeanne much grief. However, she clearly stated that this had been the only such occasion, and that all of the other nuns had remained faithful to their vocation and left Geneva with the abbess when it became impossible for them to remain in the city.

The authorities regretted the Poor Clares' intention of leaving the city. "Ah, Geneva, you are losing all your good and light right now!" the mayor is said to have cried; it was his task to guarantee the nuns' safe departure. Monastic life was useless from the Protestant perspective as it did not stem from the Holy Scriptures. What is more, this kind of life was unnatural, because according to the Reformers life in chastity was impossible for women, and for the city community the departure of such a great number of women, especially young ones, meant the loss of potential wives and mothers. Leaving the unfriendly and heresy-consumed city was indeed a great challenge for the Poor Clares. However, after the arduous journey, when they found themselves again

in a Catholic environment, they had an opportunity to find a spiritual haven and feel needed again. The following example was given by Jeanne to illustrate this. One day when the sisters were praying in front of the miraculous image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a miracle occurred: a stillborn baby came back to life so that it could be baptised. In the late Middle Ages and the following centuries there were recorded places where such miraculous resurrections had taken place. Although condemned by the adherents of the Reformation as a glaring example of Catholic superstition and fraud, the custom of going on pilgrimages to these places with the bodies of children who had died before they were baptised was popular for a very long time.[42]

Apart from being a report on political events preceding and accompanying the last years of the convent of St. Clara in Geneva, and apart from the theological arguments, Jeanne de Jussie's *Short Chronicle* is an important source of knowledge on cultural history. In addition to serious matters, the chronicle also contains narratives of funny, anecdotal events. In all likelihood, some of them were seen as such by the author herself. One Sunday the mayors sent a delegation headed by the above-mentioned Guillaume Fareland a certain Franciscan-apostate who "resembled more a great devil than a man" with the task of converting the Poor Clares. The mission can be assumed to have been unsuccessful, and when the unfortunate messengers were going down the stairs, the apostate somehow lingered or for some reason could not go any faster, and then one of the sisters walking right behind him hit him twice and uttered some unflattering words, to which he did not respond. On the other hand, Jeanne also describes how in 1531, in order to deride the duke and the Savoy nobility, a group of drunken Genevans made a charcoal drawing of a bear defecating on the Duke of Savoy's coat of arms. In 1534, when the "Lutheran" women were ostentatiously doing laundry on the feast days of Easter and Pentecost, their Catholic fellow townswomen purposefully passed by and threw their drying clothes into the Rhône. There are many more similar anecdotes in Jeanne's chronicle; one of the more juicy concerns the funeral of a certain "Lutheran" chemist: "Little Christian [i.e. Catholic] children watching the Protestant funeral said to each other: 'Those dogs did not put any holy water on their brother. Let's give him what he deserves to soothe his soul!' and all together they poured their urine on his grave. "It is also noticeable how serious and indeed common in the sixteenth-century cloister was the battle against various diseases, additionally compounded by the forced journey in search of a new home. For some elderly sisters who had spent almost their entire lives within the cloister walls, the sudden forced stay in the fresh mountain air was almost unbearable. Seeing grazing cows and sheep, they were convinced that the animals were dangerous bears and wolves. Some sisters who used to walk barefoot around the cloister had forgotten what shoes were for, and carried them tied to their belts.

A direct confrontation between both sides of the confessional conflict took place during the decisive stage in the struggle to preserve the convent. This confrontation is all the more remarkable because the protagonists were women, sure of the righteousness of their

[42] See the exhibition catalogue *Himmel, Hölle, Fegefeuer. Das Jenseits im Mittelalter*, Peter Jezler (ed.), Zürich 1994, pp. 192–194 (on the pilgrimage chapel in Oberbüren in the canton of Bern).

cause and ready to defend it with all their might. One of these women was the aforementioned Jeanne de Jussie; another was **Marie Dentière** from the Netherlands. Especially significant is that both left behind writings that adequately explain their reasons.[43]

Apart from the two works (discussed below) attributed to her, we have little information about the life of Marie Dentière. Her dates are unknown.[44] She was prioress of the Augustinian convent in Tournai (now in Belgium), which she abandoned in the 1520s, and together with her husband Simon Robert (formerly a priest in Tournai) she travelled through Strasbourg, Aigle and Bex (where Simon Robert was appointed pastor) to reach Geneva at the early stage of Guillaume Farel's reform. When Simon died (most probably in the spring of 1533), Marie married Antoine Froment. She had five children in total. She was an active Reformer, a preacher and a published writer. She is the author of two works: "The war and deliverance of the city of Geneva, faithfully told and written down by a merchant living in that city" (*La guerre et déliverance de la ville de Genesve, fidélement faicte et composée par un Marchant demourant en icelle*) (1536) and "A very useful epistle, made and composed by a Christian woman of Tournai, sent to the Queen of Navarre, sister of the King of France, against the Turks, Jews, False Christians, Anabaptists and Lutherans" (*Epistre très utile, faicte et composée par une femme chrestienne de Tornay, envoyée à la Royne de Navarre, seur du Roy de France, contre les Turcz, Juifz, Infideles, Faulx chrestiens, Anabaptistes et Lutheriens*) (1539). The former describes the victorious march of the Reformation in Geneva, while the latter, appropriately dedicated to Margaret of Navarre – a well-known and prominent proponent of women's rights – is a theological tract defending women's role in theological discourse. In her *Short Chronicle*, Jeanne de Jussie describes the struggle between the old and new faith in Geneva from a Catholic point of view, while Marie Dentière does the same from a Protestant perspective. Jeanne de Jussie describes Marie's first encounter with the Poor Clares in Geneva as follows:

> In that company was a nun, a false, wrinkled abbess with a devilish tongue, who had a husband and children, named Marie Dentiere of Picardy, who meddled in preaching and perverting pious people. She came among the sisters [...]. But because she wanted to pervert one of them, she paid no attention to any insults or injuries, and 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! Alas, I was for a long in this darkness and hypocrisy where you are. But God alone showed me the delusions of my wretched life and I saw the true light of truth and realised I had been living in sorrow the whole time because in these convents there is nothing but hypocrisy, mental corruption, and idleness. And so, without hesitating, I took five hundred ducats from the treasury and left that miserable life, and, thanks to God alone, I already have five fine children and lead a good and healthy life."

"The war and deliverance of the city of Geneva", written and published in all likelihood in the first half of 1536, is not so much a chronicle of events, but rather their interpretation in the spirit of the Holy Scriptures. The work was published anonymously,

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[43] The beginnings of the Reformation in Geneva are therefore remarkably well known, especially since Dentière's husband, Antoine Froment, wrote a tract on the topic, *Les actes et gestes merveilleux de la cité de Genève*, published only in 1854.

[44] Thomas Head (see footnote 45), gives: born ca. 1500, died 1561.

under the misleading pseudonym of "a merchant living in that city". Rightly (as it soon turned out) Marie feared the response of the Genevan authorities and the Council of Two Hundred in particular. Firstly, because despite the general acceptance of the Reformation foundations, they still represented different views and tendencies; and secondly, because they could not accept being lectured by a woman. The appeal to the reader on the front page – "Read and then judge" – was to no avail. Marie's treatise did not become widely known, and not a single copy of the original edition survives; it is known only from handwritten copies. The first new edition (Gustave Revilliod), based on a faulty manuscript, was published only in 1863, and a more correct one, in which the publisher Albert Rilliet acknowledged Dentière's authorship, appeared in 1881.

The fate of "A very useful epistle" was not any different. This time the author did not hide her identity (as confirmed by the reference to Tournai in the title and the initials M.D. used in the text). The work was written in 1539 as a commentary on the situation of the pro-Reformation camp, which was becoming more and more complex. It is notable that in the title the author mentions "Lutherans" alongside Anabaptists, "Turks", Jews, etc. The basic purpose of the treatise, dedicated to Queen Margaret of Navarre, is to defend the Reformation in its Evangelical version. However, a second main idea is to defend women's right to preach the Gospel, supported, as is usually the case in such circumstances, with suitable examples from the Holy Scriptures and the Old Testament in particular. One of the Geneva printers (Jean Gerard) was brave enough to publish "A very useful epistle" in as many as 1500 copies. However, suspecting trouble in Geneva – and rightly, as it soon turned out – he resorted to a pretence that the book had been printed in another city. This was of no help to him: within a few weeks the city's pastors had figured out the ruse, confiscated the remaining copies and initiated proceedings against the publisher. Gerard's and Froment's lengthy efforts to overturn the sequestration failed. Froment himself was subjected to a whirlwind of accusations, hurled by, among others, his former friend Farel and Calvin himself. Only a single copy (now in the Library of Geneva) is believed to have survived. The works of Marie Dentière were published in a modern but still incomplete edition (Théophile Dufour) only in 1878.

As has already been seen several times in this article, the same story repeated itself; that is, as soon as the official church structures consolidated within a Reformation framework, the religious activity of women, especially in the areas of preaching and writing, soon became undesirable and was suppressed.[45] Dentière had to wait for recognition for a very long time. In 2003, she had her name engraved on the Wall of Reformers in Geneva.

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[45] Of the quite modest literary sources on Marie Dentière, the following may be mentioned: Thomas Head, *A propagandist for the Reform: Marie Dentière*, in: *Women writers of the Renaissance and Reformation*, pp. 260–283 (including English translation of a few passages); I. Backus, Marie Dentière. Un cas de féminisme théologique à l'époque de la Réforme?, *Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire du Protestantisme Français* 137, 1991, pp. 177–199; J. D. Douglas, *Marie Dentière's use of scripture in her theology of history*, in: *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective. Studies in Honor of Karlfried Froehlich on His Sixtieth Birthday*, M. S. Burrows, P. Rorem (eds.), Grand Rapids (Mich.) 1991, pp. 227–244.

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There were also other, perhaps less well-known, but no less zealous anti-Reformist polemists in the Catholic camp. As has already been noted, Barbara Becker-Cantarino[46] mentioned **Elisabeth Gottgabs** of Oberwesel, a talented and well-read, and at the same time deeply religious abbess, the author of the 1550 anti-Reformation tract *Ein christlicher Bericht, Christum Jesum im Geist zu erkennen. Allen gläubigen und catholischen Christen zu Nutz, Trost und Wolfart verfasset*, in which she justified her unusual – bearing in mind her times and her community – decision to write such a tract. She claimed that it was the only way available to her to defend the Catholic faith. An abridged version of the abbess Elisabeth's tract was published in 1907 by F. Falk.[47] He also included several similar writings by defenders of the Catholic faith in the publication. One of them is a letter of 1523 penned by **Katharina Rem** and **Veronika Rem** of the St. Catharine's Convent in Augsburg to their relative Bernardus Rem, who was insisting on their leaving the convent and accepting Luther's teachings. The next is a note referring to a (lost or yet undiscovered) letter from a nun, not mentioned by name, from the Mariastein cloister in Nuremberg to her brother Andrew. The nun, as in the previous case, refused to change her confession. A little more attention should be paid to the Dutch poet and polemicist **Anna Bijns**, who represents the same type of protagonist and literary activity.

She was born in Antwerp in 1493 into a fervently Catholic family with modest but not little income. Following the death of her father in 1516, she worked as a private school teacher in the city. Until her death in 1575 (also in Antwerp) she lived a very modest life; to our knowledge, she never married. The Franciscans in Antwerp became interested in her skills and encouraged her to develop them. The 1520s and 1530s in prosperous Antwerp (as in many other European cities) saw important events related to the eventually successful progress of the Reformation, as well as polemics and religious struggles. The first wave of the Reformation in the Netherlands was Lutheran in character; then came a wave of radical Anabaptism, and finally (after 1526) Calvin's followers gained a decisive advantage. Despite the repressions imposed by the ruling Spanish authorities, the Reformation, especially in its Calvinist form (although contemporaries, including Anna Bijns, used to describe all reformers as "Lutherans"), spread quickly. Bijns turned out to be a talented writer, actively involved in anti-Reformation polemics. Influenced by the Antwerp Franciscans, who were determined and effective in their attempts to fight the Protestant "heretics", she noticed the ineffective preaching of lower (parish) clergy, which was the result of both poor intellectual preparation and a lack of public trust. The success of the Reformation in the southern Netherlands, where Antwerp was located, was to a great extent determined by polemical pamphlets, most often written by adherents of the Reformation.

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[46] Barbara Becker-Cantarino, *Frauen in den Glaubenskämpfen. Öffentliche Briefe, Lieder und Gelegenheitsschriften*, in: *Deutsche Literatur von Frauen*, vol. I: *Vom Mittelalter bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, G. Brinkler-Gaber (ed.), Munich 1988, p. 150 and p. 523, footnote 6.

[47] As in footnote 39, pp. 379–383.

Whether Bijns really understood all the subtle nuances of the Reformers' arguments, or the intricacies of Catholic orthodoxy at that very complex time, hardly matters. Hers was the only strong Catholic voice in print against a whole army of anonymous Protestant poets. She was of the opinion that every poet had a dual mission whose elements were closely linked: that of an artist when (s)he must get beauty from pure devotion, and that of *miles Christi* ["knight of Christ"] when (s)he must make use of his/her talent in defence of the beleaguered Church (K. P. Aercke).

Three volumes of Anna Bijns' works are known to have been published. All are collections of texts known as *Refreinen* to scholars. There is not much to be said about the earliest volume, but according to expert opinion, the next two were more important. The second collection, longer and more aggressive towards her adversaries than the first, was published in 1548. Its main theme is a harsh and vituperative polemic against Luther and the "Lutherans", written so as to appeal to the imagination and conscience of simple people deluded by the heretics. The third volume of Bijns' works (over 250 pages) was compiled much later and published in 1567. It was intended to support efforts towards the restoration of the Franciscan monastery in Antwerp. This collection contains a wider variety of themes in comparison with the previous one. Still less can be said about Anna Bijns' even earlier "occasional" writings, which might shed a somewhat different light on this seemingly homogeneous figure. This part of her work, which was published only at the end of the nineteenth century, is believed to have been twice the size of her anti-Reformation writings. It contained feminist ideas and insults aimed at men, "wolves in sheep's clothing" (like the hated Luther). Anna Bijns achieved mastery of the difficult rhetorical struggles to a greater degree than anyone else using that poetic form in the Dutch language. Bijns was also the first to deny the importance of the rhyme scheme (K. P. Aercke).

Anna Bijns' anti-Reformation collections enjoyed considerable popularity even during her lifetime, earning her the glorious epithet "Brabantian Sappho"and causing some of her works to be translated into Latin (which was by no means common). She was buried in the Cathedral of Antwerp. The twilight of her life may have brought solace to her, because the "Lutherans" in her home country were experiencing more and more severe persecution at the hands of the Spanish.[48] The fact that the southern Netherlands finally remained Catholic can no doubt to some extent be attributed to Anna Bijns.

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The image of the early stage of the Reformation presented in this paper seems to confirm a wider observation. It is quite likely that it was women who often played a key role in inaugurating new religious trends or reforming those already existing.

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[48] Kristiaan P.G. Aercke, *Anna Bijns*, in: *An Encyclopedia of continental women writers*, vol. I, New York–London 1991, pp. 127–128; for more information and selection of poems see: Kristiaan P.G. Aercke, *Germanic Sappho. Anna Bijns*, in: *Women writers of the Renaissance and Reformation*, Athens (Ge) – London 1987, pp. 365–397. According to the biographical note on Bijns by Andrzej Dąbrówka, *Słownik pisarzy niderlandzkiego obszaru kulturowego* [...], Warsaw 1999, p. 48, there is a women's literary prize in the Netherlands named after her.

Cults and rituals performed exclusively by women and constituting a kind of social niche reserved only for them are known to have existed since Antiquity (both Oriental and Classical). Let us recall the role of women at the dawn of Christianity (later mostly forgotten), in some early Christian heterodox movements ("heresies") or the outstanding role of women in medieval endeavours to reform the masculinised Church, both those recognised by the official Church and sometimes canonised (e.g. Hildegard of Bingen in the twelfth century, Bridget of Sweden and Catherine of Siena in the fourteenth) and those rejected by the Church (e.g. Marguerite Porete at the beginning of the fourteenth century), or those great reformers of religious life and mystics "tamed" by the Church over time (for example, the Beguines). As to more modern times, we should mention the French reformatory Port-Royal-des-Champs Abbey (seventeenth century), the twentieth-century Mariavite Church of Poland, and finally various grassroots initiatives springing up today, contesting the current state of affairs and aiming to raise the status of women in the Catholic Church and other Christian communities. The power of tradition, even if not based on the Holy Scriptures, continues to weigh on Christianity, though not equally on its main branches (more on Catholicism and Orthodoxy, less on Protestantism). Of course, this does not concern Christianity only.

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ABSTRACT

The quincentenary of Martin Luther's memorable proclamation of 31 October 1517 provides ample occasion to ponder on the role of women in the early ("pioneer") stage of the Reformation, a topic rarely taken up by scholars. After a brief overview of some general problems connected with the genesis of the Reformation and reflection on its influence on the social position of women, attention is drawn to several prominent female protagonists of those times. First, the involvement of Argula von Grumbach, Katharina Zell and Ursula Weide as commentators in the service of the Reformation is analysed, having regard to the limited duration of their activity. Next the parenthetical writing of Duchess Elizabeth of Brunswick-Lüneburg is discussed, followed by a more detailed characterisation of the somewhat mysterious figure of Elisabeth Cruciger of Pomerania – the first Protestant author of religious hymns. Then, going outside Germany, taking as examples the lives of Jeanne de Jussie and Marie Dentière, the author recounts the introduction of the Reformation in Geneva. The article concludes with a presentation of the role of Anna Bijns as a defender of Catholicism in the Netherlands.