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Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives
(review)

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The Catholic Historical Review, Volume 96, Number 1, January 2010,
pp. 95-97 (Review)

Published by The Catholic University of America Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/cat.0.0604>

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Die ersten Jahrhunderte christlicher Pilgerreisen im Spiegel spätantiker und frömmittelalterlicher Quellen. By Markus Schauta. [Grazer Altertumskundliche Studien, Band 10.] (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008. Pp. 161. \$52.95 paperback. ISBN 978-3-631-56437-0.)

This *Diplomarbeit* of the Karl-Franzens-Universität in Graz seeks to provide a study of pilgrimages in the Holy Land and in Egypt during late antiquity and the high Middle Ages in terms of cultural history. The first two sections (chapters 2 and 3), based on some well-known sources (*Itinerarium Burdigalense*, Egeria, the Pilgrim of Plaisance, and so forth), try to evoke the journey and its realities on one side and on the other, the places visited and the practices that were tied to them (cult of saints and of relics). The last section (chapter 4) has practically no connection with what precedes it, although it is ostensibly about the impact of pilgrimages. There is the question of the spread during the medieval period of the cult of St. George on the one hand and on the other, the Calvaries and ways of the cross, up to the *Sacri Monti* of the Piedmont. Some images illustrate the purpose.

The rare Greek sources used are not manifestly read except in translation. The *Dialogues* of Sulpicius Severus are at times called *Vita Martini*, something that lends to confusion (p. 20). The interesting Latin version of the *Vita Melaniae* recently republished is passed over in silence. The short bibliography of this small work ignores essential works or studies, beginning with the *Lieux saints et pèlerinages d'Orient* of Pierre Maraval, without speaking of the studies of Irfan Shahid on the Saracens or that of Peter Grossmann on Saint Menas. It lacks a map of the regions to which it alludes. The whole work is very superficial and barely instructs the *addetto ai lavori*. In brief, it is difficult to discern what audience is envisioned for this publication.

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Medieval

Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives. Edited by Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz. [The Middle Ages Series.] (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008. Pp. viii, 159. \$39.95. ISBN 978-0-812-24069-6).

Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe explores how medieval Europeans identified themselves, specifically when religion and gender converged. Spanning Tertullian to St. Thomas Aquinas, the five essays that compose the book employ a variety of media to reconstruct the spectrum of medieval gender and religion, including litanies, medicine, and sacred spaces.

In the opening essay, Dyan Elliot maintains that when the third-century theologian Tertullian first conferred the title *sponsa Christi* on women, he was more concerned with creating a logical position for humanity within the

created order than establishing a venue for female discipline or the preservation of gender hierarchy. Instead, Tertullian's original intent was to deal with concerns of humans attaining angelic status, which he determined could only happen through a proper union with Jesus. As a result, Tertullian separated the brides of Christ from their male counterparts, the voluntary eunuch, and effectively gave them sexually neutralized but gendered bodies on earth to ensure their future heavenly entry.

Next, Jacqueline Murray illustrates the fluidity of the Christian sex/gender continuum through medical views of the body from antiquity to the Middle Ages. Because monastic men adopted the virtues of mercy, meekness, and obedience, they lived in direct contrast to the external signs of hot, masculine virility most evident in waging war and sexual activity. As a symbol of their piety, monks tonsured their heads, openly signifying the cooling of their bodies in an effort to serve Christ. Consecrated women, however, were deemed more masculine and were often reported to have more heat than normal females, such as Mary of Oignies, who did not fear the cold because of her internal heat. Thus, Murray concludes that it may be possible to recognize a third gender in the medieval world as men and women were united as one flesh in the same cause, reconciling their sex/gender differences for a higher purpose.

Using Aquinas as a prime example, Ruth Mazo Karras challenges the notion that monks, who had taken vows of chastity, or secular clergy, who had the obligation of celibacy, were somehow less masculine because of their sexual renunciation. Since the Desert Fathers, the model of masculinity rooted in the sort of strength necessary to struggle against the individual will was held as one of the greatest battles fought on behalf of the Christian faith. Thus, Karras concludes that while ecclesiastics often used the same language that identified secular notions of masculinity, including those referencing war, by the thirteenth century, the Church had a long-standing, competing model of masculinity that upheld the otherwise seemingly contradictory notion of virile chastity.

Spanning France, England, and Germany from the sixth through the mid-eleventh centuries, Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg's essay examines the conflicting notion of attracting pilgrims of both genders to convents' patron saint cult sites without compromising the moral propriety or reputation of those cloistered. During the Merovingian period, monastic houses often had multiple churches, providing space for the patron saint's tomb in one and space for secondary relics in others. By the Carolingian period, however, monastic communities began restructuring their churches, adding ring crypts and various other features to handle the flow of pilgrims. Schulenburg concludes that these arrangements provided mixed-gendered lay access to the sacred spaces of cloistered communities without compromising their virtue and, consequently, allowed women to have a much a greater role in maintaining cult pilgrimage shrines than has been previously recognized.

In the concluding essay, Felice Lifshitz argues that as the Carolingian period witnessed the use of litanies as instruments for “reforming” liturgical and other practices in an effort to exclude women from the most important historical leadership roles, including martyrs, the litany category of *virgo* emerged as the primary tool that prevented the eradication of women from Christian liturgical activity and officialdom. Because the term *virgo* was so multivalent and stemmed from the cult of the Virgin Mary, it could not be altered to eliminate women in the same manner as the masculine gendered categories, such as *apostle*. As a result, achieving the title of *virgo* wielded such power that some virginal men sought to reclaim the status for themselves.

Overall, the collection is an admirable attempt at defining those points in the medieval world where gender and religion intersect. Because the essays span more than a thousand years of the Western religious tradition and employ a wide array of techniques, they explicitly demonstrate how many venues are yet left to explore before historians can understand fully medieval concepts of gender and religion. Perhaps, the greatest achievement of the collection as a whole is that it clearly demonstrates the fluidity of such notions.

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Martyrdom, Murder, and Magic: Child Saints and Their Cults in Medieval Europe. By Patricia Healy Wasyliw. [Studies in Church History, Vol. 2.] (New York: Peter Lang. 2008. Pp. 203. \$67.95. ISBN 978-0-820-42764-5.)

Patricia Healy Wasyliw has produced a general survey, and at the same time an impressively thick description, of the veneration of children as saints across fifteen centuries of Christian Europe. The *Acta Sanctorum*, the *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*, and many other more specific sources and studies have been learnedly excavated and ransacked. The work is heavily footnoted (indeed, so much so that readers will long for the notes to have been placed at the bottom of the page rather than at the end of the text). A complicated historical route has been ably traced through the literary, liturgical, and popular devotions surrounding deceased children in Europe. We hear of the Holy Innocents, child martyrs, children murdered (often not for any ostensibly religious motives), and alleged victims of specifically ritual murders. Although an admittedly marginal subject matter, sainthood that was accorded to children is a fascinating and colorful historical thread running through Europe’s formative centuries. Wasyliw’s marshaling of evidence sheds light on the place of children and on ideas of childhood within European society. It also illuminates developing conceptions of sanctity, piety, and innocence within that society. The world described in this study—a world of relics, miracles, and shrines; of hagiography and theology; of chronicles and histories—helps to document the intersection of lay, clerical, and theological forces at play in the often problematical fashioning of the infant or youthful saint, whether for a local audience or on a larger stage that often included much of Europe. The author can be quite pithy in describing the complexities of her subject: