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## Religious Crisis and Civic Transformation

Kimba Allie Tichenor

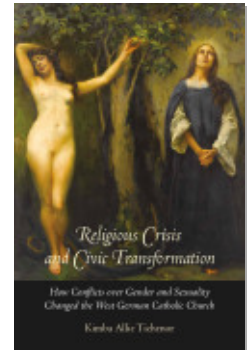
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*Religious Crisis and Civic Transformation: How Conflicts over Gender and Sexuality Changed the West German Catholic Church.*

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## Foreword

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*Lisa Fishbayn Joffe*

Kimba Allie Tichenor notes that the challenge of reconciling women's rights and religious law is often raised in discussions of Islam in Europe but is rarely explored in connection with Christian denominations. The Brandeis Series on Gender, Culture, Religion, and Law is committed to publishing work that deepens our understanding of the dynamics surrounding women's struggle for gender equality under religious law across a broad range of traditions. Much can be learned from comparing the struggles for ritual inclusion, interpretive authority, and equality under law in different religious traditions and different nations.

Some of the works in this series are directly comparative, such as Jan Feldman's study of religious women's advocacy in Israel and Kuwait in *Citizenship, Faith, and Feminism* and our anthology *Gender, Religion, and Family Law*. Others present an in-depth analysis of a single religious tradition. Jewish law is explored in Ronit Irshai's *Fertility and Jewish Law*, Susan Weiss and Netty Gross-Horowitz's *Marriage and Divorce in the Jewish State*, and Margalit Shilo's *Girls of Liberty: The Struggle for Suffrage in Mandatory Palestine*. Islam is the focus of Chitra Raghavan and James Levine's book *Self-Determination and Women's Rights in Muslim Societies*, and Janet Bennion's *Polygamy in Primetime* looks at the changing face of Mormonism in America.

Tichenor's book on struggles over women's rights in Catholicism provides a detailed and incisive analysis of the decline and reemergence of the Catholic Church as a potent political force in postwar Germany. She demonstrates how the worldwide Catholic Church responded to women's demands by developing and emphasizing theological norms that made achievement of gender equality more difficult.

The Catholic Church has faced the dual challenge of declining interest among men in becoming celibate priests and of women's increasing demands to be allowed to take on a priestly role. Tichenor describes how the German Catholic Church resisted claims that it afford equality in achieving access to ritual roles and in shaping religious doctrine on contraception, abortion, and assisted reproduction. As in other religious traditions, Catholicism confronted the "feminization" of the community of congregants filling the

pews and available to do the work of creating and maintaining communal religious life. As women took on much of the day-to-day work in churches (and synagogues), they began to ask why they should continue to be excluded from the more highly valued ritual roles of rabbi in the synagogue and altar server or deacon in the Catholic Church. Tichenor describes how this challenge was viewed by the Catholic Church as an attack not just on male dominance in the Church but also on the theological underpinnings of priestly power. Recognizing equality between men and women would necessitate recognizing equality between clergy and laity.

In other religious traditions, the creation of opportunities for advanced learning about religious doctrine has enabled women to become qualified to fulfill positions of religious leadership and to become informed challengers of doctrines that purport to exclude them on the basis of their sex. Over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, women have become eligible for ordination in other Christian denominations and in the more liberal branches of Judaism. In 2015 a small cohort of Orthodox Jewish women in America and Israel were ordained with authority to decide questions of law. Women have been recognized as pleaders in rabbinical and Islamic courts, as Islamic court judges, and as authorized interpreters of some branches of Jewish law, as *yoatzot halacha*.

Tichenor's elegant and comprehensive work helps us understand how and why the Catholic Church has been able to resist similar demands and the implications its stance has had. She shows how even widespread demands for gender equality among members of a religious community may not translate into transformation of discriminatory religious norms. Many women and moderates have left the Church. The reconstituted body is even more conservative and punitive toward those seeking gender equality than the old Church.