

Katharina Schütz Zell. *Church Mother: The Writings of a Protestant Reformer in Sixteenth-Century Germany.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006. xxix + 267 pp. \$22.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-226-97967-0.



Reviewed by Tryntje Helfferich

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Katharina Schütz Zell was born right before the turn of the sixteenth century in the city of Strassburg, a free imperial city and leading population center in the Holy Roman Empire. Zell was a pious child, and at the age of ten decided to reject the world and dedicate her life to God as a chaste laywoman. By 1521 or 22, however, hearing the preaching of the local pastor Matthew Zell, she became convinced that Martin Luther's teachings were correct and so rededicated her life to spreading his message of justification by faith alone. In 1523 she followed another of Luther's teachings by marrying Matthew Zell, thereby becoming one of the first examples of a Protestant pastor's wife. In the following years Strassburg became renowned (or infamous, depending on one's religious orientation) as an early center of Protestantism through the work of such men as Matthew Zell and Martin Bucer. As Zell's wife, Katharina saw herself as a partner in his ministry. This led her to take an active role in public teaching, to perform social work, to offer spiritual counseling to those in need, and to produce a large body of religious writings. Such activities were not at all common among even that first

generation of pastor's wives, and they both annoyed many of her husband's colleagues at the time, and scandalized parts of the larger Protestant community in years to come.

In this new, and excellent, addition to "The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe" series, Elsie McKee provides readers with a history of Katharina Schütz Zell's life and a selection of her writings in English translation. As with all books in this series, the volume begins with an identical nineteen-page series introduction (by Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil Jr.), which presents readers with a general primer on women's and gender history. Following this is the volume editor's introduction, where Elsie McKee provides a brief summary (only thirty-plus pages) of her 1999 biography of Katharina Schütz Zell.[1] This summary is well written, thoroughly researched, and gracefully analyzed, and serves as a good teaser for those who missed the earlier and more comprehensive volume. Occasionally, however, the origin of this introduction as a slimmed-down version of a larger work is clear, as with the mysterious appearance on page 9 of Martin Bucer as merely "Bucer,"

without any indication of who he might have been. Such minor editorial lapses aside, the introduction is an example of interdisciplinary history as it should be, for McKee integrates her biography of this fascinating woman with political, religious, literary, and gender history.

McKee follows her introduction with what she calls a "Note on Translation," in which she nicely explains not only her decisions on how to transform sixteenth-century Alsatian into readable modern English, but also on the selection and organization of texts. This latter choice, the organization of texts, is an interesting one. Rather than present the seven documents chronologically, she splits them into two thematic chapters. The first contains those of Schütz Zell's writings that are "generally characterized by the conflict between Rome and those who broke with Rome" (p. 41). The second contains documents that present more biographical details and that concern Schütz Zell's reaction to the religious divisions emerging within the second generation of Protestant reformers. For those readers who would like to follow the texts more chronologically, McKee suggests that they do so by referring to the dates given for the documents in the table of contents. Alas, readers find an editorial snafu at this point, for the table of contents provides no dates for any of Schütz Zell's writings. The only date given is that for a letter of Ludwig Rabus to Schütz Zell, which is contained in, and makes up the entirety of, the Appendix.

Each of McKee's two chapters of translations begins with a further introduction, and within the chapters each selection also begins with its own introduction. These numerous introductions are a bit overwhelming but also quite valuable, since they offer even more focused analyses of Schütz Zell's role as a woman and as a practical reformer—that is, one dedicated to meeting the every-day spiritual needs of the common people, and one who thought shared community more important than differences in Protestant dogma.

McKee also expands here on her argument that not only was Schütz Zell a pastor's wife, she was a "lay reformer, teacher, and pastor" (p. 43) in her own right. McKee stresses Schütz Zell's discomfort with the fragmentation of the Protestant community, and argues that her response was that of a lay theologian determined to maintain her intellectual independence from men such as Ludwig Rabus and Caspar Schwenckfeld. (This provides a corrective to earlier scholarship that portrayed Schütz Zell as a Schwenckfelder.)

Early Modern German is notoriously difficult to translate, but in the translations themselves, which probably make up about half of the book in total, McKee has done an admirable job bringing this extraordinary woman to life. The selections are well chosen, and include samples from an entire lifetime of work, from Schütz Zell's 1524 letter to the suffering Protestant women of the town of Kentzingen, to her public defense of her husband's right to marry (her, specifically), to her 1553 letter to Caspar Schwenckfeld, to her 1558 book containing her meditations on the Psalms and the Lord's Prayer. Again, the only minor quibble is with an editorial decision, in this case the decision not to begin each document on its own page. This would not have added many pages to the overall total, but would have made life somewhat more pleasant for the reader.

One final criticism, which is of an editorial decision I found to be strangely disturbing: the cover of this book is entirely taken up with a portrait of a pious sixteenth-century woman. Yet entirely by accident I noticed the fine print on the very bottom of the back cover, which indicated that the woman portrayed so prominently on the front cover was not, as one would absolutely assume, Katharina Schütz Zell, but instead Wibrandis Rosenblatt! Now Wibrandis Rosenblatt was one of Schütz Zell's contemporaries, and the wife of Bucer (among others), but honestly! Her name appears nowhere in the volume, and while substituting her picture is not technically dishonest—

nowhere does the book say that the cover shows Schütz Zell—it certainly smacks of editorial sleight-of-hand and feels vaguely unscholarly.[2]

Setting aside this and all other non-substantive criticisms, however, I heartily recommend this book and applaud McKee's decision to issue these important texts in translation. Given the multiple roles Schütz Zell played—as unrepentantly outspoken pastor's wife (and later widow), as observer of the early Reformation, as Protestant polemicist, and as author—this book is not only interesting in its own right, it could also be useful for many different courses. Indeed, a quick Google search shows that it is already on the required book lists of a number of Fall 2006 courses. This volume, with its wealth of quality analysis and easy-to-read translations, certainly will, and should, appear on many more such book lists in the years to come.

Notes

[1]. Elsie Anne McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell*, vol. 1, *The Life and Thought of a Sixteenth-Century Reformer*; vol. 2, *The Writings: A Critical Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

[2]. For more on Wibrandis Rosenblatt, see Lisbeth Haase, *Wibrandis Rosenblatt: ein Leben an der Seite der Reformatoren* (Stuttgart: Edition Anker, 2000).

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