



Andreas Rutz. *Bildung - Konfession - Geschlecht: Religiöse Frauengemeinschaften und die katholische Mädchenbildung im Rheinland (16. bis 18. Jahrhundert).* Mainz: Philipp von Zabern Verlag, 2006. 505 S. EUR 51.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-8053-3589-8.

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Early Modern Female Education

When discussing early modern schools, historians often treat the history of early modern education in a masculine context. Through extensive archival research, Andreas Rutz dispels this conventional approach by tackling the topic of education for young women sponsored by the Catholic Church. In a study that covers a great deal of ground, Rutz deals with the Rhineland in the period from the Reformation to the end of the eighteenth century.

Rutz reveals that the history of feminine education is the history of coeducation. Most girls attended parish elementary schools, where they studied reading and the catechism with boys. Thus, the girls' school was a marginal phenomenon in early modern education but one connected with Catholic reform. In fact, Rutz proves that the girls' school was a result of the pedagogical and confessional discourse of the early modern period, which demanded separate education for women. Furthermore, Rutz demonstrates that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century towns had to be sufficiently wealthy to be able to educate boys and girls separately.

The engagement of religious women and their communities was decisive in the development of a Catholic system of female education. In addition to women's teaching orders, Rutz emphasizes the role of tertiaries and *d  votes*. These two groups were more prevalent than teaching orders, whose houses were concentrated in a few larger cities. Because they did not have to live in cloisters, *d  votes* and tertiaries could be active in

smaller towns and in the countryside. The work of tertiaries as teachers was not limited to the Rhineland. They were active in other regions of the Holy Roman Empire and in Europe. *D  votes*, in contrast, appear to have been a phenomenon of the northwest. Their work in the Rhineland has parallels to the north and the south of the Netherlands but not in the rest of the empire.

The flexibility of the *d  votes* and the tertiaries made it possible for them to run their own private schools and to serve as teaching personnel in communal or parish schools. As a result, Rutz rightly points out the fallacy of seeing Catholic female education as synonymous with women's teaching orders. Still, in contrast to the women in medieval cloisters, members of early modern female orders, along with tertiaries and *d  votes*, ran schools for girls with up to a hundred students. These communities wanted to realize the goals of the Catholic reform, which espoused a broader mission. Rutz shows, however, that secular authorities did not necessarily welcome this development. Towns were ambivalent about new cloisters because they had to balance gains from education and the promotion of Catholicism with financial losses caused by property that fell into mortmain.

Rutz demonstrates that these communities and their schools for girls were able to realize the goal that spiritual and secular authorities had shared since the Reformation—the end of coeducation. Authorities saw such a goal as more than a moral necessity. The separation of girls made it possible to teach them gender-

specific skills. However, female education was not always successful. Rutz explains that the failure to end coeducation was usually a result of money. Early modern schools suffered from chronic underfunding; a duplication of structures was only possible in larger cities where religious communities could acquire funds to support their convents and schools.

Secular teachers were also active in female education. Their efforts came into play in the eighteenth century. Rutz explains that in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, female education was an important instrument of confessionalization. Religious communities offered a program that taught religion and presented women with a particular notion of ideal Catholic womanhood: it was characterized by piety, virtue, and chastity. According to Rutz, little room was available to secular teachers in this educational arrangement until the eighteenth century. At that point, expansion of education and growing secularization created a situation in which girls' schools were run increasingly by secular teachers without, however, replacing religious communities. In the reform

discussion of the Enlightenment, religious communities still played an important role. In the 1770s and 1780s, school commissions wanted to organize secular education differently. They hoped to use the existing system of parochial education for their plans. Because of the impact of the Enlightenment, however, cloisters attracted fewer novices and the quality of education was deteriorating, leading to financial problems. These problems in the cloister prevented educational reform and demonstrated that after two hundred years of success, convents came to be seen as liabilities in education. Not until the nineteenth century would a renaissance of female religious communities occur, renewing their importance in education.

Rutz's study effectively prepares the way for further studies in female education, but I would have liked to learn what these early modern educational opportunities meant for women in their lives. Overall, however, this volume provides access and an excellent introduction to female education and how the early modern tendency to end coeducation was aided by the religious communities.

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