

## BOOK REVIEWS



**Katharina Schütz Zell.** *Church Mother: The Writings of a Protestant Reformer in Sixteenth-Century Germany.* Edited and translated by Elsie McKee. (The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe.) University of Chicago Press, 2006. Pp. xxix + 267.

ELSIE MCKEE, professor of Reformation Studies and the History of Worship at the Princeton Theological Seminary and ordained Presbyterian Elder at Witherspoon Presbyterian Church in Princeton, has previously edited and has now translated most of the writings of the sixteenth-century Strasbourg “Protestant lay theologian” (p. 41), Katharina Schütz Zell (ca. 1498–1562) from their original Alsatian dialect of Early New High German into modern (US) English.<sup>1</sup> McKee has now published these translations together with a highly condensed version of her biography of Schütz Zell in a volume of the University of Chicago Press series *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* edited by Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil Jr.

Volume editor McKee has previously identified herself as Schütz Zell’s “ghost writer.”<sup>2</sup> This acknowledges McKee’s significant role in the transmission of the ideas and image of her subject. For the English-language edition of Schütz Zell’s works, McKee adds thirty-five pages of introduction and then almost three more pages of bibliography before turning to her briefer introductions of Schütz Zell as “lay reformer, teacher and pastor” (p. 43) and to Schütz Zell’s first published text, a pamphlet which appeared in 1524. The (translated) voice of Schütz Zell is therefore not “heard” until around seventy pages into the text. Instructors wishing to assign this book in an undergraduate class (and it seems that this is the target audience) should be aware that, although it is around 300 pages in length, only about 140 of those pages actually contain Schütz Zell’s (translated) words, and those pages are often densely footnoted. The editors have clearly decided that Schütz Zell’s writings require a tremendous amount of introduction and interpretation in order to be accessible to the proposed audience.

Each volume in the series includes editors King and Rabil’s introduction

which states, “the other voice [women’s] remained only a voice, and one only dimly heard” and go on to assert that “those writing in the tradition of the other voice must be recognized as the source and origin of the mature feminist tradition [...]” (p. xxvii). So what did Schütz Zell, as mediated to the modern reader by McKee, say?

One can begin with the author’s name. McKee points out that she was “known to history by her married name as Katherine Zell” (p. i). The story related in McKee’s biographical volume is a bit more complicated. There she states, “[Schütz Zell] has many names, and identifying her presents some challenges.”<sup>3</sup> In the early modern German-speaking world, commoners were often referred to by their fathers’ surnames, with women receiving a feminine ending, so Katharina Schütz Zell, daughter of Elisabeth Gerster and her husband the Strasbourg woodworker and burgher Jacob Schütz, would be known as “Katharina Schützin,” even after her marriage in 1523 to an older, dynamic Protestant preacher in the city, Matthew Zell. Some people still referred to her in this way after she died. Her first two published writings, “Letter to the Suffering Women [...]” (1524) and “Apologia for Master Matthew Zell, her Husband,” probably of the same year, appeared under this name. In a significant move, however, Katharina Schützin then shifted positions and began publishing under the name “Katharina Zellin,” a name which she took and held in print for the rest of her life. It seems clear that she wished to position herself next to her well-known preacher-husband.<sup>4</sup>

Clerical celibacy was a tremendously important issue for women and men in the early years of the Reformation. Like a number of famous women of the period, Schütz Zell chose to publicly oppose this teaching of the Christian authorities at the time by marrying a cleric. Although she was not a nun like her more famous co-religionist Katharina von Bora, whose relationship with Martin Luther is well known, her decision to wed a priest was nonetheless controversial. Schütz Zell’s pamphlet defending her actions was similarly controversial, and the Strasbourg city council ordered it to be confiscated. Its reasoned defense of her position based on her readings of German translations of Scripture reveals the mental world of an urban woman of modest origins coming to grips with the ideas of her time as circulated by Protestant reformers in the southwestern reaches of the Holy Roman Empire. As she wrote, “[...] since I saw the great fear and furious opposition to clerical marriage, and also the great harlotry of the clergy, I myself married a priest with the intention of encouraging and making a way for all Christians—as I hope has also happened. Therefore, I also made a little book [...]” (p. 77).

Schütz Zell was decades younger than her husband, and a good portion of

her life took place after his death in 1548. In this period she continued to publish. An oration she delivered at her husband's grave after the formal funeral ceremonies ("Lament and Exhortation[...]") came out at an important time in Strasbourg's history, when military defeat of Protestant princes' armies by Imperial forces had led to the organization of an interim agreement allowing for limited legal toleration of non-Protestants in Strasbourg. Schütz Zell's image of her husband as a good shepherd in difficult times helped rally the reformer's congregation at a key moment of generational change in the Protestant movement in the Empire.

One of the most illuminating of Schütz Zell's publications is her collection of correspondence with her former foster son Ludwig Rabus who had left Strasbourg for a position as preacher in the city of Ulm. In this pamphlet, which came out in late 1557 and which Schütz Zell apparently sold out of her home, she provides numerous insights into a female reformer's understanding of herself amid the backbiting and invective which characterized much of the Protestant scene at this time. McKee outlines eight ways the widow Zell presented herself in this published correspondence (p. 221). These included identifying with the image of Anna, being the spouse of Master Matthew (and "Matthew's rib") who had helped him with his congregation, and as someone who had assisted religious refugees who had ended up in her city.

The strength of McKee's translation is the publication of Schütz Zell's words, along with the editor's detailed assistance in reading them. The contextualization in the histories of the Holy Roman Empire or of the city and diocese of Strasbourg could use further development and at times is even confusing. For example, McKee's decision to refer to the traditional Christian religious authorities as "Roman" rather than "Roman Catholic" (justified at p. 15, n. 21) makes for some geographically-specific readings. The emphasis on disagreements among the Protestant camps poses a similar challenge for readers. It might have been more useful to place Schütz Zell in a broader context of religious women's lives in Strasbourg, perhaps with more emphasis on the "Roman" and Jewish women in the city (whether real or imagined), stressing the interaction between confessions instead of within them, as Amy Leonard has recently done in her significant study of nuns' strategies for survival in Strasbourg in this period.<sup>5</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Elsie Anne McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell. Volume I: The Life and Thought of a Sixteenth-Century Reformer; Volume II: The Writings. A Critical Edition*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought 69 (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

2. McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell. Volume I*, p. xviii.

3. McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell. Volume I*, p. xiii.

4. Ironically, it seems that now this author is better known than her husband. See, for example, Peter Matheson's entry on her, listed using the masculine form of her husband's name, "Katherine Zell," in Paul F. Grendler, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Renaissance* (NY: Scribner's, 1999) v. 6, p. 339. There is no entry for Matthew Zell. It should be noted that all of the works cited by Matheson were written by McKee.

5. Amy Leonard, *Nails in the Wall: Catholic Nuns in Reformation Germany* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 2005).



**Jeremy Goldberg.** *Communal Discord, Child Abduction, and Rape in the Later Middle Ages.* (The New Middle Ages Series.) Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Pp. xiv + 239.

THIS BOOK IS largely a detailed study of one case, *Marrays c. de Rouclif*, heard by York's diocesan court in 1365–1366. The case was initiated by an action for the restitution of conjugal rights, an area that fell within the purview of canon law, with John Marrays claiming that his wife, Alice de Rouclif, had been abducted by Sir Brian de Rouclif, who claimed wardship over her. The case was defended on the grounds that Alice was not legally John's wife as she had been too young to consent to marriage. These two points presumably give Goldberg the "child abduction" of the title, although the court ruled in John's favor, and Alice was fairly swiftly restored to John, despite an appeal. The case is "extraordinary," according to Goldberg (p. 29), because of the number of witnesses examined (fifty-seven when the norm in similar cases is six) and the number of female witnesses brought (thirty-three, when the ratio of male to female witnesses was usually over seven to one).

The book seems to have two different foci: one concerns the evidence and how we approach it; the other relates to women and consent. Part one sticks most closely to the first, as it uses *Marrays c. de Rouclif* to discuss a range of themes and questions. It is entitled "Alice's evidence," even though she was not