



Nails in the Wall: Catholic Nuns in Reformation Germany (Women in Culture and Society)

Amy Leonard

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During the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther instituted new ideologies addressing gender, marriage, chastity, and religious life that threatened Catholic monasticism. Yet many living in cloistered religious communities, particularly women, refused to accept these new terms and were successful in their opposition to the new Protestant culture.

Focusing primarily on a group of Dominican nuns in Strasbourg, Germany, Amy Leonard's *Nails in the Wall* outlines the century-long battle between these nuns and the Protestant city council. With savvy strategies that employed charm, wealth, and political and social connections, the nuns were able to sustain their Catholic practices. Leonard's in-depth archival research uncovers letters about and records of the nuns' struggle to maintain their religious beliefs and way of life in the face of Protestant reforms. She tells the story of how they worked privately to keep Catholicism alive—continuing to pray in Latin, smuggling in priests to celebrate Mass, and secretly professing scores of novices to ensure the continued survival of their convents. This fascinating and heartening study shows that, far from passively allowing the Protestants to dismantle their belief system, the women of the Strasbourg convents were active participants in the battle over their vocation and independence.

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