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## Review of Christine Peters, *Patterns of Piety: Women, Gender and Religion in Late Medieval and Reformation England*

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Christine Peters. *Patterns of Piety: Women, Gender and Religion in Late Medieval and Reformation England*.

Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003. xv + 389 pp. index. append. illus. tpls. bibl. \$65. ISBN: 0-521-58062-5.

Peters has written an important book about religion in late medieval and early modern England. Her discussion of the implications for women and gender in the transition in England from Catholicism to Protestantism is ingenious, thoughtful, and elegant. It is thoroughly researched and beautifully written. Peters questions the assumption that the loss of the Virgin Mary was a blow to women's status, arguing that Protestantism is not an alien environment for women because of the model of the frail Christian as a woman devoted to Christ. Rather than seeing the decisive moment for women's involvement being the break with Rome, rather, she posits, it was the later shift in Protestantism from Lutheranism to a more Calvinist strain.

Peters begins the book with the question what was the impact of the English Reformation on women? As she admits, this is a far more difficult question that she had anticipated. As she notes, it is difficult for the historian who is researching individual acts of piety because most of that behavior, such as frequency of prayer, is unrecoverable. Peters demonstrates how subtle the issues are through her thorough and exhaustive scholarship. Most of the acts of piety that were documented involved some material investment and may have been influenced by such worldly concerns as status and display. As a result, women's religious activities were probably largely underrepresented. Peters's work responds to the work of such major scholars as Patrick Collinson and Eamon Duffy, who have characterized the sixteenth century as a period of continuity rather than change. Peters complicates the discussion by focusing on gender and women and by examining the period through that lens the importance of change over continuity becomes more clearly focused. Peters also refuses to accept the argument that in this period the laity was passive. Margery Kempe, far from passive, plays quite a role in the text.

Another fascinating aspect of Peters's book is her discussion of the attitudes toward female saints, Mary Magdalene, and especially the Virgin Mary. Peters examines how these attitudes changed from the fifteenth century onward. But

Peters is not interested only in how women responded to the Virgin and other female saints. She also discusses the male response to the Virgin Mary as well. Peters discusses the integration of the cults of Mary and of Christ into the concern for the salvation of the soul. One fifteenth-century sermon described Mary's power as not only stronger than any other saint but rivaling that even of Christ. This Mary was not only Queen of Heaven and Lady of the World, but was also the Empress of Hell, who could even command the obedience of demons. The powerful Mary during the Reformation becomes reframed as a representative grieving Christian, with Christ as the emblemized suffering reformer. Neither the Virgin Mary nor Mary Magdalene is lost to Protestantism. Peters demonstrates how Christocentric piety developed throughout the Reformation period. Peters suggests that as a result women did not experience the Reformation as an alien male environment, but rather as one where women could feel comfortable and at home with the representative frail Christian, a woman devoted to Christ. What caused women to limit in their involvement in congregations was not, Peters carefully demonstrates, the break of the Reformation, but rather the tendencies within an increasingly dominant Calvinistic strain of Protestantism.

Peters used churchwarden accounts extensively for her research. She also examined wills of both men and women and many printed sermons and other theological works of the period. This book is beautifully produced with many illustrations and a full bibliography as well as notes. It deserves to be widely read.

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