

Between rejection and affirmation. Women in religious literature of the polish Baroque

Abstract

This dissertation aims primarily to provide an anthropological reflection on how women are presented in religious writings following the Council of Trent (1545-1563) up to the 18th century. The work attempts to demonstrate the presence of women in the religious world from the 16th to 18th century, define all female related concepts existing within the analysed timeframe, including stereotypes, as well as providing the outlines for the female sanctity and the female model based on the two genres: hagiographies and funeral homilies and sermons. These texts are based on the general concept of persuasion and were intended to influence the society by presenting and disseminating specific personal models and standards of conduct. Two external factors had an effect on their content and form: historical context, i.e. the Council of Trent, with its clearly formulated demands to mend the catholic church following the reformation, and the patriarchal culture of that time, forming a social system of rule based on the gender dependent hierarchy. This dissertation is divided into three main parts. They all investigate the presentation of females in hagiographies, sermons, and funeral homilies respectively. The analysis shows that the perception of womanhood reflects, to a large extent, the interpretation contained in the Holy Bible, in particular the Book of Genesis and the Pauline epistles, or the exegesis of the letters by the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. Women who managed to go beyond the conventional standards set by the church and the society were saints. Taking the total control over their bodies, they were given the status of "the other", and the ascetic practices performed by such women placed them closer to the Christ suffering on the cross. The heroines of the post Trent hagiographies are also independent beings in social terms. Since they are considered to be saints, female related standards are no longer applicable to them and they no longer perform roles attributed to females. Other women are still required to be fully obedient to male authorities, both secular and religious. The standards of a good wife and, in general, of a good woman, contained in the pages of sermons, are only to reinforce this dependency.

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