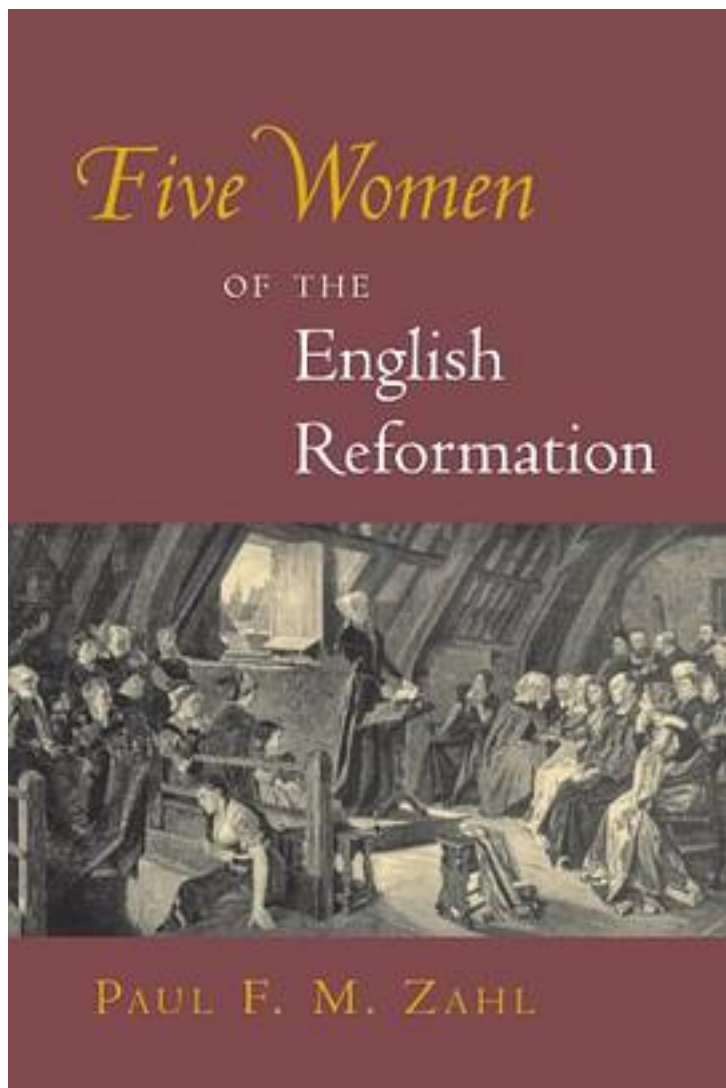


Five Women of the English Reformation



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Books on the history of the Reformation are filled with the heroic struggles and sacrifices of men. But this compelling volume puts the spotlight on five strong and intellectually gifted women who, because of their absolute and unconditional commitment to the advancement of Protestant Christianity, paid the cost of their reforming convictions with martyrdom, imprisonment, and exile. Anne Boleyn (1507-1536) introduced the Reformation to England, and Katharine Parr (1514-1548) saved it. Both women were riveted by early versions of the "justification by faith" doctrine that originated with Martin Luther and came to them through France. As a result, Anne Boleyn was beheaded. Katharine Parr narrowly avoided the same fate. Sixteen-year-old Jane Grey (1537-1554) and Anne Askew (1521-1546) both dared to criticize the Mass and were pioneers of Protestant views concerning superstition and symbols. Jane Grey was executed because of her Protestantism. Anne Askew was tortured and burned at the stake. Catherine Willoughby (1520-1580) anticipated later Puritan teachings on predestination and election and on the reformation of the church. She was forced to give up everything she had and to flee with her husband and nursing baby into exile. Paul Zahl vividly tells the stories of these five mothers of the English Reformation. All of these women were powerful theologians intensely interested in the religious concerns of their day. All but Anne Boleyn left behind a considerable body of written work - some of which is found in this book's appendices. It is the theological aspect of these women's remarkable achievements that Zahl seeks to underscore. Moreover, he also considers what the stories of these women have to say about the relation of gender to theology, human motivation, and God. An important epilogue by Mary Zahl contributes a contemporary woman's view of these fascinating historical figures. Extraordinary by any standard, Anne Boleyn, Anne Askew, Katharine Parr, Jane Grey, and Catherine Willoughby remain rich subjects for reflection and emulation hundreds of years later. The personalities of these five women, who spoke their Christian convictions with presence of mind and sharp intelligence within situations of life-and-death duress, are almost totemic in our enduring search for role models.

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