

this excellent book encourages others to pursue further investigation into this fascinating subject matter.

Michael Grossberg is to be congratulated for a thoughtful, perceptive and well-crafted analysis.

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YVONNE YAZBECK HADDAD and ELLISON BANKS FINDLY, eds. — *Women, Religion and Social Change*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985. Pp. 508.

Scholarship on women and religion has passed through several stages since its initial emergence in the late sixties. Early work tended to focus upon scriptural and theological bases of women's low status in Judaism and Christianity, and often was done with express political intent. The misogyny of western religious tradition was to be exposed, then transformed. In time, this attention to traditional prescriptive literature was superseded by a concern for what women actually did historically within whatever boundaries their cultural environment established. Often these studies tended to the hagiographic; "great women" were to be lifted up as exemplary foremothers. While both these enterprises — establishing the status of women in religious tradition and identifying women who triumphed over its limitations — remain important and valuable, they tend to reinforce a notion of religion which is static, institutional and conservative, and an understanding of women as primarily passive victims of male history.

Women, Religion and Social Change stands as a refreshing and stimulating challenge to these assumptions. In this exploratory volume, which emerged out of the Hartford Symposium on Women, Religion and Social Change, the contributors address the question of religion as an agent for, rather than as an impediment to, social transformation. Further, they consider the complex and often surprising contribution of women, as historical actors, to that process.

The first two sections competently engage the concerns of earlier scholarship, namely, the formation of religious tradition and the role of women in traditional institutions. Although little new ground is broken conceptually, Judith Baskin's use of anthropological material from Sherry Ortner and Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo in "The Separation of Women in Rabbinic Judaism" is a welcome exception, and helps locate the discussion beyond the realm of apologetic or invective. Jane Smith's "Women, Religion and Social Change in Early Islam" is likewise recommended for its careful, nuanced exploration of the foundations of Muslim tradition. Less successful are essays by Ellison Banks Findly ("Gargi at the King's Court: Women and Philosophic Innovation in Ancient India"), Nancy Schuster ("Striking a Balance: Women and Images of Women in Early Chinese Buddhism"), and Sandra Robinson ("Hindu Paradigms of Women: Images and Values"). All contain uncritical and/or apologetic elements uncharacteristic of the volume as a whole. For example, Findly speaks of a "new fashion in child marriage" being "in vogue" (p. 40) as if it were simply a question of changing tastes, but does not inquire further into the socio-political or historical factors leading to this development. Likewise, Robinson notes that a central rite in Indian women's popular piety is now often performed by men, with no further explanation (p. 209). It is precisely these sorts of changes in the actual structure of women's lives which should be central to the study of women, religion and social change, but which the study of "images" alone tends to obscure.

The text makes its most unique and exciting contribution to scholarship in Section III, "Women, Religion and Revolution in the Modern World." Essays by Yvonne Haddad and William Darrow explore the crucial question of women's role in the revolutions of the Middle East; Haddad is particularly insightful in her treatment of the differing status and roles accorded women in liberal nationalist, socialist, and Islamist revolutionary programs. As Darrow's contribution shows, a very

real price was paid by formerly "liberated" women for reappropriating their tradition, although there are reasons why women might willingly make that choice. Both Darrow and Haddad teach the reader much about contemporary Middle Eastern perceptions of the West. One issue of particular concern, cited by Haddad, is the belief in some Islamist quarters that gender equality is a Jewish plot, a plan of International Zionism to subvert women and destroy Islam from within (p. 291, 305). In Haddad's thorough and complex portrayal, the absolute centrality of women to the Islamist revolutionary program is made plain.

Also deserving of mention is Michael Letsz' "The Soong Sisters and China's Revolutions, 1911-1936." This fascinating story of two American-raised, Methodist-educated sisters, and their subsequent marriages to Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek suggests that the common understanding of women as "the power behind the throne" is not always platitudinous. Letsz' treatment of Soong Chingling and Soong Mayling's differing views of revolution, and the positions they consequently took on the issue of women's rights is likewise illuminating.

The volume concludes with the section, "Women, Religion and the Transformation of Society in North America," in which the obligatory "impact of feminism" question is addressed by Antoinette Iadarola and Ellen Umansky. Less conventionally, Ann Braude's "Spirits Defend the Rights of Women: Spiritualism and Changing Sex Roles in Nineteenth Century America" convincingly shows the power of religion to subvert the very ideology it ostensibly seeks to uphold. Braude notes:

When Spiritualists took seriously Victorian ideas about women's nature, they found that these dictated radical departures from Victorian norms for woman's role. In woman's spiritual experience, they found a warrant for participation in public life (p. 428).

Further, "Spiritualism bolstered the claims of the women's rights movement by integrating them into a religious system that had a strong appeal to mid-century Americans (pp. 429-30)."

Other contributions to the volume include essays on women in Buddhism, the Magdalen in Christian art, women in Islamic art, women in the Nicaraguan Revolution, Iroquois women, and the nineteenth century abolitionists, the Grimke sisters. The breadth of concerns addressed throughout, the inclusion of all tradition, east and west, mainstream and marginal, add to the text's distinctiveness.

In reading *Women, Religion and Social Change* it becomes obvious that the complex inter-dynamic of religion and society can only be enriched by focussing attention upon the experience and contribution of women. Although occasionally uneven, as is not unexpected in a volume containing such a range of topics and perspectives, *Women, Religion and Social Change* contains many valuable and original contributions to scholarship; indeed, Haddad's article alone warrants its high recommendation.

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D.J. HALL — *Clifford Sifton Vol. 2: A Lonely Eminence 1901-1929*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985. Pp. 437.

When the first volume of this biography appeared in 1981 it was widely acclaimed as a scholarly study of Sifton's political career. It was clearly based on a thorough and meticulous study of the Sifton papers and told us a great deal that we had not known, especially about Sifton's electoral activities and his administration of the Department of the Interior. The first volume was also notable for its scholarly restraint; where the evidence was incomplete or contradictory, the author did not impose an interpretation. The second volume has the same virtues. Indeed, the biography is divided into two volumes only because of its length. The year 1900 was not a year of transition or a turning