
Elisabeth Wengler  
College of Saint Benedict / Saint John's University

From the establishment of the Reformation in 1536, Geneva's pastors knew that inculcating "right" belief and religious practice was essential to the success of religious reform. To accomplish this goal they created new institutions including the Consistory, a faith and morals court where the pastors and lay elders presided. The Genevan Consistory enforced ecclesiastical discipline, and the pastors, particularly John Calvin, saw it as a tool for educating the laity about Christian belief and behavior. The consensus among historians has been that it contributed to the success of the Reformation as well as the success of Calvin. Robert Kingdon has argued that the Consistory was crucial to Calvin's rise and power.¹ William Monter argues in his classic work, Calvin's Geneva, that "[Calvin's] basic achievement, upon which his numerous biographers agree, was to instill Christian discipline upon a refractory and even revolutionary population that had just uprooted her traditional spiritual leader." Monter asserts that "Geneva was pliable material which Calvin gradually shaped into a disciplined and educated community . . . Calvin's

¹ Robert Kingdon and his team of scholars are editing and publishing the records of the Genevan Consistory for the years 1542-64. Librairie Droz has published volumes 1-4 so far. For an overview of the Consistory and a description of the editing project, see Robert Kingdon, "Calvin and the Establishment of Consistory Discipline in Geneva: The Institution and the Men who Directed it," Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis 70 (1990): 158-72.
community was not a forum for discussion, but a closed society.\textsuperscript{2}

While the Consistory was diligent in seeking out misbehavior, creating confessional conformity among sixteenth-century Genevan women was not as easy as Monter alleges, nor was discussion absent.\textsuperscript{3} The new religious regime faced challenges throughout Calvin's tenure, and women were among the vocal dissenters. The Consistory registers reveal that Genevan women thought carefully about religious matters and even about theology; some were interested in discussing their ideas and even arguing about religion with the pastors. However, women's religious ideas have been largely ignored, and this neglect has resulted in an overly optimistic assessment of the ease with which the Reformation was implemented. Histories of the Genevan Reformation like that of Monter and more recently William Naphy highlight the city's more famous and politically motivated religious controversies, which were resolved in Calvin's favor.\textsuperscript{4} More mundane religious dissent has been largely

---


\textsuperscript{3} In his research on La Rochelle, Kevin Robbins challenges the notion that that city was a bastion of orthodox Calvinism, citing contentious relations between the church and municipal authorities as well as difficulties faced by its Consistory in disciplining the faithful. Although most Rochelais abandoned Catholicism, Robbins argues that heterodoxy was more widespread there than previously recognized: Kevin Robbins, \textit{City on the Ocean Sea: La Rochelle, 1530-1650: Urban Society, Religion, and Politics on the French Atlantic Frontier} (Leiden: Brill, 1997), ch. 3, esp. 132-46. Karen Spierling has observed that enduring kinship networks of Genevan Protestants and their Catholic relatives show that "mid-sixteenth-century Geneva was neither a closed nor purely Reformed society." Karen Spierling, "Making Use of God's Remedies: Negotiating the Material Care of Children in Reformation Geneva," \textit{Sixteenth Century Journal} 36:3 (2005): 785-807.

\textsuperscript{4} William Naphy has examined the influence of politics on the religious Reformation and concluded that, with the elimination of hostile political factions, Calvin triumphed. His evidence primarily comes from government sources and notarial documents, and his discussions of religious disputes focus on those with a political dimension involving leading citizens: William Naphy, \textit{Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).
overlooked, but these cases constituted the lion's share of the Consistory's work and were the type of cases in which women were most often involved. When women diverged from orthodoxy, their religious beliefs and practices tended to be individual rather than part of collective dissent. Analysis of individual cases reveals the depth of women's participation in religious reform and, in some cases, tenacious dissent from the pastors' interpretation of it.

A wide variety of women challenged the "official" Reformation, including nuns, crypto-Catholic lay women, Protestants broadly defined, single women, wives, widows, immigrants, and Genevan natives of all socio-economic statuses. In this article, I will highlight three cases of women who saw themselves as good Christians and accepted at least some elements of reformed Protestantism but nonetheless challenged the pastors on religious matters. None were outright Catholics, Anabaptists, or adherents to another sect, although they may have been influenced by them. These women did not write, but their words have been preserved in the registers of the Genevan Consistory and those of the secular institutions that worked with the Consistory. Although these sources make it difficult to discern the nuances of the beliefs and sometimes even theological arguments of those called before the courts, individuals' ideas about religious matters expressed in these texts can tell us more about the reception of religious reform among the population than the better-known and larger-scale controversies that highlight the primarily political power struggles of elites. Women's responses to the Consistory's questions indicate that their religious beliefs and practices were

---

<sup>5</sup> Not surprisingly, Genevan women tended to be less involved than men in the most politically charged religious disputes. Recent research is giving more attention to Genevans' religious ideas, and the publication of the Consistory registers should encourage this trend. In addition to Spierling, see also Thomas Lambert, "Preaching, Praying and Policing the Reform in Sixteenth-Century Geneva" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1998) and Elisabeth Wengler, "Women, Religion, and Reform in Sixteenth-Century Geneva" (Ph.D. diss., Boston College, 1999).
influenced by their own consciences, social and economic circumstances, and gender. The wide variety of religious views among sixteenth-century Genevan women suggests that heterodoxy, discussion, and disagreement about religious reform were more prevalent than historians of the Genevan Reformation have recognized. Finally, their testimony shows that women believed they had a role to play in reforming religious belief and behavior in sixteenth-century Geneva.

Jeanne Bonna, known as Pertemps

Soon after the Reformation was established in Geneva, Jeanne Bonna, known as Pertemps, was accused of rebellion against the Reformation, and she left the city because of that charge. Five years later, she returned but still was not entirely in accord with the Reformation and was accused of hearing mass. She belonged to a well-established Genevan family. Her son Claude was one of Geneva's four leading magistrates at the time his mother was called before the Consistory, and he often sat on that court as the representative of the civic government. His mother's responses to the Consistory's questions show that she understood some of the most important elements of the reformed faith. She claimed that she attended sermons on Sundays and could say the creed in French, demonstrating that she knew the pastors' minimum requirements of the faithful: that they attend the sermons and say their prayers in the vernacular. In addition, she knew enough scripture to cite it in her responses, demonstrating that she recognized its religious authority. In fact, she told the Consistory that "where the Word of God is, God is, and that she conforms to the Word of God." Pertemps even seemed to understand the reformed doctrine about the Lord's

8 Ibid., 1:24: 30 Mar. 1542.
supper; she offered that "she believes in Holy Communion as God said: 'This is my body, and do this in my memory'."9 In a subsequent appearance before the court, she answered the Consistory's question of whether Jesus Christ is or is not in the communion bread by saying that "[s]he believes that Jesus Christ is in heaven."10 She demonstrated that she understood justification by faith when she offered her opinion "that Our Lord, by the merit of his passion, will pardon her."11 She added that "she understands that no one will be damned if it pleases God," suggesting that she also understood the doctrine of predestination.12 Compared to many of the Genevans who came before the Consistory in those early years, she had quite extensive knowledge of the reformed faith.

Nonetheless, she followed her conscience on religious matters. When asked "why she is not satisfied with communion as celebrated in this city but goes elsewhere," she responded "she goes where it seems good to her."13 She admitted to the Consistory that she continued to say the rosary, pray to the Virgin (whom she called "her advocate"), and read from old Latin prayer books, all practices the reformed pastors expressly forbade.14 She argued that there was nothing wrong with these activities. Moreover, she rejected the pastors' claim to knowledge of the "correct" interpretation of scripture by paraphrasing Acts 20:29-30. "[O]ne must be aware that the Lord has said that ravishing wolves would come," Pertemps warned, and she added that "she does not know who these ravishing wolves are or where there are false prophets."15 For all she knew, the pastors were the false prophets in sheep's clothing mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew.

---

9 Ibid., 1:23-4.
10 Ibid., 1:27: 4 Apr. 1542.
11 Ibid., 1:26.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., 1:24: 30 Mar. 1542.
15 Ibid., 1:24: 30 Mar. 1542.
Despite her knowledge of reformed doctrine, her persistence in Catholic beliefs and practices led the Consistory to excommunicate her. Pertemps was clearly disturbed by the sentence and offered more examples of her knowledge of reformed doctrine, but the Consistory would not budge. She refused to acknowledge her excommunication and separation from the church, a course of action that suggests that participation in the ritual was important to her. Pertemps seems to have felt the Consistory was unnecessarily disputing details. In her understanding of scripture, the Catholic practices that she continued were permissible within the broader framework of Christ's message. The pastors could only see her as a "papist."

As Jeanne Pertemps' testimony suggests, the Protestant call for all to read scripture led to some interpretations that were vexing to the pastors. Scripture was the chief authority for those women who argued most vigorously with the Consistory. These women actually did what the pastors wanted: they read scripture for themselves. The problem for the pastors was that these women interpreted what they read in ways that made sense to them but were unorthodox and, in some cases, heretical – although pastors rarely used this term in reference to women's ideas. Pertemps' testimony as transcribed in the records indicates that she offered more information about her religious beliefs than the Consistory requested and that she introduced topics of discussion in her hearing. She had confidence in her understanding of scripture, and far from deferring to the pastors as educated experts, she insisted on her own interpretation as she stood before them. In the early days of the new church, she seems to have thought that she could participate in shaping the Reformation.

**Benoîte Jacon**

Like Jeanne Pertemps, Benoîte Jacon insisted that her interpretation of scripture was correct. Also like Pertemps, Jacon had deep roots in Geneva. Her first husband was a citizen and left substantial property for their two sons. Jacon's second husband, Pierre Ameaux, fought on behalf of the Genevan
Reformation, was elected to the Small Council (the executive governing body of Geneva) three times, and served on other governmental councils between 1530 and 1546. But the Reformation created economic hardship for him; Ameaux was a playing-card maker by trade, an occupation he had to give up when the reformed government outlawed card playing. It seems likely that he married Jacon because of her considerable wealth. Still, several years after their marriage, Ameaux complained to the Small Council about his difficulties; to ease his burden the council gave him charge of some of the city's gunpowder. In spite of this assistance, Ameaux's financial problems continued and soured his marriage.

In August 1542, Benoîte Jacon appeared before the Genevan Consistory for the first time. The Consistory's pastors and elders asked that she tell them about the couple's quarrels. She said that her husband complained about her children (his wards), he beat her, and he was generally unhappy with everything she did. The Consistory simply advised her to live in peace with her husband and go more frequently to the sermons. Jacon seems to have taken their advice and looked to God and the pastors' sermons for assistance with her marital problems. She returned to the Consistory a little more than one year later, and she spoke about what she learned; her ideas led Ameaux to accuse her of adultery and to seek and obtain the first divorce in Geneva.

Between December 1543 and January 1545, Jacon underwent three civil trials for adultery. Initially the focus was less adultery per se but rather Jacon's views about marriage, sexuality, and property: she asserted that the Christian faithful should share their goods, both material possessions and even their bodies, with one another. She told the court that she believed that she could have sexual relations with all Christian men and that they were, in fact, all her husbands. When asked

---

who told her this she suggested that her ideas had been divinely inspired and responded, "Our Lord indeed reveals [things] without [using] men and that no one told her." During subsequent questioning, she added that she learned some ideas from the pastors. Her testimony is peppered with Biblical references, implying that she read scripture herself or heard it read. One pastor claimed in a deposition that she engaged him in conversation and told him that scripture teaches that in the communion of saints all things are held in common including "property, houses, possessions, bodies, and goods whereby one has charity toward the other." Her repeated insistence that Christians should share their property, material and physical, with each other likely came from Paul's letter to the Romans 12:13: "Share your belongings with needy fellow Christians and open your homes to strangers." As further explanation of her beliefs, she remarked that "Our Lord created marriage and the two will be one flesh," a reference to Matthew 19:5 which provides divine sanction for the sexual act. She said that she wanted to believe in scripture, and according to scripture "we are all one body," which suggested to her that all Christians licitly could have sexual relations with each other. Not surprisingly, the marriage broke down and Ameaux asked for a divorce.

The Consistory questioned a woman who had been accused of Anabaptism several years earlier in the hopes of discovering the source of Jacon's ideas. Although the records occasionally refer to Jacon as an Anabaptist, there was little evidence

---

Ibid., 1:290-1.


Ibid. This could be a reference to 1 Cor. 12:12-13, Rom. 12:4-5, or Col. 3:15.

Some Anabaptists preached a community of goods as well as polygamy, although most would have been shocked to hear that a woman could have multiple husbands. On Anabaptist ideas about sexuality, see Lyndal Roper, "Sexual Utopianism in the German Reformation," in Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality, and Religion in Early Modern Europe (New York: Routledge, 1994), 84.

Proceedings of the Western Society for French History
connecting her to this or any other sect, and ultimately the officials did not charge her with this. Nor were her ideas a result of a voracious sexual appetite, and it seems that she may not have had sexual relations with other men until more than a year after she started expressing her ideas. Rather it seems that money matters and physical abuse prompted Jacon's thinking. Although the authorities were prosecuting her, she asked for justice against Pierre Ameaux because he kept the inheritance of her children, told her she was not his wife, and threw her out of his house without giving her anything to live on.²⁴ The misuse of "property" – her children's inheritance and possibly her dowry as well as her body – was at the center of her ideas about sex and marriage. Ameaux managed her dowry and the inheritance of her children after they were married, but only a few years into their marriage and before the adultery trial, Jacon complained about Ameaux's financial administration of these goods. She claimed that he was stealing from her children by taking a loan with no intention of paying it back.²⁵ She also charged him with mistreating her body that, in her ideas about sex and marriage, she equated with property. In the sixteenth century, it was widely believed that the husband controlled his wife's body; it was his property, just as he controlled any other property she brought to the marriage.²⁶ By offering her body to other "husbands," as she called them, she was not necessarily increasing her control over it, but lessening that of Pierre Ameaux. Perhaps she thought that other husbands might better manage the inheritance. In spite of her accusations, her charges against Ameaux were not investigated.

When finally she admitted to having sexual relations with other men, Jacon refused to acknowledge it as adultery and retorted that she had done nothing wrong; she had in fact acted

²⁴ AEG, PC 1ère série 385: 13 Jan. 1545.
²⁶ In Reformation Geneva, husbands and wives had sole right to each other sexually, and the church permitted women to demand and receive a divorce if husbands were unfaithful.
as prescribed in scripture. The Small Council judged her guilty of both adultery and blasphemy and sentenced her to be shackled by an iron chain in Geneva's prison for "as long as we presume that she is in any madness and weakness of spirit." This punishment was often accorded to the mentally ill as well as to adulterous wives, and the comments made at her sentencing clearly indicate that the authorities thought she was crazy. As expressed in the court documents, her ideas appear incoherent. But the authorities were not interested in disputing with her. The records show that the officials were less concerned that she held these ideas than that she might have acted on them. Jacon, however, clearly wanted to engage in a discussion. Through her understanding of scripture, the pastors' sermons, and, she claimed, divine inspiration, Benoîte Jacon tried to defend her children's inheritance and her body from her husband's mismanagement. Her persistence in making her arguments suggests she believed her ideas had merit and were worthy of being heard by the pastors.

Andrée Audru and the Doctrine of Predestination

In 1551, Jérôme Bolsec, a former monk, doctor of theology, and physician who was passing through Geneva, publicly criticized Calvin's doctrine of predestination. Robert Kingdon has argued that popular support for Bolsec had to do more with his character and skill as a physician than with his beliefs. Testimony of some of his Genevan supporters suggests, however, that they grasped aspects of the doctrine of

---

27 AEG, PC 1ère série 385: 20 Jan. 1545.
29 Another adulterous wife in Geneva received the same sentence in 1558, although she was not alleged to have been insane. Lyndal Roper has found that in Augsburg, house arrest was occasionally ordered for adulterous wives in order to control them: Lyndal Roper, The Holy Household: Women and Morals in Reformation Augsburg (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 199.
predestination and agreed with Bolsec's argument that Calvin's interpretation made God the ultimate source of evil.\textsuperscript{30} Andrée Audru, a recent immigrant, was the sole woman who publicly supported Bolsec, and she was the only one of his supporters who wanted to prove him correct through reference to scripture.\textsuperscript{31}

Audru had been in trouble with the pastors and secular authorities a few years before the Bolsec trial.\textsuperscript{32} In 1549, the secular officials questioned her about her marriage to another immigrant, and she was also charged with belittling the pastors.\textsuperscript{33} About one month later, Raymond Chauvet, her pastor, asked for proof of her marriage, and when she could not provide it, she and her husband were told to separate until the matter could be investigated. Audru was outraged and reportedly said that only Satan would separate man and wife.\textsuperscript{34} She then accused her pastor's wife of adultery with another reformed minister. Audru was imprisoned for the slander.\textsuperscript{35} A month later, Audru allegedly proclaimed that the ministers preached heresy; for that claim she was banished from the city for three years.\textsuperscript{36} In spite of her alleged transgressions and after only two months in exile, the

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 140-1.
\textsuperscript{32} AEG, Registres du Conseil de Genève, vol. 44, fols. 29, 31, 31v, 36v, 38, 40, 41v, 42v, 56v, 57v, and 61v.
\textsuperscript{33} Joannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia, eds. Guilielmus Baum, Eduardus Cunitz, and Eduardus Reuss, vol. 21, col. 444, part of the Corpus Reformatorum (Brunswick, 1863-1900).
\textsuperscript{34} AEG, Registres du Conseil de Genève, vol. 44, fol. 36v: 7 Mar. 1549. Audru was accused of having two husbands, but when she went before the city council, it was to answer for the slanderous charges she made against Chauvet's wife and the minister Cosin. This incident led to further questioning that eclipsed the charges of bigamy.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., fols. 29 and 31: 26 and 28 Feb. 1549; and fol. 41: 12 Mar. 1549.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., fol. 57v: 1 Apr. 1549 and fol. 61v: 4 Apr. 1549. In April 1549, right after Audru was banished for the first time, her husband withdrew his request for citizenship because he wanted to follow his wife.
city council lifted her sentence when some women whose daughters Audru instructed in "honest things" petitioned the city council for her return. 

More than two years later, in December 1551, Audru was in trouble again. Witnesses claimed that she spoke in favor of Jérôme Bolsec at his sentencing, saying that he was a "good man" (homme de bien) and that she would support his opinion on predestination over that of Calvin. Audru told the Consistory that the physician Bolsec cured her of an ailment, but she nonetheless insisted that she believed that the secular magistrates had acted justly by exiling Bolsec, perhaps because she knew that the magistrates could do the same to her if she crossed them. However, she added, she had read (à veu) Calvin's Institutes and claimed she was scandalized by some things in them.

Apparently Audru frequently offered her religious opinions. Four witnesses stated that Audru told them she could support Bolsec's contentions through reference to scripture. Audru's other opinions are not recorded. From the entries in the registers, it seems the Consistory was not interested in investigating Audru's ideas about the Institutes or how she would support Bolsec's ideas. Instead, the Consistory reproached her for spreading heresies "like Anabaptists or Libertines." She left Geneva before being sentenced and her husband followed her. Audru returned to Geneva some time that same year and appeared before the Consistory again, this time for questioning doctrine in the Genevan catechism. She claimed that she would demonstrate that the catechism contained false doctrine and would defend her

---

39 Ibid., fol. 78v: 25 Dec. 1551; and AEG, PC 2e série 983: 1 Jan. 1552.
40 Ibid., fol. 79: 25 Dec. 1551.
opinion before Calvin. The Consistory excommunicated her with the recommendation that she be banished.

Like Pertiemp and Jacon, Audru seems to have developed her ideas through an acquaintance with scripture, claiming that she could defend Bolsec and her own criticisms of the *Institutes* and the catechism by this means. She disagreed with the reformed view of predestination, and it may have been Calvin's discussion of this question in his *Institutes* that she wanted to refute as well as some unspecified elements of the catechism. She and her husband came from a Catholic area; perhaps they immigrated to Geneva because they were attracted to some elements of reformed Protestantism but later found that they were not entirely in agreement with the Genevan church either. Audru was careful not to speak against the secular authorities and said that the council's judgment of Bolsec was just. Her disagreement was with the pastors, and specifically, she wanted to debate with Calvin on theology, a rather bold demand. Although she was called to the Consistory for supporting Bolsec, she had ideas of her own as well and had spoken against the pastors and their teachings even before the Bolsec controversy. Testimony from witnesses suggests that she frequently offered her opinions publicly. Although she was not accused of heresy specifically, she did receive the same sentence as most heretics in Geneva: banishment.

Why look at the very particular ideas of individual women, especially since they were denounced and punished for them? What can they tell us about the Reformation? These three cases illustrate the variety of heterodox beliefs that persisted in Geneva after the Reformation, and they demonstrate official reluctance to describe women's dissent as "heresy." Although the pastors wanted to categorize them as "papist" or "Anabaptist," they were not necessarily the ideas of competing sects. The pastors' desire

---

45 Natalie Zemon Davis has cautioned against judging popular religion by the standards of religious authorities and theologians and also against assuming
to categorize their ideas also shows how gender operated during
the Reformation. Jeanne Pertemps had to be a "papist." During
their questioning of both Jacon and Audru, the authorities
attempted to find a sect or a male leader to whom they were
attached. The authorities failed to find a connection between
Jacon and local Anabaptists, and ultimately they concluded that
she was crazy. The Consistory persistently linked Audru with
Bolsec. Although contact with others' opinions certainly
influenced these women, the extent of their doctrinal and pious
individuality was difficult for the Consistory to believe. While
their ideas could have been deemed heretical, like those of
Bolsec and later Servetus, the Consistory and secular officials
resisted labeling them "heretics." Such a designation would have
accorded women theological authority and status, even if only
negatively.

The influence of scripture on the ideas of these three women
shows how the Reformation succeeded in its insistence upon the
word of God as chief authority for religious belief and practice.
But, as examination of their testimony has shown, their scriptural
literacy did not produce the results that Calvin intended. Access
to scripture through sermons and public and private Bible
reading gave women a certain amount of independence to
interpret scripture that they had not had before. They gained
confidence in their ideas, which they believed were based on an
authoritative source. Theirs was a practical interest, influenced
by the personal, which was the lens through which these women
reflected upon scripture. Discussion of their religious ideas
before the Consistory or secular magistrates was a way for
women to express their concerns about their own lives as well as
about religious reform. Jacon tried to draw attention to a
situation that seemed unfair and out of her control by citing
scripture and interpreting it in a way that she hoped could protect

that the laity were passive receptacles of theological teaching: Natalie Zemon
Davis, "Some Tasks and Themes in the Study of Popular Religion," in The
Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion, ed. Charles
Trinkhaus and Heiko Oberman (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 309.
her from her husband's mistreatment of her body and her children's property. Jeanne Pertemps discerned religious truth for herself by reflecting upon scripture. Pertemps' elaboration on both her orthodox and unorthodox religious beliefs beyond what the Consistory demanded suggests that she wanted to participate in negotiating the religious settlement and that she believed she had some authority to do so. When the Consistory denied her communion, she forcefully asserted that she was a member of the church. It is possible that Audru was grateful to Bolsec for curing her of an illness. She might have been more favorably disposed toward him and his ideas as a result. But speaking with Bolsec on religious matters and knowing scripture also may have emboldened Audru to offer her ideas about predestination and to read Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and the Genevan catechism with a critical eye. Her earlier appearances before the Consistory show that she thought about religious matters and had been critical of the pastors and their teachings before she met the physician/heretic. Closely examining these women's ideas and the circumstances of their lives helps us to understand their innovations in religious thought, the lenses through which they read scripture, and some of the reasons for their willingness to think outside of the "Calvinist" box.

These case studies also show the importance of looking not only at the results of the Genevan Reformation – or any "successful" social and cultural transformation – but also its process. Rather than being imposed on a "pliable" community, the Genevan Reformation was negotiated. Women participated by engaging the pastors in a discussion of religious ideas, and in so doing they required the clergy to refine their message. There was no sense among these women that they were incapable of understanding and interpreting scripture, no deference to the interpretation of the pastors, but in fact an insistence on their own abilities and on the validity of their ideas. While these women were not trying to overturn the reform, they seem to have had a sense that they possessed some authority to speak about

---

46 Kingdon, "Popular Reactions," 144.
religion and shape religious change. The Reformation itself seemed to promise greater lay participation, perhaps even women's participation, with its emphasis on the importance of knowing scripture along with the priesthood of all believers, which gave everyone equal access to God.