

Abstract

This thesis examines the intricacies of women's vowed life in the High Middle Ages with regard to key aspects of contemporary religiosity. Vowed women are studied in their connection and interaction with the male world of authorities and spiritual guides. The diachronic approach is employed with a focus on the ideals and spirituality of three different types of vowed women's groups; traditional monastic groups living according to the Benedictine rule, namely Benedictines and Cistercians, Mendicant groups, which include Poor Clares, Dominicans and tertiaries of both orders, and finally groups of non-conformist vowed women, including beguines, anchoresses and recluses. This thesis serves as a probe into the proclaimed ideals of these groups in the view of male authorities, and points out the tendencies in the spirituality of specific vowed women. The principal method is the analysis of several types of sources with the categories of analysis being three key aspects of the religious life of the society of the High Middle Ages, namely the relationship to asceticism, the relationship to Christ and the Eucharist, and the Marian devotion. The introductory chapter presents the preconditions for constructing the role and position of the female gender in medieval society and subsequently discusses the origin and development of women's vowed life in a broader context. Other chapters devoted to individual religious groups contain their characteristics with a focus on the relationship with women, analysis of essential documents such as rules, which illustrate the expected ideal, and finally the analysis of biographies and ego documents of individual women, which reflect certain elements of spirituality. Subsequently, these groups are compared with respect to the examined categories of analysis.