

Women in Reformation

The position of women developed throughout history. Religious reformation, which took place in the early 16th century in the German speaking countries and hundred years earlier in the Czech Kingdom, was one of the movements which changed radically the position of women in the society. First, the religious leaders beginning with Martin Luther changed the clerical view which saw women as incompetent, incomplete and sinful beings into one of respect to the gender and its specifics and to the biological role played by women – motherhood. As a result, women were respected in the society as wives and mothers; nobody wrote preaching about them being danger to men anymore. But with the attack on the monasteries women were deprived of the only way for higher education and independence offered to them in these institutions.

The Czech reformation never fully changed its view on marriage. Celibacy and virginity were still considered better ways to salvation than marriage and especially its consummation. In the end both Utraquists and the Unity of Brethren accepted Luther's view on marriage, especially the marriage of priests, but never fully. They tended to see celibacy as the better although for most people impossible way. But the position of women in these branches of Czech reformation was slightly better than in German reformation. The Hussites let women be educated and live in their communities on their own. While the Utraquists did not continue in this custom, the Brethren respected educated women and gave them opportunity to show their faith and religious enthusiasm. Moreover women had special roles in the congregation which were held in awe and respect by all its members. The Unity of Brethren can be taken as the most becoming branch of reformation for educated women who wanted to use their education in the service of their faith.