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Amy Leonard

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Amy Leonard : Nails in the Wall: Catholic Nuns in Reformation Germany (Women in Culture and Society)
before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Nails in the Wall: Catholic Nuns in Reformation Germany (Women in Culture and Society):

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Nails in the Wall By clarinetsarethebest Nails in the Wall, a reworked version of the author's doctoral dissertation, is a fascinating examination of the sixteenth-century reformations through the lens of seven Dominican convents in Strasbourg. Amy Leonard stresses religion, power balance, and gender as all having been important in the survival of three of these convents, explaining convincingly that had the nuns been men or had they lived in a country with a stronger central power than the Holy Roman Emperor - or had they not undergone the medieval religious reforms - they would not have made it through the Protestant Reformation. Her perspective is fair, and though she clearly sympathizes with the nuns, she does not exculpate them. The writing is clear, straightforward, and lively (although it must be noted that Leonard has a bad habit of splitting every infinitive that she can), and the thesis is well argued. While many of the bar graphs are somewhat superfluous, most of the frequent anecdotes about individual nuns are entertaining and forward Leonard's argument. The book contains significant bibliographic and annotative notes, printed as thirty pages of endnotes.

During the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther instituted new ideologies addressing gender, marriage, chastity, and religious life that threatened Catholic monasticism. Yet many living in cloistered religious communities, particularly women, refused to accept these new terms and were successful in their opposition to the new Protestant culture. Focusing primarily on a group of Dominican nuns in Strasbourg, Germany, Amy Leonard's *Nails in the Wall* outlines the century-long battle between these nuns and the Protestant city council. With savvy strategies that employed charm, wealth, and political and social connections, the nuns were able to sustain their Catholic practices. Leonard's in-depth archival research uncovers letters about and records of the nuns' struggle to maintain their religious beliefs and way of life in the face of Protestant reforms. She tells the story of how they worked privately to keep Catholicism alive—continuing to pray in Latin, smuggling in priests to celebrate Mass, and secretly professing scores of novices to ensure the continued survival of their convents. This fascinating and heartening study shows that, far from passively allowing the Protestants to dismantle their belief system, the women of the Strasbourg convents were active participants in the battle over their vocation and independence.

The subject is original and interesting, the conclusions are based on thorough research, and the analysis is clearly presented. *Nails in the Wall* is an important contribution to our understanding of religious change in early modern Europe and the way in which practical, local considerations often trumped dogma and rhetoric.--Sarah A. Curtis, author of *Educating the Faithful: Religion, Society, and Schooling in Nineteenth-Century France*