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From Virile Woman to Womanchrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature (Paperback)

By Barbara Newman

University of Pennsylvania Press, United States, 1995.

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Why did hagiographers of the late Middle Ages praise mothers for abandoning small children? How did a group of female mystics come to define themselves as apostles to the dead and end by challenging God's right to damn? Why did certain heretics around 1300 venerate a woman as the Holy Spirit incarnate and another as the Angelic Pope? In *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, Barbara Newman asks these and other questions to trace a gradual and ambiguous transition in the gender strategies of medieval religious women. An egalitarian strain in early Christianity affirmed that once she asserted her commitment to Christ through a vow of chastity, monastic profession, or renunciation of family ties, a woman could become virile, or equal to a man. While the ideal of the virile woman never disappeared, another ideal slowly evolved in medieval Christianity. By virtue of some gender-related trait—spotless virginity, erotic passion, the capacity for intense suffering, the ability to imagine a feminine aspect of the Godhead—a devout woman could be not only equal, but superior to men; without...



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