omen have been carried through the streets in closed alanquins and deposited in windowless women's-only ain carriages. Husbands have even forbidden physiians from looking at their wives and have demanded iat examinations be conducted through a small openig in a sheet.

More extreme practices for ensuring women's chasty include genital mutilation performed in parts of frica, which ranges from the removal of the clitoris to ewing closed the labia of the vagina. The controversial id sporadic incidence of sati in India can be read as ie ultimate expression of female chastity. The ideal Hindu wife should fully worship her husband as god. fter his death, she proves her ultimate virtue by beoming a sati and immolating herself on his funeral yre. By ending her life she precludes any possible sexal interaction with other men; she also brings merit id auspiciousness to his lineage for generations.

Celibacy is highly regarded in Buddhist and Christn religions but has been met with hostility in traditions such as Islam and Judaism that locate women's regious duty and fulfillment within marriage. Although evere in its abstinence from all sexual activity, celibacy onically frees women from marriage and the most dect forms of male control.

Although there are valid reasons for choosing a chaste fe-style, it should be recognized that religious and altural systems impose heavy penalties on women ho choose to do otherwise. It is extremely difficult, if ot impossible, for women deemed unchaste to remain espected members of society. Persuaded by religious leals, social customs, economic dependence on men, id the threat of physical violence, women usually coperate in monitoring their sexuality.

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See also Celibacy; Mutilation, Genital; Sexuality; Virtue.

TREVOR M. WADE

Christianity

Historical Overview from 300 to 1800

The study of women in the history of Christianity has advanced from critiques of exclusionary ideologies and practices as represented in classical (male) theological texts and ecclesiastical sources to recovery and reconstruction of women's lives and accomplishments as revealed in their own works and in the evidence of material culture. Detailed investigations of particular contexts have begun to yield analyses of privilege and differences among women. Yet despite these gains, exceptional women with access to cultural resources and power continue to dominate the historiography of women and Christianity.

LATE ANTIQUITY (300–600)

During the last Roman persecutions of Christians (303–311 C.E.), women figured prominently among the martyrs (Agape, Irene, and Chione; Crispina). Once Christianity was tolerated (313) and established (391) as the religion of the empire, Christian imperial women influenced the religious policies and preferences of emperors (Helena [c. 255–c. 330], mother of Constantine, discovered the True Cross, 326), brought about the banishment of bishops (Eudoxia exiled John Chrysostom, 403), and guided the outcome of doctrinal controversies (Pulcheria called the Council of Chalcedon, 451).

Aristocratic women converts brought Christianity to the Roman elite in the late fourth century. Notable wealthy women practiced asceticism and philanthropy (e.g., Paula [347–404] endowed monasteries in Bethlehem for Jerome and herself, supporting his biblical scholarship while pursuing her own studies); others built churches and saints' shrines and subsidized episcopal sees. But women's power as patrons did not translate into public leadership in the churches. By about 400, misogynist theologies of women's nature combined with understandings of ordained male priesthood to exclude women from most formal ministries other than deaconess.

Sexual asceticism offered early Christian woman some freedom from conventional social roles, but teth-

CHRISTIANITY

Fresco depicting Constantine with his mother, Saint Helena, who found the True Cross (Chris Hellier/Corbis).

ered them to male norms of sexuality and sanctity. Some upper-class women (e.g., Macrina [327–379] sister of powerful bishop-theologians) formed ascetic communities on their family estates; others practiced asceticism in their city homes. Women of varying social status lived in monastic communities or as solitaries in the deserts of Egypt, Palestine, and Syria. The teachings of several desert mothers (Sarah, Syncletica, Theodora) are preserved in collections of sayings of the desert fathers.

EARLY MIDDLE AGES (600–1000)

Christian women married to pagan kings played a pivotal but private role in evangelizing the Germanic kingdoms that replaced the Roman empire in the West after the late fourth century. They urged their husbands' conversions (Clothild and Clovis, king of the Franks, 496) and predisposed them to receive Christian missionaries (Bertha, Christian Frankish wife of Ethelbert of Kent, aided Augustine of Canterbury, 596). Often ruled by powerful abbesses, Anglo-Saxon and Carolingian women's monasteries were centers of local Christianity in recently converted areas. As monasticism became a dominant institution in the West, some women entered monasteries by choice to pursue a vocation or seek personal advancement; others did so of necessity, having been dedicated as child oblates or deemed unmarriageable.

In the Byzantine (eastern Roman) empire, imperial women were instrumental in overturning the iconoclastic policies of their predecessors: the empress Irene championed the icons and promoted their vindication at the Second Council of Nicaea in 787; the empress Theodora again restored their use in 843, in the so-called Triumph of Orthodoxy. In the West privileged women began to produce Christian literature. The Frankish noblewoman Dhouda (803–c. 843) wrote a manual of instruction in Christian faith and virtue for her son; the tenth-century Saxon canoness Hrotsvitha wrote plays, legends, and epics.

THE MEDIEVAL WEST (1000—1500)

Religious communities under the Rule of Benedict offered both elite and common women some measure of security and educational opportunity. Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) is an exceptional example of monastic achievement. From the twelfth century onward, both women and men founded new, or reformed older, monastic orders (e.g., Cistercians, 1098, and Premonstratensians, 1120), but male communities often refused to acknowledge their female counterparts or undertake their pastoral care.

Urban growth and cultural expansion fostered nonmonastic forms of religious life (e.g., canonesses, first known in the Carolingian era) and popular movements that emphasized poverty, penitence, and charitable works. Women pursued evangelical ideals in newly approved mendicant orders such as the Dominicans, and Clare of Assisi (1194–1253) for example, in the Franciscans; informal associations such as the Beguines (who had no Rule or permanent vows); third (lay) orders; and individually fashioned ways of life. By 1400 many popular religious movements had been suppressed, and most Beguines forced to enter established orders with a recognized Rule and strict cloister.

Women mystics and visionaries found receptive audiences but were regarded with suspicion by the clerical hierarchy. Mysticism flourished at the Cistercian monastery of Helfta (Gertrude the Great, d. 1301 or 1302) and among the Beguines, who were often harried by church authorities, as was Mechthild of Magdeburg, and sometimes executed for heresy, as was Marguerite

Porete. Some women mystics, such as Julian of Norwich, Catherine of Siena, and Bridget of Sweden, wrote and spoke unharmed, but others, such as Joan of Arc (c. 1312—1431), were burned at the stake for heresy and witchcraft. From the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries, churchmen pursued witches and condemned as many as one to three hundred thousand to death.

EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1500–1800)

During the Protestant Reformation, women voluntarily left convents and monasteries or were turned out by local reformers. Many former nuns married, some, like Katherine von Bora, who married Martin Luther, to reform leaders. Luther considered marriage a religious vocation but restricted women to the confines of the patriarchal family. Nevertheless, pastors' wives, such as Katherine Zell, and other married women furthered the aims of the Reformation through the family, even while their economic opportunities outside it declined.

In England and Scotland female monarchs both advanced and hindered the reforming cause: Mary Stuart (Queen of Scots, r. 1561–1567) remained Roman Catholic; Mary Tudor (called "Bloody Mary," r. 1553–1558) executed English Protestant leaders in an effort to reimpose Roman Catholicism; Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603) was so politically astute that she secured the establishment of the Church of England through policies known as the Elizabethan Settlement.

Among radical Protestants, Anabaptist women were martyrs, visionaries, and prophets. Puritan and Quaker women, such as Anne Hutchinson (1591–1643) and Margaret Fell (1614–1702), claimed the egalitarian authority of the Spirit for their ministries of Bible studies, women's meetings, public preaching, and missionary work and defended women's right to speak on religious matters. Pietist emphasis on affective religious experience created openings for women's influence in Moravianism, early Methodism, and revivalism (the Great Awakening).

Women advanced the Catholic Reformation through the cultivation of prayer, as did the *beatas,* holy women in urban Spain, and the renewal of existing religious orders (witness Teresa of Avila's reform of the Carmelites). They founded new congregations of women for "apostolic" service of the poor, (e.g., the Ursulines and the Daughters of Charity), most of which eventually were compelled to accept cloister but maintained their educational and charitable works within its constraints. Particularly in France and England, upper-class women nurtured Roman Catholicism in their families.

Following Spanish and French conquests in the Americas, women religious undertook missions to establish convents, schools, and hospitals to serve the colonists and, to a lesser extent, to evangelize the indigenous peoples. In Mexico the learned poet Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648–1695) flourished and was silenced. In Canada, Marie of the Incarnation (1599–1672), a French Ursuline, opened the first school for girls in Quebec (1639) and compiled dictionaries of several Native American languages. French Ursulines established a convent in New Orleans in 1727, but it was not until the nineteenth century that religious orders of women took root in the United States.

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FRANCINE CARDMAN

Religious Rites and Practices

In Western cultures, Christian women's ritual and religious domains tend to be more informal than men's, often flourishing in the domestic environment, outside of institutionalized rites and practices. Women's religious expression may be interpreted as reactive, the direct result of male domination and the exclusion of women from institutional roles. Such a viewpoint assumes a powerlessness to act within a patriarchal framework. Scholars such as Kay Turner argue for the relative autonomy of women's traditions from institutional structures and suggest within Christianity women find pathways to exercise religious power and creativity. This theoretical perspective grants women active agency in their religious lives and asserts that women can and do create or reinterpret symbolic modes of expression to articulate a religiosity that differs from the dominant (male) culture.

Within Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy women interact with the sacred through a tradition of sacramental praxis expressed through ritual activities that parallel a priest-mediated formal tradition. This culture of women's religion is expressed in such activities as the recitation of the rosary, home prayer, novenas, votive making and offering, laments, the making of traditional foods associated with special religious holidays, devotion to particular saints, construction of altars in the home, feminist liturgies, and other creative endeavors.

Praying the rosary, for example, is found across many Catholic cultures and occurs in the church or in the Roman Catholic home. The rosary encompasses a ritualized formulaic prayer form accompanied by the use of prayer beads and is recited privately or communally. In the United States, from the nineteenth into the twentieth century, the rosary was the most important prayer form used in the home by Catholic families.

While both men and women pray the rosary, women predominate in its use and incorporate the rosary in contexts not shared by men. Women across several Catholic cultures enact the rosary as part of a complex of informal rituals surrounding death. Among some indigenous Mexicans in Oaxaca, for example, women prepare the area in the home where the body lies with candles and flowers and chant the rosary throughout the entire night. The women are solely responsible for leading the prayers and expressing the grief of the family. On the ninth and fortieth day following the funeral, the women re-enact the wake, gathering around a stimulated corpse, and again pray the rosary for the deceased. As in everyday life, the women nurture deceased family members as they make their gradual transition into the next world.

Many traditional practices centered in the home articulate concerns with family and community. The creation and ritual use of altars by women in the Roman Catholic home represents such an activity. Altars are

placed in a special area of the house and utilized for intercessory prayer. The altars are created out of an assemblage of religious paraphernalia such as statues of particular saints, Mary, or Jesus; holy cards and other images, or rosaries; votive candles; photographs of family members; and flowers. While certain elements are common to home altars, such as the use of images, flowers, and candles, each altar is tailored to express the spiritual needs as well as the aesthetic inclinations of the altar maker.

Prayer to a particular saint has long been incorporated within the Catholic doctrine. However, the choice of particular saints and the ways in which women actually interact with them are uniquely personal and independent of clerical authority. Recent studies of home altar traditions among women of Mexican and Italian descent document the ways in which the creation and use of altars sacramentalize women's activities of care, symbolically expressing women's power within the home and connections to sacred passages, family, and community.

Women dominate activities of traditional healing across many Christian cultures. Greek Orthodox women healers are found both in Greece and in immigrant communities in the United States. Healers utilize verbal incantations drawn from traditional prayers combined with religious objects to effect cures for illness. Particular sacred images known as icons, considered efficacious against various illnesses, are physically placed near the sick person by the women of the family. Women also pin amulets and charms onto family members, particularly children, to cure illness or protect one's family from the evil eye.

The influence of white Protestant women on their families from the mid-nineteenth century was profound. Because of the scriptural orientation of Protestantism, reading from the Bible was the center of home worship, accompanied by prayer and hymn singing. Men presided over the daily family worship service, but women were perceived as the moral center and example of Christian living in the home. As a reflection of women's roles as the moral force within the domicile, middle-class Protestant women created and displayed religious objects in the home. These included family Bibles, embroidery with mottos and scriptural verses, wax and wooden crosses, pin cushions shaped in the form of churches, and woven hair art used to commemorate deceased relatives and friends. In contrast to the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions, with the exception of the Bible religious artifacts were not used for prayer or ritual purposes. However, their presence imbued the home with a sense of the sacred, relating the supernatural realm with everyday life.

A stand sells religious figurines to be used in homes outside of the Church of San Francisco in Quito, Ecuador (Pablo Corral V/© Corbis).

Protestant women of the nineteenth century were denied ordination, leadership on church boards, and participation in established structures of the denominations. However, in the late nineteenth century church women developed a plethora of all-female organizations. The most common were missionary societies ministering both at home and abroad, and the establishment of deaconess orders in a number of denominations. These organizations broadened women's public and ministerial roles within Protestant Christianity. While denied official status as ministers, a number of women were well-known evangelists and preached on a regular basis within the context of public worship and revivals.

The nineteenth century was punctuated by the first ordination of a woman into the Congregational church in 1853. Following World War II, a number of denominations began to ordain women, a movement that continued into the 1970's. The decision to ordain women among Lutherans, Episcopalians, Methodists, Disciples of Christ, and other churches opened the doors to full participation and leadership in all rites and practices found within their respective traditions.

A number of American congregations still ban or are extremely ambiguous about women ministers. Despite these limitations, women within certain congregations, such as Holiness, Pentecostals, Church of God in Christ, and independent Baptists, dominate areas within the public arena of the worship service. Worship services in these traditions are marked by charismatic experiences among participants as well as distinct styles of preaching and testimony. In both African-American and white churches women dominate the genre of oral testimony. Testimony is a distinct, sponta-

neous verbal art form, which employs highly stylistic and traditional speech patterns. Women often utilize testimony to engage in a style of informal preaching. As a result, women restricted from formally recognized acts of preaching still forcefully voice interpretations of experiences of God's action in the context of public worship.

Since the 1970's, many women within Catholic and Protestant churches critique male dominance found in their own theological traditions and structures. Today within Catholicism, for example, women explore and reinterpret institutionalized rituals, particularly the central sacrament and liturgy of the Eucharist. Progressive parishes and communities of women religious struggle with a ritual that clearly restricts women from mediation of institutionally defined sacraments and interpretation of scripture. Such explorations attempt to eliminate the inequalities in the ritual, often stretching and even breaking institutional rules. Alternative Eucharists, which are celebrated without the participation of a priest, are also part of the ritual landscape of many Catholic women. Such emerging practices are yet another example of the process of creation and reinterpretation in which Christian women engage.

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