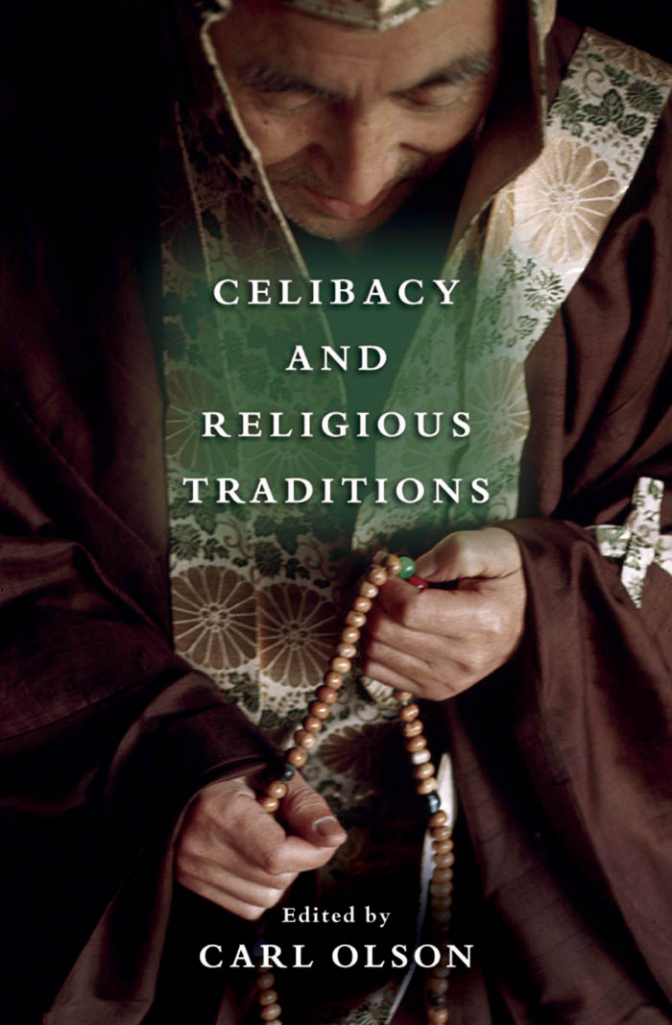

CELIBACY AND RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

Edited by

CARL OLSON

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Printed in the United States of America
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This book is dedicated to the memory of Louise and Warren Eisenhower for their love, hospitality, and good cheer

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Preface

This book is intended for an educated general readership and for use in college courses. It is also intended to be a supplement to other texts in introductory courses in various religious traditions, because the issues raised by its essays play pivotal roles in many cultures. Moreover, the chapters in this book are intended to introduce students to the role of celibacy, or a lack of it, in various religious traditions, and the contributors present the rationale for its observance (or not) within the context of each tradition. Scholars writing about religious traditions that do not advocate celibacy for its followers call attention to exceptions to this general trend and what lessons can be learned from the absence of celibacy from a culture.

This book grew from my own teaching of courses in various religions (such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Taoism, as well as Native American Indian and African religions). During the course of my teaching, I was not surprised to discover that students are very interested in topics related to human sexuality. Celibacy provides a way to discuss a topic directly related to human sexuality. It also is a way to learn something valuable about the worldview and value system of particular religious traditions.

Using the expertise of scholars in various religious traditions encompassing East and West, ancient and modern, moribund and living, this collection of essays addresses certain questions such as the following: Why do some members of a religious community decide to maintain a celibate style of religious life? Is celibacy

a prerequisite for religious office or status? Are there different contexts within a given religious tradition for the practice of celibacy? Are there gestures or actions that can replace the absence of sexual activity? What is the symbolic significance of celibacy within a particular religious tradition? Besides such questions, these chapters will also address issues about the symbolic significance of celibacy, its function within a religious tradition, its connection to the acquisition of power, and the physical or spiritual benefits of celibacy. In addition to addressing implications for the practice or nonpractice of celibacy within various traditions, this work will enhance our understanding of spirituality, and contribute to our knowledge of asceticism in the East and West.

In a collaborative work of this nature, I need initially to thank the contributors from all over the globe for their hard work, insights, creativity, and willingness to share their knowledge with a wider audience. At Oxford University Press, my gratitude goes to Cynthia Read and others at the press for their faith in and support for this project, such as Meechal Hoffman for her early work on this book and Christine Dahlin for steering it through the production process. This book marks the fifth time that Margaret Case has served as my copyeditor, and I am deeply in her debt. When some contributors were tardy, Peggy helped to keep me sane. I am also thankful to my colleague Glenn Holland for coming through in the clutch, and I am delighted that we could work together on a writing project after being together for so many years at the college on the hill. Finally, I want to extend my thanks to President Richard Cook and Dean Linda DeMerritt of Allegheny College for moving the college forward and allowing me to continue to do what I love. Finally, I want to thank Richard and his wife, Terri, for their many contributions to the college and specifically for his help with my work by offering me a humanities chair. Richard's decision to retire from the college creates a huge gap that we hope will be filled by someone as talented and successful in the near future.

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Patrick Olivelle is the chair of the Department of Asian Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, where he is also professor of Sanskrit and Indian religions and holder of the Jacob and Frances Sanger Chair in the Humanities. His work has covered the ascetical traditions of India. Among his major

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Celibacy and Religious Traditions

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I

Celibacy and the Human Body: An Introduction

Carl Olson

It is biologically natural for human beings to engage in sexual relationships for the procreation of the species, impelled by motives of lust, pleasure, enjoyment, comfort, companionship, relaxation, or a combination of these drives and needs. Upon reaching adolescence, it is not unusual to experience sexual urges due to chemical changes within one's body that for some people can be overwhelming and difficult to control. Many societies channel this sexual energy into early marriage, for the welfare of the social fabric. Due to the dangers associated with sexually transmitted diseases, especially the deadly scourge of AIDS, contemporary governments have encouraged programs of sexual abstinence or protected sex as preferable ways to prevent such hazards. Certain religious organizations have advocated lifelong celibacy for spiritual reasons, whereas some religious traditions that oppose the practice in general allow for instances or exceptions to the prevailing ban on celibacy.

Being subject to sexual urges presupposes that one is embodied, and our bodies are necessarily embedded in the world. The embodied nature of our sexual drives is, of course, equally true of celibacy. In fact, a discussion of sexuality and celibacy presupposes a conceptual grasp of the human body as a sensitive substance with the ability to produce both pain and pleasure. In addition to being a sensitive substance, the body projects a visible, tangible image of itself in space and time. The body can also transform itself into a sign that functions in a self-referential way and as a referent for

others by means of its ability to acquire meaning. If a symbol can be understood as a particular type of sign, the body can be said to symbolize a bridge that connects nature and culture.[1] As a sign or symbol, the body can be an ambivalent entity from a cross-cultural perspective, even as it possesses the potential to embody and reveal cultural values and attitudes.

During the latter half of the twentieth century there has been an acute philosophical interest in the human body. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, for instance, in his work *Phenomenology of Perception* discusses human bodies as organisms capable of perception. The human body and the perceived world form a single system of intentional relations that form correlations, implying that to experience the body is to perceive the world, and vice versa.[2] Therefore, the body and world form an inseparable, internal relationship. Mary Douglas, an anthropologist, views the body as a metaphor for reality and a symbolic system, whereas Michel Foucault concentrates his focus on the body as a product of a relationship between power and knowledge. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, who are influenced by Merleau-Ponty and second-generation cognitive science, point to the role that the body plays in conceptualization, which is only possible through the body: "Therefore, every understanding that we can have of the world, ourselves, and others can only be framed in terms of concepts shaped by our bodies."[3] Mark Johnson, on the other hand, argues that the human body is in the mind, in the sense that structures of understanding are essential to meaning and reason. But he also explores how the body is in the mind, or how reason and imagination have a bodily basis. He thinks that our bodily, social, linguistic, and intellectual being are interconnected in complex relationships that constitute our understanding of our world.[4] From another perspective, there is also a sense in which one can speak about the history of the body, most clearly evident in the aging process, which demonstrates that the body experiences changes.

In addition to being a sign, symbol, metaphor, mode of conceptualization, and having a history, the body is also flesh, which can express a lustful nature that manifests as threatening and dangerous unless it is controlled and regulated by social processes. Since the body is associated with uncontrollable and irrational passions, desires, and emotions, celibacy is an excellent example of exerting discipline and control upon the human body: "Disciplining is a technical operation designed to form and to fix aptitudes in a body, thus augmenting the body's powers, increasing its functional efficacy. . . . Disciplining makes bodies docile—adapted to instrumental layouts and productive, and also tractable. It makes bodies function as elements that can be programmed and maneuvered."[5] Sexual urges do not cease until weakened by old age, disease, or afflictions associated with medication for high blood pressure or diabetes, and

celibacy is often part of a pattern of actions undertaken to control and discipline the body.

The decision by an embodied person to engage in heterosexual or homosexual activity is not only a personal and mutual action but also a social one. Since sexual relations occur within a social context, the human body may in this sense also be thought of as the result of numerous social and cultural practices, behaviors, and discourses, which operate to construct the body as a social artifact.[6] In summary, although our body is biologically given to us, it is socially constructed.

If the human body and sexuality are inherently social, the same thing can be stated about celibacy, although its observance can differ according to individual volition (for example, whether it is elected or imposed) and temporality (for example, whether it is temporary or permanent). For the aspiring Catholic priest, Hindu ascetic, or Buddhist monk, celibacy appears to be an antisocial choice, but such a momentous and personal decision enables the male or female to enter into a new social order and construct a new identity and status. An understanding of celibacy can thus be a useful way to view the significance of the human body and desire within a social context. This book demonstrates how the practice of celibacy differs cross-culturally and historically within different religious traditions, highlighting exceptions to the general ethos of each tradition.

The Nature of Celibacy

Celibacy is commonly understood as entailing a vow to abstain from all sexual relationships. Such a vow or intention does not necessarily mean perpetual virginity, because a person could have been married or simply have engaged in sexual relations before taking a vow to remain celibate. Celibacy does not require a vow, however, when it is forced on a person because of social or religious circumstances, such as being on a religious quest, participating in a hunting expedition, or observing a religious ritual.

Within the Western context, celibacy originates from the Latin term *caelebs*, which means "alone or single."[7] The implications of being alone are a bit misleading, because choosing to be celibate might make a person a member of a community of other celibates. In Hinduism, celibacy is called *brahmacarya*, which is practiced by an ascetic and by a student (*brahmacārin*), which suggests that for a Hindu celibacy is practically synonymous with being a student. These definitions of celibacy from East and West are indicative of cross-cultural differences; the Indian ascetic can choose to live alone or in a group of other

wandering ascetics, and students have often lived in the homes of their teachers.

The chapters within this book demonstrate that the practice of celibacy is a complex religious phenomenon. The control of sexual desire can be used, for instance, to divorce oneself from a basic human biological drive, to extricate oneself from what is perceived as impure, or to distance oneself from the transient world. Within some religious traditions, one can find the practice of temporary celibacy, a commitment to long-term permanent celibacy, or an outright condemnation of it. By maintaining a state of virginity, members of some religious traditions imitate divine models, whereas other traditions do not admit the possibility of emulating such paradigms. Whether or not a religious tradition encourages or discourages it, the practice of celibacy gives us insight into its worldview, social values, gender relations, ethical implications, religious roles or offices, understanding of the physical body, and its practitioner's connection to spiritual and political power. Celibacy can contribute to the creation of a certain status and play a role in the construction of identity, while serving as a source of charisma. It can also represent a negotiation regarding social values and cultural attitudes. In some religious traditions, it is possible to renounce sex and gain sacred status and economic support from society.[8]

The practice of celibacy reflects a certain understanding of a particular culture's conception of the human body. In fact, celibacy marks the human body, an inscription that may be accompanied by special modes of dress to differentiate the celibate from ordinary people. This has important implications for understanding the image of the body within each culture. From one perspective, a person's body is presented to him or her, while its meaning is taught by society (such as parents, relatives, and peers). Likewise, a person's attitude about his or her body arises from society's image of itself. The human body is a natural symbol system, even though the body is never experienced naturally because it is always mediated by society. Moreover, an individual's body is patterned in a way analogous to the pattern of the social body. The ways that we are taught to control our bodies, for instance, reflects a general cultural style.

Celibacy, Danger, and Purity

For many religious traditions, the physical human body is a microcosm of society. Therefore, intense social controls will be experienced as demands for strong bodily controls. A good example of the direct correlation between bodily and social control can be found in the military, where soldiers stand rigidly at

attention. Because of this correlation, the human body functions as a symbol of society. In fact, the human body is a model that can stand for any bounded system. With such a system in place, this helps us to grasp bodily refuse (such as sweat, saliva, urine, and feces) as symbols of danger. These kinds of bodily refuse are connected to the margins of the body and are considered polluting. By transgressing the boundary of the body, these forms of refuse trigger a concern for purity in religions traditions. In many religious traditions, therefore, celibacy reflects a concern for maintaining purity.

Purity is connected to holiness, whose root meaning implies being set apart. Because holiness is characterized by completeness, it requires that individuals conform to the class or category to which they belong and that classes or categories of things should not be confused.[9] Moreover, holiness represents order, unity, and perfection with respect to a person. In many religious traditions, celibacy is part of the process of becoming holy, complete, perfect, and clean.

In contrast to holiness and purity, pollution is a form of dirt that offends against order. Standing in opposition to holiness, dirt is unclean and a form of danger.[10] Whether it is committed intentionally or inadvertently, pollution is a danger that tends to strike when form or order is attacked, which can result in disorder, a sign of danger. Furthermore, disorder invokes power because it can spoil pattern or order. If order implies restriction, like the practice of celibacy in some religious traditions, disorder implies a limitless potential for destroying pattern. Thus disorder is dangerous. In some religious traditions, the practice of celibacy is one way in which danger can be controlled.

The person practicing celibacy in some instances becomes an embodiment of power; this is especially evident among Hindu ascetics, Buddhist monks, and Sufi mystics. Possessing within itself a drive, impulse, or tendency, power possesses an impetus to empower, which suggests that power gives itself, increases itself, and enhances itself. Power is, however, ambivalent because it is both creative and destructive. By drawing it into us, we can be either strengthened or weakened by it. Thus to encounter or acquire power demands care if one is not to be overwhelmed or overawed by it. Power possesses the ability to affect things or persons by forcing them to move or behave in a certain manner. This points to the dynamic nature of power and its energetic force. Power also has a compulsive aspect because it can coerce actions and even prohibit actions. By means of its force of compulsion, power coerces that which it encounters, and controls it. Celibacy gives a person power, according to evidence from religious traditions of the East and West. And if one possesses power, this gives one control over oneself, over other entities, and even over the cosmos.

Celibacy, Asceticism, Violence, and Pain

Within a personal and social context of inhabiting a human body and being driven by desire, temptation, and possibly transgression, one may choose to practice celibacy in order to control oneself so as to achieve either a short-term goal or a permanent goal beyond the everyday world. In practicing celibacy, one is denying the body what it naturally strives to exercise in terms of its biological urges, with the result that the body is brought to further attention. Thus the ascetic act of denial as evident in the observance of celibacy is another kind of affirmation, a less carnal and more spiritual one.

By agreeing or choosing to be celibate because, for example, one is entering a religious position, such as the priesthood, that demands celibacy as a prerequisite, a person is making a type of decision that is ascetic. This is true even if he or she is not strictly speaking a full-fledged ascetic, that is, one who strives to harness bodily drives and re-channel them into more spiritual ends by denying fundamental biological drives. As some of the chapters in this book attest, some Eastern paths advocate utilization of natural biological drives to achieve their goals, standing in sharp contrast to more conservative traditions. There is a variety of ways to interpret asceticism within different cultural contexts. It is possible to view asceticism as a structure of compensation in which an ascetic both gives up and receives something.[11] Asceticism represents, moreover, a withdrawal from the habitual way of behaving.[12] In some contexts, asceticism is a means of critiquing the dominant society. Or it can be defined as "performances designed to inaugurate an alternative culture, to enable different social relations, and to create a new identity."[13]

Celibacy is not only associated with an ascetic strain within particular religious traditions but it is also a scripted form of violence. Without claiming that violence is innate to human nature, violence can be defined in the following way: "Violence, in both the widest possible and the most elementary senses of the word, entails any cause, any justified or illegitimate force, that is exerted—physically or otherwise—by one thing (event or instance, group or person, and, perhaps, word and object) on another."[14] Of course, by adopting a celibate lifestyle, one is inflicting the violence on oneself, or in the case of institutional celibacy, the violence is already embodied in the religious institution that demands celibacy as a requirement for membership. By practicing celibacy, a person works against the natural inclinations of the human body and its drives, and he or she thereby perpetuates violence on him or herself. With its inherently ascetic and violent features, celibacy causes emotional, mental, and physical discomfort and pain of an often self-inflicted kind. Pain can be defined

as "a sensation that is tangled with mental and even cultural experiences."[15] When the practice of celibacy is personally chosen by an individual it represents a form of self-punishment. Pain is, of course, intimately associated with asceticism. Moreover, it is possible for pain to be transformed into power.[16]

Monotheist Traditions

As a context for the discussion of Western and some monotheistic religious attitudes toward the practice of celibacy, the book begins with the classical world of Greece and Rome. In the worlds of Greece and Rome, citizens were expected to reproduce. Those that chose to remain single were penalized by government legislation. An exception to this general social expectation of reproduction was granted the Vestal Virgins by virtue of their religious office. The position of the Vestal Virgins was significant in the ancient world because it was anomalous, even though many of these women married after their thirty years' term of duty was completed.

The stress on reproduction hid a classical cultural conviction that sexual pleasure was potentially dangerous and antisocial. Sexual pleasure was symbolically connected to heat, and orgasm was seen as akin to minor epilepsy. Moreover, sexual intercourse was associated with the loss of a person's vital spirit. The danger associated with sexual pleasure motivated the Stoics, for instance, to advocate sex for the production of children and not the sake of pleasure alone. The emphasis on reproduction contributed to making celibacy an uncommon practice in the Greco-Roman world.

Willi Braun's chapter reviews Greek myths that provide some examples of celibacy, but he warns us not to interpret myths as representative of social practice or as paradigms of human behavior. Braun also reviews ascetic tendencies among philosophers and their stress on self-control and reason, although such thinking did not include renunciation of sexual relations, which was conceived as a civic duty to produce a new generation, promote moderation, and counteract desire, lust, and effeminate attitudes. Since sexual moderation was the cultural norm and celibacy an aberrant practice, Braun devotes much of his essay to examining the important role of celibacy among the Roman Vestal Virgins and the eunuch-priests of the Cybele cult.

Although there was no ambiguity associated with the Vestal Virgins' vow of celibacy, their roles, status, and privileges did create some ambiguity in the minds of others. Eunuchs, however, who were considered strange figures by ancient writers, attracted only disdain, ridicule, and suspicion. Various thinkers classified eunuchs as a third type of human being, and they were

viewed as immoral, weak, and low on the social ladder. Braun also discusses the association of eunuchism with purity, chastity, desexualization, and sterility. Since the eunuch was disdained and ridiculed by others, what fascinates Braun is the rationale for the continuation of the eunuch's place in the Greco-Roman world, which he traces both to gender ideology of the historical period together with achievement of male excellence, and to accepted notions of the science of physiognomy, with its presupposition that external bodily characteristics determine internal character.

Judaism represents a religious tradition that is strongly opposed to celibacy. In ancient Judaism, marriage was regarded as both a normal condition and a divine ordinance. The generally accepted opinion was that world creation entailed an injunction to multiply the species (Gen. 1:26). With the destruction of the Temple and the strengthening of the synagogue, Judaism became a religion of the book and of the sanctified, married household. No single aspect of normal life could be renounced if it represented the will of God. From the perspective of rabbinic Judaism, the unmarried man is not a whole person. In fact, the unmarried man diminishes the likeness of God. Therefore, celibacy was not common and was disapproved by the rabbis on moral and theological grounds, and the rabbis equated celibacy with sinfulness, as Eliezer Diamond's chapter reminds us. For rabbinic Judaism, sexual abstinence was not a virtue because it was in conflict with the purpose of creation. Although the Jewish idea of holiness includes a reference to restraint of sexual relations, this does not include becoming celibate.

The Jewish tradition did allow for exceptions, with a temporary practice of celibacy during a woman's menstrual cycle. There were also examples of prophetic figures that practiced celibacy as a result of their direct contact with God. And an individual called a *nazir* took a temporary vow of celibacy in order to attain a state of holiness. Although celibacy played only a minor role in Jewish history, Diamond's chapter calls attention to some exceptions among marginal sects, such as the Therapeutrides, who wanted to develop discipline and remove social obstacles to the study of divine wisdom; the Essences, who were motivated to reject material and sensual pleasure; and the Qumran community, whose practice of celibacy is open to scholarly debate—but each of these exceptions represents a response to catastrophe of some kind.

Diamond's chapter also calls attention to some exceptions in rabbinic Judaism that were associated with studying the Torah. And Diamond draws a distinction between Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic attitudes. Thus Diamond finds some evidence of celibacy within Judaism, and he attempts to recover the motivations and circumstances behind the rare cases where it occurs.

The emphasis on the virgin birth of Jesus, the apparent celibacy of Jesus due in part to his itinerant lifestyle, and the apparent sexual abstinence of many of his disciples served as models for Christian practice at a later period. The narrative of the virgin birth suggests a mentality that closely linked virginity to the gift of prophecy. In the case of Jesus, his celibacy was an adjunct of his prophetic calling. Glenn Holland contextualizes his essay within Roman culture, with its notions of self-restraint that were connected to self-mastery and the idea that vital energy would be depleted by means of sexual relations, which could thus prove harmful to a person. Holland connects the Christian motivation for celibacy to both a decision to refrain from marriage and eschatological expectations of the early community. The message of Jesus and response to it demanded that the hearers repent, believe, and focus on matters that were beyond ordinary and family concerns. Holland calls attention to the period after the death of Jesus, when it was possible to find examples of married and unmarried male and female ministers, although the women tended to be unmarried or widowed.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul affirms that sexual renunciation is not essential to his message, although he does refer to sexual continence as a gift and sexual relations as normal. Holland's chapter reminds us that as the early Christian movement developed, the notion of lifelong celibacy became accepted as a higher path to salvation. In fact, different notions about the nature of a follower of Jesus grew along with rationales for voluntary celibacy.

Holland traces the growing emphasis on celibacy and veneration of the ascetic lifestyle. Before long, lifelong celibacy received a theological foundation with important implications for women. In the second-century Christian churches, sexual abstinence became a distinguishing mark, as it established the authority of prophetic figures and church leaders by making the human body a more appropriate vehicle to receive divine inspiration. For Justin Martyr (ca. 100–ca. 165), continence was associated with fundamental simplicity, whereas Tertullian (ca. 160–ca. 225) grasped celibacy as the most effective technique with which to achieve clarity of the soul. If sexuality was symptomatic of humanity's fall into bondage, the renunciation of sexual relations was linked in the Christian imagination with the reestablishment of a lost human freedom, regaining the spirit of God, and the conquest of death. With the growing negative view of sexuality in the fifth century, the works of Jerome, Augustine, and the rule of Benedict, according to Holland, shaped the Latin comprehension of acceptance of celibacy by the church.

Within the context of medieval Christianity, celibacy was increasingly a prerequisite for religious office or position. Celibacy also set a religious person

apart from the rest of society. Karen Cheatham's richly nuanced chapter emphasizes change within medieval Christianity, and it calls attention to writers who discussed three orders of the faithful based on sexual lifestyle, with the highest status reserved for those who refrained from sexual activity. Cheatham makes a distinction between virginity, which was mostly associated with women, and chastity, which represented a choice of lifestyle after sexual activity and did not imply lifelong abstinence. These kinds of choices were associated with sexual purity, preparation for an intimate relationship with God, and imitation of angels, and were connected to superior moral and spiritual conditions.

In addition to discussing the diversity of medieval notions of virginity and the theme of spiritual castration, Cheatham stresses that the concepts of virginity and chastity had wide influence on the shaping of the medieval mind in many ways. An obvious example is clerical celibacy, which is traced to the polluting nature of sexual intercourse and is connected to daily performance of the Eucharist service. In addition to the economic factors involved in clerical marriage, there is also evidence of resistance to celibacy enforced by church authorities. For lay members of the church, there developed so-called chaste marriages for devout couples. Cheatham calls attention to lay sanctity movements, such as the Beguines in the thirteenth century—a group of uncloistered religious women for whom chastity and celibacy were fundamental to their lifestyle. Such examples show that the medieval church and the role of celibacy, within it and outside of it, were complex and never static.

Protestant Christianity exemplifies a different attitude toward the practice of celibacy. M. Darrol Bryant begins his chapter by raising the question of whether or not celibacy is a Protestant issue. After surveying the issue of celibacy in early Christianity, Bryant presents celibacy as a path of obedience and service, although troubling questions about sexuality persisted. Martin Luther, a Catholic priest turned reformer, offered a critique of celibacy after becoming convinced on the basis of his study of the Psalms that God's grace, not our acts, redeems us. In his lectures on Galatians in 1519, Luther denounced priestly celibacy, saying it was not good for all priests. Furthermore, the formal vow of celibacy set clergymen apart from the masses of the people. Being opposed to any coercive authority, Luther argued that monastic vows stand against the Word of God and against Christ because they violate the freedom of the gospel and make religion a matter of rules, statues, orders, and divisions rather than a spontaneous relation to God through Christ. Moreover, it is ridiculous, he said, to assume that virginity is superior to marriage. The belief that the celibate person attains a higher stage of perfection than the average person is abhorrent because it involves a conviction that Christ has

not done everything sufficient for our salvation. Thus there is a danger that the vow of celibacy could become a substitute for faith itself. In his work the *Babylonian Captivity*, Luther argued that marriage was a natural state, whereas Satan inspired clerical celibacy.

In addition to Luther, Bryant examines other figures, such as the humanistic scholar Erasmus, the Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli, French reformer John Calvin (who pointed to the corruption in the church and lack of scriptural basis for celibacy), and Menno Simons, a Dutch Anabaptist. Bryant points out the Protestant undermining of the distinction between priests and laity that contrasts a celibate priesthood with a married ministry. After reviewing examples of lay spiritual and lay-centered movements among the Puritans, Pietists, and Methodists, as well as John Wesley's call for perfection, which had no connection with celibacy, Bryant discusses the neo-orthodox Protestant thinker and pastor Karl Barth (d. 1968), who strikes a balance between the options to marry or remain single. Bryant views Barth's position as a correction to the Protestant tradition, before he concludes with a look at male-centrist thinking in the twenty-first century.

In contrast to Roman Catholicism, the Eastern Orthodox Church does not insist on celibacy for all clergy. They allow some clergy who are content to remain among the "lower" clergy to marry. This attitude toward celibacy reflects in part the tendency of individual Eastern Orthodox Churches to practice independence from each other by forming bodies that more or less correspond to the national states in which they exist.

In contrast to Christianity and the model of Jesus, the prophet Muhammad was a model for married life, a position shared with Judaism. The Qur'an (57:27) denounces celibacy as a human invention. Hence, ascetic practices tend to be un-Islamic from an orthodox perspective. Although the Shiite Muslims are an exception with respect to mortification of the flesh, there is in Islam generally no injunction to mortify the body, because such practice does not allow a person to perform ritual duties. In his chapter, Shahzad Bashir shows that the Islamic situation is more complex with respect to celibacy.

In contrast to the orthodox tradition, the Sufi movement expresses more negative attitudes toward the body. Sufi religious leaders express a variety of opinions about whether or not a Sufi should lead a celibate life. In addition to contested ascetic practices among Sufis on the basis of Qur'anic injunctions and personal choice, Bashir finds that celibacy functions as a form of social protest by Sufi groups, and that there is a relation between forced celibacy and political power during the medieval period. Bashir points out that most Sufis marry, with the exception of the Bektashi order in Turkey, although antinomian Sufi groups have arisen that were more radical and insistent on celibacy.

Other exceptions to the Islamic tradition included eunuchs, who served in the military and as government officials and had status in the society and real influence on kings. Bashir also balances his chapter by discussing the female Sufi saint Rabiʿa and works that discuss advantages of marriage and celibacy to promote religious life.

Eastern Religious Traditions

In his chapter, which focuses on classical Hinduism, Patrick Olivelle draws a distinction between the terms *chaste* and *celibate*; he views the latter category as a social institution within the Hindu context. Knowing the important role played by celibacy in Indian history, Olivelle finds it ironic that there is no specific term for celibacy, although the term *brahmacārya*, which is later adopted by Buddhists, comes to approximate celibacy—it entails an initiation that requires a celibate lifestyle for several years during a young man's life as a student. In comparison to the minor role of celibacy in vedic religion, the embrace of celibacy by members of newer religious groups, such as Buddhists, Jains, and Ājīvikas, influenced the later Brahmanical tradition.

The importance of celibacy in Indian culture was embedded in the stages of life (*āśramas*) of a student, forest dweller, and renouncer, the sole exception being that of the life of a householder. According to Olivelle, the āśrama system was crucial for the development of celibacy in Indian culture, where it evolved from a permanent commitment to temporary stages of life, although the value of celibacy changed when it was domesticated. Olivelle discusses the tension between the values of domestic life and ascetic values. Overall, Olivelle shows how ascetic values were incorporated into the stages of life and also relegated to later in life after a person had been able to meet social obligations. The classical Hindu attitude toward celibacy is captured nicely in the *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* (2.13.3–6), where it affirms that those practicing celibacy attain immortality and acquire superhuman powers on earth.

Although the cultural attitude toward the value of celibacy continued in later Hinduism, the picture became more complex with the advent of devotional religious movements and Tantra. The various devotional movements have tended to be more life affirming and use sexual imagery in poetry to express the erotic and devotional relationship between a person and his or her deity. Devotional Hinduism also tends to be more sensual, with an emphasis on seeing and touching the deities.

The Tantric movement in its so-called left-handed form embraces sexual relations and other forbidden things as a means to achieve liberation. In

Tantra, the human body is considered a microcosm of the divine pair represented by Śiva and Śakti. By engaging in a ritualistic practice of sexual intercourse, a couple imitates the divine paradigm. This forbidden and illicit form of sexuality increases one's spiritual progress and prefigures the union of the divine masculine and feminine forces within one's body; final liberation is conceived as an androgynous condition and the overcoming of one's fragmented condition. The use of sexual relations to achieve liberation stands in sharp contrast to classical yogic techniques.

Celibacy is integral to the religious way of the Jain ascetic. There is a conviction that celibacy protects the soul from the harm associated with passion connected to sexual activity. The Jains also believe that there is a direct connection between celibacy and nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*). They believe that the act of sexual intercourse destroys numerous single-sense creatures believed to dwell in the generative organs of couples.

Paul Dundas makes creative use of the narrative of the Jain monk Sthūlabhadra to illustrate the struggle against sexual desire and a test of the vow of celibacy. The story suggests a juxtaposition of two opposing conceptual realms: urban sexual relations and renunciation, with the latter being the heroic choice to conquer desire. Dundas places the Jain attitude within its historical context and takes Olivelle's discussion in a previous chapter in another direction by discussing women as sources of temptation and roots of violence, and the monastic guidelines for relating to women. Dundas also connects food with erotic desire because food conditions sexual activity, both promote satisfaction, and both threaten the soul. In addition, Dundas examines the relationship between monks and nuns and the relationship between women and sexual restraint.

Instead of being in sharp contrast to the Jain ascetic, a Jain householder could choose to limit sexual activity to certain times, have a single partner, and curb the sexual drive. These are examples of the strong influence that celibacy has over the Jain religious imagination. Dundas calls attention to the negative view of sexual intercourse that shaped lay attitudes. And he reminds us that attitudes about celibacy are presented from a male perspective.

Similar to ascetic Jainism, a fundamental ethical precept embodied in the message of the Buddha involved the practice of celibacy for those who choose to become monks or nuns. Since ignorant craving was by definition essential to the arising of suffering, it was absolutely necessary for a monk or nun to become detached from sensual pleasure. Moreover, sexual relationships entailed social and family responsibilities and functioned as obstacles to mental concentration. Householders were not expected to share in the latter because they were expected to have sexual relations, although a householder might

practice celibacy on special occasions or for a specific purpose for a specific period of time. John Powers uses narratives to illustrate Buddhist attitudes and monastic rules, and he unpacks various rules and regulations in an attempt to comprehend why celibacy is essential for liberation. Powers discusses instructions for overcoming desire that are directed to the brain instead of the sexual organ, because it is the source of desire.

If we compare the formative period of Buddhism with its later development in Tibet, we find a more complex situation, because some schools of Tibetan Buddhism insisted on celibacy while some schools allowed sexual intercourse within a ritualistic context. Some more elite, advanced practitioners under the influence of Tantric thought imitated the Buddha, who is depicted as engaged in sexual relations with consorts. There were also some sects of Tibetan Buddhism that allowed for married clergy, in sharp contrast to the formative tradition. Powers skillfully distinguishes between Vajrayāna sexual techniques and more popular forms in the West.

In addition to India and Tibet, China and Japan hosted further developments within Buddhism. With respect to the practice of celibacy, there was wide diversity within these countries. John Kieschnick demonstrates the many obstacles to celibacy in China, where sexual activity was encouraged by the culture, was considered healthy, and played an important role in the social-lineage ancestor cult. From the Chinese perspective, celibacy was antireligious and antisocial, although a layman might produce a son to protect his lineage and take a vow of celibacy afterward. Kieschnick also calls attention to the sexual misconduct of monks that harmed the image of Buddhism, the work of critical literary figures, and the fabrication for political reasons of stories about wayward monks.

Although the practice of celibacy spread with Buddhism to Japan, with the advent of devotional movements and an emphasis on the role of lay people the Japanese abandoned celibacy for a married clergy. As Kieschnick observes, the practice of allowing a married clergy needs to be comprehended within the context of a belief in the decline of the Buddhist doctrine. The practice of celibacy never completely died out in Japan, however, as evident in the development of Zen Buddhism, and Korean Buddhism represented a counter movement back to celibacy.

Kieschnick's essay on East Asian Buddhism is complemented by Livia Kohn's essay on Daoism. Celibacy is not central to Daoist ethos or to Confucianism. A basic conviction holds that the family represents the basis of Chinese society; this is an attitude that gives paramount importance to the role of filial piety and marriage in ensuring the continuation of the paternal lineage and perpetuation of the ancestral cult. Nonetheless, the harnessing and refin-

ing of sexual energy, a basic power of life, is essential to Daoism. Inner alchemy schools stress female superiority in harnessing the primal sexual energy, and influenced the bedchamber arts. The practice of inner alchemy is intended to stimulate sexual energy and to transform it into a spirit that creates an immortal embryo. This type of practice is also associated with longevity techniques and mental concentration. Kohn shows that sexual techniques do not completely eliminate celibacy because they are used as a prelude to enhancing concentration and meditation practices, which are not intended to devalue sexuality but rather to gain inner strength. With the body forming the basis for transformation, sexuality becomes internalized into a refined sexual practice.

Shinto, an indigenous religious tradition of Japan, represents another religious tradition that is opposed to celibacy. C. Scott Littleton indicates that Shinto celebrates life and procreation. Littleton places Shinto into a historical and cultural context by reviewing its mythology, divine beings, belief system, shrines, priesthood, relationship between women and religions, and the cultural institution of the *miko*, who must be virgins in order to assist priests. Littleton also discusses the religion's attitude toward marriage and its relationship to the state, and he makes a brief comparison to Judaism. The Shinto tradition stands in sharp contrast to some forms of the Buddhist tradition that exerted an equally profound influence on Japan.

Non-Asian Indigenous Religious Traditions

Within African indigenous religions, celibacy is not viewed with favor because it upsets the social and religious order and the necessity to propagate the species. In African cultural traditions, celibate individuals are treated with contempt to the extent of being ostracized by their families and society. Likewise, sterile people are also despised, and they are compared to unproductive earth that possesses no value. For example, although in some religious traditions celibacy can symbolize purity, it is the emitting of semen that functions as a form of purification among the Zulu of southern Africa. When a Zulu male fears that he has been treated negatively with secret medicines, he does not sleep with his wife. Rather he goes to another woman and has sexual relations with her. Thereby, he expels his evil into her.[17] Such a scenario gives rise to questions about the connection between celibacy and social habits, and the extent of social control over human bodies by the individual and the collective.

Concentrating her essay on the Yoruba society of Nigeria, Oyeronke Olajubu stresses the importance of procreation to perpetuate family and lineages in order to ensure biological immortality. She examines sexuality as it is

connected to the maturation process for males and females, which is also connected to the rhythm of life and ancestors. She also explores the importance of children and the dire consequences of not producing any children. She finds that sex is conceived as a divine gift that must not be abused by the Yoruba.

Contextualizing celibacy among the Yoruba, Olajubu finds it among servant and slave groups within the society, which calls attention to sociopolitical problems related to class, power, and the status of the celibate person as subject to force. Within a religious context, on the other hand, celibacy is not a lifelong commitment; religious functionaries are required to practice it for periods of time when they assume roles as intermediaries between divine beings and worshipers. Some elderly, who dedicate themselves to a deity, also practice celibacy, along with young girls dedicated to goddesses. From the perspective of her sociocultural analysis, Olajubu argues that celibacy is a matter of class and not religion among the Yoruba, and it is connected to the need for loyalty, trust, and protection of royal blood.

As a general statement that invites qualification, Native American Indians do not embrace or stress celibacy because it is not creative, whereas sex is a natural act that is encouraged. Among Native Americans, there is a cultural expectation to gratify one's passions, although there tends to be a double standard for men and women, with the former allowed to be promiscuous while the latter are expected to remain pure, unless women want to compromise their future marital status. Moreover, the dichotomy of body and soul that Native Americans believe in does not contribute to an emphasis on celibacy because sexuality is conceptualized as a creative power.

The cultural encouragement of sexual relations among Native American Indians is sometimes interrupted by short-term celibacy, such as the game played by the Cherokee and by the Eskimo at their Bladder Festival. In another instance, married Cheyenne abstain from sexual relations for long periods of time after the birth of a child and conception of another. Within the context of the Sun Dance ritual, celibacy is imposed by the rigors of the rite and is not specifically required. The Sun Dance also paradoxically embodies numerous sexual aspects that tend to dominate the ascetic aspects of the rite. In general, Native American Indians tend to respect those that choose celibacy, but they do not emulate celibates as a general rule.

Some Native American Indian peoples give overt expression to sexuality in their cultural figures, such as the trickster with his insatiable sexual appetite, which reflects universal human biological urges that need to be addressed before cosmic and social equilibrium can be achieved by members of a society. Trickster narratives are indicative of the ambivalent and dangerous

nature of sexuality. It is also important to mention the role of clowns and their often sexually obscene antics.

As we move from North America to Mesoamerica, we encounter peoples who celebrated sexual pleasure, which placed them into opposition with Catholic priests' intent on converting them. Mesoamericans believed that sexual relations between married couples were healthy, harmonious, and positive, whereas sexual transgressions threatened the social fabric. Jeanne Gillespie calls attention in her chapter to the connection between abstinence and purity; uncleanness is caused by excess and imbalance, creating the general rule that sexual moderation is to be preferred. For unclean individuals, sweat baths were used for purification.

Even though sexual relations are tied to pleasure, harmony, and moderation, there were exceptions to the general social pattern among Mesoamericans. Gillespie calls attention to the practice of periodic celibacy by warriors, the finite nature of bodily fluids, and the necessity for abstinence during some festivals. In fact, celibacy was connected to a return to social and cosmic balance.

NOTES

1. T. N. Madan, *Non-renunciation: Themes and Interpretations of Hindu Culture* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 95.

2. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 205.

3. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 555.

4. Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

5. Alphonso Lingis, *Foreign Bodies* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 58–59.

6. Bryan S. Turner, "The Body in Western Society: Social Theory and Its Perspectives," in *Religion and the Body*, edited by Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 19.

7. Sandra Bell and Elisa J. Sobo, "Celibacy in Cross-Cultural Perspective: An Overview," in *Celibacy, Culture, and Society: The Anthropology of Sexual Abstinence*, edited by Elisa J. Sobo and Sandra Bell (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 11.

8. Ibid., 8.

9. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 2.

10. Ibid., 96–97.

11. See Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), and "Asceticism and the Compensation of Art" in *Asceticism*, edited by Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 357–368.