the changes won in previous decades, and the women’s movement entered a new chapter after 1949.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


Weipin Tsai

**CHLAMYDIA**

**SEE** Sexually Transmitted Diseases.

**CHRIST**

The body of Christ was central to late medieval and early modern European culture, not merely as a symbol or an idea but as a physical presence. It hung from crosses in churches and homes and along roadsides, shone from stained-glass windows, and gestured from scaffold and wagon stages. In the form of the Eucharist, Christ’s body was not only consumed daily at mass, but also paraded through city streets once per year and reverently displayed in countless chapels for perpetual adoration. It was the object of spiritual meditation and devotion that many now find startlingly physical in focus, and often unexpectedly gendered, or overtly erotic.

**CORPUS CHRISTI**

The fourth Lateran Council defined the long-held doctrine of transubstantiation in 1215, and devotion to the sacrament soon increased. The doctrine holds that the Eucharistic host or wafer actually becomes the body of Christ upon consecration by the priest at the words of institution, “hoc est corpus meum” (this is my body), while retaining the natural appearance and taste of bread. The Feast of Corpus Christi, first established in Liege in 1246 to celebrate the Real Presence, was formally instituted by Pope Urban IV in 1264, and again by Clement V in 1311; within the next century this midsummer feast became one of the most important events in the church calendar, associated with major processions and theatrical performances. In York, England, a processional cycle of biblical plays produced by trade guilds displaced the ecclesiastical procession of Corpus Christi to the following day; seeing Christ in the flesh, as represented by actors, apparently won out in the popular imagination over seeing Christ in a wafer. Like the procession, however, in which the consecrated host was held high and paraded through the city streets, the plays emphasized the need and desire to see Christ: Characters repeatedly drew attention to his physical presence. The ability to see, touch, or consume the true body of Christ at virtually any time, in the form of the consecrated host, continued to foster devotion, ritual, and superstition. Demand grew to see the moment of transformation, itself associated with the miraculous power to preserve the observer from danger or death, while accounts (and representations) of miraculous bleeding hosts proliferated, often in relation to anti-semitic legends of host desecration.

**IMITATIONS OF CHRIST**

Many theologians unsurprisingly emphasized faith and good works over visual representation or sensory perception. The still-popular devotional treatise De imitatione Christi (The imitation of Christ), published anonymously in 1418 but now attributed to Thomas à Kempis, warns against a critical examination of spiritual mysteries such as transubstantiation, which rely on faith rather than proof or sensory perception. The treatise advocates a life of cheerful, humble devotion and virtue, filled with quiet contemplation and free of passion.

Others took a more visceral approach. The influential Pseudo-Bonaventurian Meditationes vitae Christi (Meditations on the life of Christ), composed in the fourteenth century, promoted affective piety through detailed, emotionally stirring meditation on the life of Jesus. Each moment was to be visualized in an imaginative reconstruction of events that might depart significantly from the Gospel accounts. What mattered far more than historical accuracy was a sense of immediacy, of one’s personal presence at the event, and an empathetic identification with Christ or with witnesses such as his mother. Horrifying invented details of the Passion narrative such as the scourging of Jesus with knotted or metal-studded whips that repeatedly tore his naked flesh were elaborated in the visions of fourteenth-century mystics such as St. Bridget (Birgitta) of Sweden and Richard Rolle de Hampole and Margery Kempe of England, long before they were filmed for Mel Gibson’s The Passion of the Christ (2004). The stretching of Jesus’s arms on the cross to fit prebored holes for the nails, featured by all the above-mentioned authors, was also represented in the York Crucifixion pageant. Some two dozen actors would have played Jesus in a full production of the York plays, all on different wagon stages, effectively promoting the image of Jesus as Everyman more than as a particular individual. This, too, may have encouraged men and women to imagine Christ’s body in a wide variety of highly personal ways.
While an emphasis on his emotional and physical suffering was common, many women in particular also dwelt at length upon more pleasurable ideas, such as the Nativity, or the physical perfection of Christ’s body. In the Revelations of Bridget of Sweden, immediately after recounting the horrors of the Crucifixion, Jesus’s mother describes the physical perfections of her son at the age of twenty, remarking on his hair (dark blond [crocea brunea] in the Latin version, auburn in a Middle English translation), pale skin, and red lips, and noting that even his enemies liked to look at him (4:70). Often such visions and meditations coincided with particular events in the church calendar. They were also closely associated with the physical host itself. As Caroline Walker Bynum (1991) states:

The humanity of Christ with which women joined in the eucharist was the physical Jesus of the manger and of Calvary. Women from all walks of life saw in the host and the chalice Christ the baby, Christ the Bridegroom, Christ the tortured body on the cross . . . Most prominent, however, was the Christ of the cross. No religious woman failed to experience Christ as wounded, bleeding, and dying.

(pp. 130–131)

Women in particular participated in this suffering, through physical illness and often severe self-mortification.

BRIDES OF CHRIST

Margery Kempe, who like some of her contemporaries suffered frequent uncontrollable fits of weeping at thoughts of Christ, envisioned herself not only as a witness to the Passion, having walked in his steps in Jerusalem on pilgrimage, but also as a servant first to St. Anne, at the birth of Mary, and then to Mary herself, witnessing the births of both John the Baptist and of Jesus. A married woman who bore fourteen children before demanding chastity from her husband, Margery also had visions of a relationship with the adult Jesus that strike the modern reader as remarkably intimate. In one vision she weds Jesus in the presence of his mother and a multitude of saints and angels, after which he tells her:

\(\text{thu mayst boldly, when thou art in thy bed, take me to the as for thi weddyd husbonde, as thy derworthy derlyng, and as for thy sweite sone, for I wyl be loyvd as a sone schuld be loyvd wyth the modyr and wil that thu love me, dowtyr, as a good wife owyth to love hir husbonde. And therfor thu mayst boldly take me in the armys of thi soale and kyssen my mouth, myn hed, and my fete as swetly as thow wylt. (Kempe, Chap. 36: you may boldly, when you are in your bed, take me to you as your wedded husband, as your beloved darling, and as your sweet son, for I desire to be loved as a son should be loved by his mother and desire that you love me, daughter, as a good wife ought to love her husband. And therefore you may boldly take me in the arms of your soul and kiss my mouth, my head, and my feet as sweetly as you will.)}\)

Margery takes a literal approach to the sponsa Christi motif that was common in poetic and theological writing alike: Standard allegorical interpretation of the biblical Song of Songs, attributed to Solomon, made Christ the mystical bridegroom of the church and of all Christians. In the third of his eighty-six sermons on this highly erotic and poetic text, Bernard of Clairvaux, a twelfth-century Cistercian abbot, expounds upon the opening verse: “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.” Bernard asserts that anyone who has once experienced a mystical kiss from the mouth of Christ will seek it repeatedly, but advises anyone burdened with carnal desire to start humbly at Christ’s feet, and then with his hand. In his eighth sermon on this text, alluding to Genesis 2:24, he states that “if marriage according to the flesh constitutes two in one body, why should not a spiritual union be even more efficacious in joining two in one spirit?”

THE SEXUALITY OF CHRIST

Various accounts of spiritual union, by men as well as by women, nonetheless explicitly cite physical sensations and sensual pleasures, many of which seem overtly erotic. When Rupert of Deutz, a twelfth-century Benedictine monk, passionately embraced a crucifix high above an altar, the kissing, according to his account, involved not only lips but also tongues. Richard Rambuss (1998) has demonstrated evidence of “male devotional desire amoroously attuned to a male Christ” (p. 238) in the work of major seventeenth-century English writers such as John Donne and Richard Crashaw. Artists and critics alike have in this regard more often taken note of the religious experiences of women. In the ecstatic vision of St. Teresa of Avila (1515–1582), the subject of Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s famous statue in Rome’s Cornaro Chapel, not Christ but a handsome angel repeatedly thrust a burning spear through her heart and deep into her entrails, filling her with the fire of God’s love. St. Catherine of Siena (1347–1380) not only drank blood directly from the wound in Jesus’s side, his gift in recompense for her drinking pus from a woman’s infected breast, but was also, like Margery and others, betrothed to Jesus in a vision. As reported by her biographer, Raymond of Capua, the ceremony was presided over by the Virgin Mary and involved a gold ring encrusted with jewels; her own description involves the circumcised foreskin of Jesus.

A cult had grown up around the holy prepuce, a potent symbol of Christ’s humanity and physical suffering, and a
part of his body thought singularly to have been left on earth after his ascension—a relic claimed by several institutions in the Middle Ages, including abbeys in Charroux and Coulombs in France as well as St. John Lateran in Rome, and by a church in Calcata, Italy, as late as 1983 when it was reported stolen. In The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion (1996), Leo Steinberg has argued that devotion to the foreskin and the Feast of the Circumcision (January 1), like the many fifteenth- and sixteenth-century paintings of Jesus either as an infant or after the Crucifixion that focus the viewer’s attention on his penis (the ostentatio genitalium), point not merely to Christ’s humanity but also to his sexuality. Some sixteenth-century illustrations, most notably a series of paintings of the “Man of Sorrows” by Maerten van Heemskerck, even indicate an erection under the cloth that drapes the loins of the resurrected Christ, his flesh rising not because of lust or any external stimulus but at his will, as Adam’s own penis was said by some medieval commentators to have done before the Fall in Eden. Such pictures thus symbolize Christ as the second Adam, reversing the Fall through his resurrection (1 Cor. 15:21–22), and bringing life to all.

JESUS AS MOTHER
In his eighth sermon on the Song of Songs, Bernard discusses the verse “Your breasts are better than wine” (4:10, translating the Vulgate’s “puerchiora sunt ubera tua vino,” where modern texts have “Your love is better than wine”), which he applies to the bridegroom rather than to the bride as customary, referring to the sweetness and forgiveness that flows from the breast of Jesus. Other writers described Christ in explicitly feminine terms as a nurturing mother. They had biblical precedent: In Matthew 23:37, Jesus compares himself to a hen gathering and protecting her chicks under her wings; he is also conventionally identified with divine Wisdom, personified as a woman in biblical texts such as Proverbs and the book of Wisdom and, like the eternal Word of the first chapter of John’s gospel, characterized as participating in the creation of the world. In her book of Shewings, an account of revelations she received in 1373, the anchorite and mystic Julian of Norwich writes, “our Lady is our Moder in whome we are all beclosid and of hir borne in Christe, for she that is moder of our Savior, is moder of all that shall be savid in our Savior. And our Savior is our very moder in whom we be endlessly borne and never shall come out of Him” (chap. 57). In the chapters that follow this passage, Julian develops the maternal image at length, noting for instance that “The Moder may geven hir child soken her mylke, but our preious Moder Jesus, He may fedyzn us with Himselde, and doith ful curtesly and full tenderly with the blissid sacrament that is preious fode of very liif” (chap. 60). As Bynum (1991)

states, “Such an identification of Christ’s saving role with giving birth as well as feeding is found in a number of fourteenth-century texts” (p. 97), especially by women such as Julian, or Margaret of Oingt (d. 1310), who describes the Crucifixion as Christ giving birth to the world.

DESIRE AND CONTROVERSY
Discussion of ideas such as the femininity of God, the sexuality of Jesus, and the relationship between eroticism and religious devotion by twenty-first-century feminist and queer writers and artists, as well as by theologians, have met with controversy and sometimes outrage. Accusations that such ideas are somehow unchristian indicate a lack of awareness of Christian history. For many, religious devotion remains a matter not just of the soul, but also of the body, and centred on the desirable body of Christ.

SEE ALSO Catholicism; Christianity, Early and Medieval; Homoeroticism, Female/Male, Concept.

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Garrett P.J. Epp