

Feature:

Religion and a New Century of Women

From Public Lectures

The 21st century has been dubbed “the women’s century,” and undeniably recent years have seen a growing prominence for women in all areas of society. After playing a subordinate and secondary role for so long, perhaps the time has finally come for women to exercise some power on the stage of history. Since the 1960s, with the advent of feminism and women’s studies, reexamining the male-centered society and culture of the past from a “female” perspective has become an increasingly popular exercise. As part of this, a critical spotlight has also fallen on the world’s religions. At the dawn of a new century and in light of such research, it is worthwhile taking a fresh look at the question of “women and religion” to deepen our understanding of the issues involved. Accordingly, the Institute of Oriental Philosophy organized a series of four public lectures over November/December 2001 on the theme of “Religion and a New Century of Women.” Covering Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism, these lectures looked at issues involving women in each faith from a variety of angles, including the view of women in scriptures and other writings, women in religious systems, and the influence of religious views of women on society in general. In this issue we present in a special feature translations of lectures by Kyoto University Assistant Professor Mari Oka (“Amidst a World in Conflict: The Women of Islam and Us,” Katsuhiro Kohara, Assistant Professor at Doshisha University (“Women in the World of Christianity: From the Religious Right to Feminist Theology”) and Senior Researcher at The Institute of Oriental Philosophy Toshie Kurihara (“A History of Women in Japanese Buddhism: Nichiren’s Perspectives on the Enlightenment of Women”). We are confident this set of essays will offer suggestions for new relationships between women and religion in the “women’s century.”