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The Religion of Thinness
How Society's Obsession with Beautiful Bodies is Holding Us Captive

Moorhead, Minnesota – According to the National Eating Disorders Association, Americans spend approximately \$60 billion a year on weight loss products, and diet books outsell any other books on the market—except the Bible. An estimated 10 million women and 1 million men suffer from eating disorders, and many millions more struggle with their weight. Obsessing about eating and weight has come to function like a religion, complete with its own moral code, symbols, beliefs, rituals and rules. At the heart of this obsession is the belief that in order to be happy, one must be slim.

In her revolutionary new book, *The Religion of Thinness: Satisfying the Spiritual Hungers behind Women's Obsession with Food and Weight*, Michelle Lelwica, Th.D. challenges our culture's devotion to slenderness and encourages readers to identify the spiritual needs that are hidden behind their desire to be thinner. Having had personal experience with an eating disorder herself, (she suffered from bulimia as a teenager), she explores a variety of more nourishing ways to meet these needs.

Lelwica proposes that the never-ending quest for a fat-free body masks deeper yearnings for a sense of purpose that religions are typically meant to provide. Even as the influence of traditional religions has been challenged, she shows how The Religion of Thinness is flourishing among devotees who chronically diet, exercise compulsively, go under the knife, or suffer with eating disorders like anorexia, bulimia, or binge eating.

"The real problem is not our soft bellies or well-rounded buttocks," stresses Lelwica. "We crave much more than food, which is why some of us feel we can never get enough."

The Religion of Thinness is designed to wake us up—not only to our spiritual longings but also to the ways we have been brainwashed into believing that our bodies are flawed and our appetites sinful. Using examples from the world's major religions, it examines the widespread cultural messages that contribute to the alienation so many women feel towards their bodies, and it urges criticism of these messages.

In an effort to deliver true redemption from one of society's most oppressive commandments, "You can never be too thin," Lelwica hopes her book will help stop the cycle of guilt and shame associated with food, and inspire the millions who are

desperately trying to lose weight to discover the sacred longings behind this struggle and “practice peace” with their bodies—as they are.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Lelwica has a doctorate of theology from Harvard Divinity School and is a professor at Concordia College in Moorhead, MN, where she teaches classes in religion, culture, and gender. She is also the author of *Starving for Salvation: The Spiritual Dimensions of Eating Problems among American Girls and Women*.

The Religion of Thinness is published by Gürze Books, a trade publisher that has specialized in eating disorders for the past 30 years.

The Religion of Thinness

Satisfying the Spiritual Hungers behind Women’s Obsession with Food and Weight

By Michelle M. Lelwica, Th.D.

Price: \$18.95

ISBN: 978-0-936077-55-0

Publication Date: November 12, 2009

Gürze Books

Advance Praise

“...*The Religion of Thinness* will be a godsend to anyone who wants to exchange a “religion” constructed by American media for more life-enhancing values.”

- **Margaret R. Miles** - Former Bussey Professor of Theology at the Harvard University Divinity School Author of *A Complex Delight: The Secularization of the Breast, 1350-1750*

"...Offers both theory and practice for women who want to free themselves from the pervasive obsession with body projects. The author's voice is mature and acutely critical of the ways in which American culture embraces thinness and its pursuit as a religion."

- **Joan Jacobs Brumberg, Ph.D.** - Author of *Fasting Girls: The History of Anorexia Nervosa* and *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls*

"...A wise, practical, and dynamic resource for all patients on their journey to recovery from eating and body image problems. Lelwica's grasp of the spiritual issues that perplex human beings in the 21st Century is essential to living a full life matched only by her ability to communicate her depth of understanding in a stimulating, clear, and effective manner..."

- **Kathryn Zerbe, MD** - Author of *The Body Betrayed: A Deeper Understanding of Women, Eating Disorders, & Treatment* and *Integrated Treatment of Eating Disorders: Beyond the Body Betrayed*

“This book should be required reading... We have believed for so long that there is only one kind of beauty, only one "perfect" body...Lelwica overturns these assumptions and opens the door to a new way of being in our bodies and in the world.”

- **Marya Hornbacher** - Author of *Wasted* and *Madness: A Bipolar Life*