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The Education of a Christian Woman: A Sixteenth-Century Manual (The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe)

Juan Luis Vives

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"From meetings and conversation with men, love affairs arise. In the midst of pleasures, banquets, dances, laughter, and self-indulgence, Venus and her son Cupid reign supreme. . . . Poor young girl, if you emerge from these encounters a captive prey! How much better it would have been to remain at home or to have broken a leg of the body rather than of the mind!" So wrote the sixteenth-century Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives in a famous work dedicated to Henry VIII's daughter, Princess Mary, but intended for a wider audience interested in the education of women.

Praised by Erasmus and Thomas More, Vives advocated education for all women, regardless of social class and ability. From childhood through adolescence to marriage and widowhood, this manual offers practical advice as well as philosophical meditation and was recognized soon after publication in 1524 as the most authoritative pronouncement on the universal education of women. Arguing that women were intellectually equal if not superior to men, Vives stressed intellectual companionship in marriage over procreation, and moved beyond the private sphere to show how women's progress was essential for the good of society and state.

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