



# Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness & Religious Meaning in the Christian West

By Margaret R. Miles

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When we look at Michelangelo's David, we see a nakedness that expresses physical prowess, self-knowledge, and spiritual discipline. What do we see when we look at Hans Baldung's Eve, the Serpent, and Death or Master Francke's Martyrdom of Saint Barbara? Why should those naked female images symbolize wantonness and shame? How do ideas about nakedness formed at the dawn of Christianity continue to shape today's sexual values? What must women do to take their bodies back? This revolutionary study by Margaret R. Miles, formerly Bussey Professor of Historical Theology at the Harvard Divinity School and author of the acclaimed *Images as Insight*, sifts through centuries of Christian writing and religious ritual and, above all, Western art to reveal the origins of our attitudes toward women's bodies and their encoded meanings. Broad enough to encompass fourth-century descriptions of Christian baptism and contemporary theories of representation, *Carnal Knowing* is a brilliant, startling work of scholarship whose implications extend far beyond the academy to the way we live and see.

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