

# Reinterpreting the Eucharist

Explorations in Feminist Theology and Ethics

Edited by Anne Elvey, Carol Hogan,  
Kim Power and Claire Renkin



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## Chapter 9

### EMBODYING THE EUCHARIST

*Kim Power*

#### *Part I: Introducing the Christa*

Since the earliest days of the church, childbirth has been used as a metaphor for Eucharist. In Christ's farewell discourse at the Last Supper (Jn 16.21 cf. 19.24), Christ's coming passion, death and resurrection are compared to a woman giving birth, thereby placing Christ in the prophetic tradition that compared the coming of the Kingdom (and also the Day of the Lord) to a woman in labour (Isa. 42.12-16, 66.7-14; Jer. 50.43-46; Mic. 5.3; Hos. 13.11-14; Gal. 4.19-20; Mt. 24.7-8; Jn 3.1-8). This is in keeping with Job's use of childbirth as a metaphor for Creation (Job 38.8). Indeed, this metaphor is over determined as revelatory of the sacred, for the prophets also compared God's election of Israel, and later, God's suffering in bringing Israel to conversion, to a woman giving birth and then carrying her babe through the desert (Jer. 6.24b; cf. 30.21; Isa. 42.14, esp. 42.3, 66.13). The early Church Fathers maintained this tradition as the foundation for their eucharistic theology. For them, when Christ's side gushed with the fluids of birthing—blood and water—then *Genesis* was recapitulated as Christ gave birth to a redeemed creation, simultaneously creating and inseminating his Bride, the Church. In this dispensation Jesus becomes the New Adam and Mary, the New Eve, through whom Adam and Eve's sin is graciously redeemed.<sup>1</sup> This conflation of Eucharist and Baptism

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1. All the Church Fathers followed Irenaeus, who was the first to systematize Paul's metaphor of Christ as the second Adam in the doctrine of recapitulation. Irenaeus, *Against Heresy*, 3.21.10; 5.2.3; 5.19.1, *Sources Chrétiennes* (SC) vol. 34, ed. F. Sagnard, pp. 152-53, and vol. 100, ed. A. Rousseau, B. Hemmerdinger, C. Mercier, L. Doutreleau, pp. 263-64, 293-94 (Paris:



So, are the *Christa* images proliferating in contemporary fine arts an obscene modern fad or a new leading of the Spirit, challenging old certainties that assert a false obscenity against her?

The generic commodification of women's bodies (which finds its nadir in the pornographic *Christa*) evokes John Paul II's caveat that only 'genuine art' constitutes revelation. How can we know if the *Christa* is genuine art? Certainly, the Senate, faculty, and students of the University of Toronto decided Almuth Lutkenhaus-Lackey's sculpture, *Crucified Woman*, to be so.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, female crucifixions have been painted and sculpted by artists of the calibre of Hieronymus Bosch,<sup>25</sup> Arnulf Rainer (see fig. 9.1, below, *The Wine Crucifix*), Edwina Sandys,<sup>26</sup> Arthur Boyd (see fig. 9.3, *Crucifixion, Shoalhaven* 1979–80), Martina Hoffmann (see fig. 9.2 below, *Female Crucifixion*), Susan Dorothea White,<sup>27</sup> Darinka Mircovich<sup>28</sup> and Eric Drooker (see fig. 9.4 below *Crucifixion*) – all internationally recognized artists, though I would wish to argue that creations from outside this select company are not necessarily artistically illegitimate. Margaret Argyle's exquisite *Bosnian Christa* and James M. Murphy's *Christine on the Cross* are cases in point.<sup>29</sup> It is also significant that several of

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24. Dyke fully describes the discernment process at the University of Toronto, when it was proposed that this sculpture be installed at Emmanuel College in *Crucified Woman*, pp. 10–24. The Senate's resolutions are cited, pp. 16–18. My photos of this sculpture can be found at <http://picasaweb.google.com/drdragonlady/Canada1#>
25. Between 1500–1515, Bosch completed an altarpiece *The Crucifixion of St. Julia* that is now in the Doge's Palace in Venice. Ilse E. Friesen discusses it in detail in *The Female Crucifix: Images of St. Wilgefortis Since the Middle Ages* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2001), pp. 55–57. It is accessible online at 'lib-art.com', [www.lib-art.com/artgallery/7231-triptych-of-the-crucifixion-of-st-j-hieronymus-bosch.html](http://www.lib-art.com/artgallery/7231-triptych-of-the-crucifixion-of-st-j-hieronymus-bosch.html)
26. The image is accessible online at the Brooklyn Museum. See, [www.brooklyn-museum.org/easca/feminist\\_art\\_base/gallery/EdwinaSandys.php?i=2206](http://www.brooklyn-museum.org/easca/feminist_art_base/gallery/EdwinaSandys.php?i=2206)
27. Susan Dorothea White's paintings on this theme also include a *Last Supper*, where an Australian Indigenous Woman represents Christ, a *Crowning with Thorns* and a *Crucifixion*, where Marilyn Monroe represents Christ. The latter is a detail in *The Seven Deadly Isms*. All can be viewed on her website, 'Susandwhite' [www.susandwhite.com.au/artworks\\_painting.html](http://www.susandwhite.com.au/artworks_painting.html)
28. Darinka Mircovich created a new altarpiece for a Chapel to St. Julia; see 'Darinka Mircovich', [www.darinka.it/galleria/sgiulia/galleriasgiulia.htm](http://www.darinka.it/galleria/sgiulia/galleriasgiulia.htm)
29. Both works appear in Julie Clague, 'Symbolism and the Power of Art: Representations of Christ Crucified', in Darlene Bird and Yvonne Sherwood (eds), *Bodies in Question: Gender, Religion and Text* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), figures 5 and 6.



also been exploited to critique politics,<sup>65</sup> sexism,<sup>66</sup> and even to protest against Christianity when it is seen to add to women's suffering.<sup>67</sup> These categories are not exclusive but, as the genre is flourishing, in this essay I shall keep my focus on the Johannine symbol of the Passion—childbirth.

*Arnulf Rainer's The Wine Crucifix (Figure 9.1)*

One of the earliest contemporary paintings that might stand as a precursor to the *Christa* is Arnulf Rainer's painting, *The Wine Crucifix*. Begun in 1959, Rainer originally created it as an altarpiece for the Catholic University in Graz. It was hung in front of a chapel window, where the light rendered the layers of paint translucent, highlighting the cross beneath them. After the 1959 congregation repudiated the painting, it was removed, to later find a home at the Tate Gallery.<sup>68</sup>

A crucifixion pregnant with meaning, it offers a subtle and ambiguous treatment of the theme. On a white canvas, an empty cross is deeply shadowed against a red background that flows and

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65. Eric Drooker's *Crucifixion* (see [fig. 9.4](#) and discussion below), 'Eric Drooker' [www.drooker.com/originals/drawing\\_gal.html](http://www.drooker.com/originals/drawing_gal.html); Ralph Wolfe Cowan's *The Cruise-I-Fiction (MADONNA): The Ultimate Pin-Up-Girl, and You've Come A Long Way Baby* was painted as a protest against the first Gulf war. See, [www.rogallery.com/cowan\\_ralph\\_wolfe/cr1.htm](http://www.rogallery.com/cowan_ralph_wolfe/cr1.htm). Willem Barnawi's, *Palestine Crucified*, lampoons American-Israeli collaboration against Palestine in a manner frankly anti-Jewish. It identifies those countries with the Pharisees who crucified Jesus, who is depicted here as female Palestine. See, [www.israpundit.com/2008/?p=8289](http://www.israpundit.com/2008/?p=8289)
66. Susan Dorothea White has been at the forefront of this theme with her images of Marilyn Monroe in both *The Seven Deadly Isms*, 1992, see, [www.susandwhite.com.au/paintings/isms.html](http://www.susandwhite.com.au/paintings/isms.html), and *The Crowning with Sexism*, see, [www.susandwhite.com.au/paintings/isms.html](http://www.susandwhite.com.au/paintings/isms.html)
67. The Art in Defence of Humanism Project, *In the Name of God*, falls into this category. Jens Galschiot created four crosses bearing sculptures of pregnant teenagers. These were paraded through the streets to protest many churches' attitudes to contraception and sexual education. For details of the countries where the images have travelled and gallery of images, see, [www.aidoh.dk/?categoryID=187](http://www.aidoh.dk/?categoryID=187)
68. After its rejection by the congregation, Rainer eventually recovered it and continued working on it until 1978, when it went to the Tate Gallery, though Rainer believes it belongs in a church. The painting is easily accessible online. The thumbnail is on the Gallery site with a note at [www.tate.org.uk/modern/tatetracks/yourtatetrack/entry.do?\\_flowExecutionKey=\\_c6311CCD9-6E1B-700B-611F-7A02876AFE31\\_k7958EA6C-A2A2-9648-BEBB-1A3FC335D2B7](http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/tatetracks/yourtatetrack/entry.do?_flowExecutionKey=_c6311CCD9-6E1B-700B-611F-7A02876AFE31_k7958EA6C-A2A2-9648-BEBB-1A3FC335D2B7)