

## 10. What do Christians say about sexual issues?

Crucifix, p. 207

The 1975 *Christa* sculpture by Edwina Sandys (b. 1938) has been praised by some Christians who claim that it illustrates that Christ saved both men and women and it testifies to the sufferings of women. To those who object to the image as not picturing the historic Jesus, the supporters liken it to Asian Christians drawing Christ as Asian or African Christians depicting him as black. *Christa* has been displayed in both galleries and churches; its presence in 1974 in New York's Episcopal cathedral of St. John the Divine was highly controversial.

### Quotes and Images

p. 209: The precise attire for the Amish is stipulated by the local bishop. Thus all the Amish in one area will dress in virtually identical clothing. At larger geographical gatherings, all will know where each person resides, by, for example, the width of the brim of the man's hat or the length of the ribbons on a woman's cap. Women are dressed not for sexual attraction but for communal identity.

p. 210: In the quotation from Mary Douglas, the term "holiness" means not "sinless," but "being set apart."

p. 212: Despite the traditional picture of thirteen males at the Last Supper, some contemporary artists show also women at the table, as if to answer the inquiry, "Who prepared the dinner?" In Da Vinci's fresco, all the sight lines converge on Christ's forehead.

p. 213: Rosemary Radford Ruether (b. 1936), a Roman Catholic historian, has written extensively about the role of women in Christian history and about liberation theology in Palestine and Latin America.

p. 214: Jarena Lee (1783–?) was the first woman eventually authorized by Richard Allen in 1819 to preach in the African Methodist Episcopal churches. She served as an itinerant preacher predominantly in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and her memoir is valued as a source of religious history.

p. 217: Dennis P. Hollinger is an evangelical and a professor of Christian ethics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Massachusetts. His book on Christian sexual ethics is useful especially for its treatment of a wide range of issues and for his fair presentation of views that he does not finally espouse.

p. 218: In the United States, it is usual for the Orthodox crowns to be floral wreaths that are attached to one another by a long ribbon. No crowns are used at second marriages.

p. 221: Beverly Wildung Harrison (1932–2012) was a Protestant professor of Christian ethics at Union Theological Seminary in New York. Her position that a woman has the right to govern her own body, and to see through or terminate a pregnancy, follows from her conviction that before God women are fully human moral agents, without subservience to men or their opinions.

p. 224: Fridolin Leiber (1853–1912) was a German artist who designed popular religious prints. The learned scholar Pope Benedict XIV in 1745 banned from Roman Catholic churches images that depict the Trinity as three males; however, some churches, particularly in Mexico, do display such images.

## Suggestions, pp. 225–26

7. “The Promiscuous Self” is an excerpt from a 1983 work by Walker Percy (1916–1990), a Southern author whose writings demonstrate his love of philosophy, his talent for satire, and his devotion to the Christian faith. The story begins with a debate about the prevalence of promiscuity in American society despite the history of Christian ethics, and it concludes with “The Last Donahue Show,” during which six characters, one being John Calvin, comment on sexual ethics. Discussion of this story might be enhanced if students were assigned to support one of the six positions that Percy presents.

8. Of the countless novels that juxtapose Christianity and sex, *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864) is suggested. Published in 1850, this American classic purports to narrate events that took place in colonial Boston two hundred years prior. At first, the “A” signifies Hester Prynne’s adultery, but it mutates into Able and then Angel. Both the parallel between Hester with Mary, both holding their infants, and the David and Bathsheba tapestry indicate that the hypocritical clergyman is more to blame than is Hester, and evil is personified by Hester’s husband, Roger Chillingworth. Thus the Puritan judgment against adultery is not supported by the narrator, who in the final chapter foretells the coming of a new truth of which the “apostle must be a woman.”

9. The 2010 German film *Vision* narrates the life of the Benedictine nun Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), abbess, visionary, scholar, author, healer, herbalist. Hildegard’s literary and artistic output was wide-ranging, and her resistance to male hierarchical censure impressive. The film touches on many sexual issues: male authority, illicit sexual intimacy, abortion, the blaming of women, gender attire, latent lesbianism, feminized spirituality. The description in Hildegard’s medical text of the process of conception was closer to the facts than that of her contemporaries. Discussion of the film can focus on Hildegard as exemplifying much that this chapter describes.