

## Margaret Ruth Miles

It is my privilege to present to you, for the awarding of an honorary doctorate in theology, the Bussey Professor of Theology at Harvard University Divinity School, Professor Margaret Ruth Miles.

Born in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Professor Miles earned her bachelor's and master's degrees at San Francisco State University. She completed her Ph.D. at the Graduate Theological Union in 1977 and, the following year, was appointed Assistant Professor of Historical Theology at Harvard. Since her initial appointment at Harvard twelve years ago, she has authored five books, edited two other books, and published more than forty articles and reviews--acquiring, along the way, a reputation as one of the major figures in contemporary theology.

Her books include such important contributions to theological knowledge as *Fullness of Life: Historical Foundations for a New Asceticism*, *Augustine on the Body*, *Practicing Christianity: Critical Perspectives for an Embodied Spirituality*, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West*, and, perhaps her most highly acclaimed work, *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture*. Of the latter work, the eminent theorist of aesthetics, Rudolf Arnheim, remarked that this "beautiful book...supplements our conception of what constitutes the history of religious ideas, and it gives the history of the visual arts and architecture a new, enlivening perspective." *The Christian Century* characterized the book as an "inherently interesting" and exhaustively researched study that offers a new vision of how historical theology can be done. *Image as Insight* integrated the arguments of Foucault, Turner, Geertz, Langer, Gadamer and other modern theorists into a larger tapestry that demonstrated the possibility of a visual/verbal interpretation of theological history. As Dr. Miles has elsewhere explained, "I am concerned with finding ways to understand and interpret the past, which illuminates the present, and to reconstruct a history of contemporary people who do not recognize either political or intellectual history as *their* history. It is difficult to find evidence for the 'ordinary' people of the past, but it can be done by using both verbal and visual examples." It is done with extraordinary skill in her subsequent book, *Practicing Christianity*, which examines the roles of the metaphors of imitation of Christ, pilgrimage, and ascent in the spiritual lives of various historical figures.

It is done in all of her work by focusing on the relationship between the human body and the human personality in the images and texts of the Christian religion. Though her numerous writings range over early and medieval church history, art history, theology, feminism, and hermeneutics, all of her work finds its focal point in the question of the significance of human embodiment and its representations in historical theology.

Margaret Miles, it has justly been written, is the originator of "a new, free, and often moving discourse that unites words and images to illuminate experiences of the present and the past." In appreciation for the originality and imaginative creativity of her scholarship, and for the deeply spiritual sensibility that informs it, it is a great privilege to present Professor Margaret Miles for the degree, Doctor of Divinity.