



# waterwheel

A Quarterly Newsletter of the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual

## Women Under Fire

Mary E. Hunt

It is easy to get complacent about women's well-being. A woman, Judge Sonia Sotomayor, has been nominated for the Supreme Court. Women are moving into positions of power in the Obama administration. But oppression on so many fronts stems from the continued, persistent, intractable sense that women can be taken for granted in what is still in too many respects a man's world. I will single out two seemingly unrelated examples that trouble me deeply both in themselves and for what they represent. I hope that by directing attention to them some changes will come about.

The tragic murder in a Lutheran church of Dr. George Tiller, who provided abortions in Wichita, Kansas, reverberates endlessly for women who need health care. Understandably, the immediate focus is on Dr. Tiller. His family and friends deserve all the consolation in the world as they cope with the loss of a courageous, caring, and compassionate man who was killed because he acted legally and professionally in ways some people did not like. However, the results are a disaster for women.

Dr. Tiller's murder points out that women's well-being means little to many people. Women's Health Care Services, Inc., the clinic he ran, is now closed. It is understandable that his family and staff, traumatized beyond measure, having lived with harassment, threats, previous attacks, and now a murder, have no energy to carry on. They have done more than enough and deserve praise. But it means that outside of Kansas City there are few, if any, clinics in the state of Kansas where a woman can get an

abortion. The closest place for a Wichita woman is Tulsa, Oklahoma, or some other place at least a three-hour drive away.

Put aside the usual ethical discussion about abortion for a moment. Talk is cheap but medical care costs more than money. Abortion is a legal, medically acceptable practice regardless of the fact that some people disapprove of it. No one is forced to have or procure an abortion under the law. There are people who have religious scruples about blood transfusions and organ donations. But those are done every day at clinics around the country without fanfare. There are no picketers and harassers to keep people from getting blood or kidneys. Recipients do not need escorts to get from their cars to the medical care they have a perfect right to seek under the law. That pregnant women are subject to such treatment is oppression.

What if the nearest place for other forms of routine health care were three hours away? Imagine if there were no place to get a mammogram or a prostate exam in the region. Think about a chest X-ray or stress test, a cholesterol screening or treatment for high blood pressure. These are private medical matters that doctors and patients routinely interact on. They are no one else's business and neither is abortion. It is only when women's health, safety, and rights are left aside that abortion services can be curtailed. This is unacceptable.

On another front, U.S. Catholic nuns are being pressured by the Vatican in a two-pronged way. Facts help: There are now

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It is easy to get complacent about women's well-being.

### WATER is Going Green!

WATER would like to send you information by email. This action helps lessen our impact on the environment and saves time and money.

Simply send us your email address. Email [waterstaff@hers.com](mailto:waterstaff@hers.com) and type in "Email update for WATER." Thanks.



### We Need WATER Interns, Associates, Volunteers, Visiting Scholars and Ministers

*Become part of a community  
where feminism, religion,  
and social justice intersect.*

WATER is accepting applications for Fall 2009 internships and visiting scholar opportunities. We offer exciting possibilities for students, or for women on sabbatical or needing a pause from work as usual.

Interns work in the WATER office, learn with the WATER staff, and enjoy all that Washington, DC, has to offer!

Visiting Scholar and Minister opportunities, Associateships, and Internships can be designed to meet your needs and WATER's.

For more information and an application, visit WATER's Web site, or contact Diann at [dneu@hers.com](mailto:dneu@hers.com) or 301.589.2509.

## Editorial

Going to church with U.S. Marshals posted around the sanctuary is a jarring experience. That is how the Washington, DC, memorial service for Dr. George Tiller was conducted. It was a very meaningful, moving worship service held under combat conditions. The alternative was worse, putting people in harm's way without protection. Such are the times in which we live.

Dr. Tiller was murdered while ushering in a Lutheran church in Kansas, allegedly by someone who opposed the fact that he performed abortions. His colleague, Dr. LeRoy Carhart, the eulogist at the DC event, is protected by federal officers lest the same fate befall him. Other speakers at the event, including religious pro-choice activists from several religious traditions, might also be targets. It is a terrifying thought.

The precautions taken prudently highlight the fact that differences of opinion can lead to violence. Language is not trivial in the equation. Abortion is the end of a pregnancy. Murder is murder. There is a difference that all the U.S. Marshals in the world will not erase. Pity it has come to this. We can, must, and will do better, so help us God.



## ...Under Fire

(Continued from page 1)

about 60,000 U.S. nuns whose median age is over 70. The first push is the so-called Apostolic Visitation, an effort by the Vatican's Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life "to look into the quality of the life" of these women. A Web site where this seemingly benign process is described includes a video of Mother Mary Clare Millea, the leader of the Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, who carries the unusual title of "Apostolic Visitor." Deputized by Rome to lead the process, she reports that she has already met with many leaders of religious congregations and looks forward to meeting with more. She will then move on to the next phase of the effort, which includes a questionnaire for the communities followed by on-site visits to selected ones. A confidential report to headquarters will follow.

It all sounds rather congenial until you realize that the "visits" came as a surprise to those who are to be visited. This is clearly a way to put progressive, not to mention feminist, nuns on notice that they are the reason their numbers are shrinking. There is no mention of the scandalous second class citizenship of every Catholic woman, which is the real reason young women don't flock to religious orders. Nor is there any hint of the burden nuns face as their members age, their facilities require maintenance, and their ministries multiply.

Some might be fooled into thinking that the resultant report will be a glowing account of these women's diligent work in education, health care, social work, ministry, and the like—as it should be. But don't count on it. The second prong of the attack is a "doctrinal investigation" of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), the group started with Vatican approval in 1956 which represents those who lead more than 95% of the nuns in America.

LCWR is being probed on three specific issues: women's ordination; lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender matters; and "Dominus Jesus." Translation: Some of the nuns want women in ministry in the

Women will not be taken for granted no matter how dire the consequences of full personhood may be.

Catholic Church; some of them are supportive of rights for LGBTQ people; and some of them think that there is salvation beyond the Catholic Church. So do millions of other Catholics.

Waiting in the wings, and carrying out the first investigation, is another group of nuns, the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious. They are ready to replace LCWR as the prime representatives of American women religious. Their power is derivative of their acquiescence to the male clergy. Perhaps it has not occurred to them that they too can be replaced when they run afoul of their patrons, when they start to make decisions on their own. That is the slippery slope here until and unless women can make their own choices.

The strategy is part of the larger plan of Pope Benedict XVI to purify the Church of dissenters. "Divide and conquer" is the tactic. But it only works in a system where women are not taken seriously as moral and theological agents, where the only women who have power are those who are deputized by and report to men. Alas, this is the case in contemporary Catholicism, and it is unacceptable.

While "abortion" and "nuns" are not often found in the same sentence, the loss of rights, the disregard for women's well-being, and the presumption that men can determine what is best—whether using guns or threats—ties them together.

I respectfully suggest that religious feminists speak clearly and in many voices the truth that those who will not share power need to hear: Abortion is primarily a women's health care issue for which privacy rules; nuns are mature adults who are perfectly capable of determining for themselves and in their communities how they will live their lives. Women will not be taken for granted no matter how dire the consequences of full personhood may be.

Mary E. Hunt, Ph.D., feminist theologian, is cofounder and codirector of WATER.

## Feminist Spiritual Practices with WATER. Join Us!

### Contemplative Prayer and Power

A small group of women meets monthly at WATER for contemplative prayer a la the Engaging Impasse Project ([www.engagingimpasse.org](http://www.engagingimpasse.org)). We have come to "need" this time for our own reflection, a chance to unplug from the daily demands and let the spirit flow. Perhaps our model will be an invitation to others to try this simple but effective way of being together.

We arrive at 7.00pm for a cup of tea and conversation. Promptly at 7.30 we gather for introductions and the laying out of a theme. We take turns doing this so no one is burdened. It is a way to share leadership and assure that our leaders don't burn out.

We have employed many aids: water, something to smell or taste, a picture of the earth, bird calls, musical selections, photos. We may begin with a guided meditation or a reading from a spiritual writer or literary figure. The "main course" is our 20 minutes of *absolute silence together*. The "together" part makes all the difference. Most of us simply would not take the time alone. We finish with a short period of discussion, bringing to the fore issues or insights that have arisen for us in the process. Again, being with others encourages verbalizing some of what is hard to put into words. Much is left unsaid, but the bits that get shared are rich.

It is hard to say what we achieve in the silence. But it is easy to acknowledge the power of the silence, the space it creates for new ideas and the refreshment it brings in the midst of bombardment by media, traffic, and even well-meaning people! No wonder meditation is part of most spiritual traditions. The surprise is that this simple technique is not used more widely.

We at WATER are keeping a log of our topics and materials to be shared as a resource down the road. For now, let this reflection be a spur to your own experiment with silence together. Just gather a few friends—every one won't be able to come every time so it is good to have a regular contingent that rotates—and plan a monthly time for contemplation. No miracles are promised, but it is a good bet that you will want to do it more than once.

### Women's Ritual Group: Marking the Seasons

Women in the WATER circle continue to gather monthly to create and share feminist liturgy and ritual. Our gatherings center on seasonal or holiday themes, grounding us in existing traditions and connecting us to others in celebration. At the same time, our feminist liturgies enable traditions to take on new meaning, reshaping them in fresh ways. Our feminist liturgies include the stories of women and other marginalized people, the rituals and practices that they create and need, and the solidarity of those near and far.

In the short days and long nights of December, we savored the beauty of darkness and the lights celebrated by Chanukah, Kwanzaa, and Advent with our liturgy, *Winter Solstice: From the Womb of Night*. With the New Year came the *Feast of Brigit*, including stories and rituals associated with ancient goddess and saint Brigit of Ireland (See WW 19.3-4 for a copy of this liturgy). Lent began (in the Christian tradition) and we re-imagined Ash Wednesday with *Give Them Garlands Instead of Ashes*, "making ashes" out of women's suffering and letting them spur us towards change and healing.

We certainly could not forget World Water Day at WATER! We focused our waters on healing—healing the waters of the world and healing ourselves—with *Water to Make All Things New*. We continued this ecological "greening" on Earth Day, calling on the glory of earth, air, fire, and sea with *Think Green: Hope for Planet Earth*. In May, the month of honoring mothers, we dug into *Women's Knowledge of Holy Mysteries*, exploring the symbols of serpent and apple and their connection to women, power, and knowing.

Now at the year's mid-point once again, we celebrate *Summer Solstice: A Fulfillment of Wishes* to be satisfied and renewed by the energy of the sun.

### Moon Sisters: Reorientation Across the Sky

The spring equinox marked one full year of Moon Sisters gathering faithfully outdoors on the night of the full moon for yoga and meditation. Our meetings testify to the wander of the moon and to the power of women's energy, especially at the site of the National Mall in our Nation's Capital. Our group is small and never the same—we recently welcomed the first of our Moon Brothers!—which makes each gathering take on a nature of its own, shaped by those who are present. And our circle always extends to those who are with us in spirit.

As the days grew longer, the moon rose later. One glorious month the moon emerged above treetops in the midst of our yoga, as if our very salutations called her forth. Some nights were cloudy and some nights our gathering ended before the moon was even visible, reminding us of that which is powerfully present even when not seen.



We have experimented with orientation, finding symbolic value in where our bodies are positioned. As the moon shifted her orbit each month, we, too, shifted our point of reference. Our faces moved from the horizontal line between the U.S. Capitol and the Washington Monument to diagonal locations across the sky. Last month we even rotated entirely to bid farewell to the setting sun in the west, usually at our backs. The moon beckons us off the grid, offering alternative perspectives.

The long evenings of June are waning again, often a bittersweet realization at this point in summer. With more hours of darkness, however, come more hours for the moon to show her glow.

### Feminist Spiritual Practices at WATER, Summer 2009

Contemplative Prayer: June 10, September 9

Women's Ritual: June 24, July 22, September 16

Moon Sisters: June 7, July 7

Prayer and ritual groups meet at WATER on Wednesdays at 7.30pm. The WATER office opens at 7.00pm for tea and conversation. Moon Sisters meet on the Mall at the Smithsonian Metro stop, east exit. RSVP to [annabeth@hers.com](mailto:annabeth@hers.com) or call 301.589.2509.

WATER heard the call to connect women of younger and older generations to share feminist religious values. We responded with our new project, *Intergenerational Circles: Loving Our Bodies, Our Selves*. We created space for women to address issues of sexuality, spirituality, and healing from a holistic, feminist perspective.

This program connects women across the generations to help them develop into the healthy, whole, empowered leaders that society and religious communities greatly need. We share here two sessions of two hours each. Use them for your group as they are or use them for one longer or several smaller sessions. Most importantly, create an intergenerational circle.

## SESSION 1

### Materials Needed

Collage supplies, slips of paper in two colors, pens, candle, coffee/tea, snacks.

### Setting

Circle chairs around a center table which holds a candle and colored papers. On a separate table, lay out collage supplies.

### Welcome/Introduction

Welcome. This circle is a safe space for us to be ourselves, find empowerment, and seek healing. We seek to create space to address issues surrounding sexuality, spirituality, and healing from a holistic, feminist perspective. This is a space to listen and learn from one another, and to allow our own questions and wisdom to guide us in our discussion and sharing.

### Naming Our Circle

Let us introduce ourselves. Say your name. In a phrase, share what brings you here and speak one thing you are hoping to get out of participating in this circle. (Write each response on a peach-colored paper and put it on the table.)

What values do we want to be mindful of to create a safe and supportive space for everyone? Let us name guidelines, write them on blue paper, and put them on the table. Some values might be: safety, confidentiality, respectfulness, avoiding being judgmental, listening to others, getting your own needs met. What else?

### Lighting a Candle

We light this candle for the women here tonight, as well as women near and far who are connected with this circle. This candle reminds us to honor the sacred in us and to honor our bodies as sacred.

**Chant:** "Woman Am I," traditional  
Woman am I, Spirit am I,  
I am the infinite within my soul  
I have no beginning, and I have no end,  
All this I am.

### Responsive Reading

**One:** The body is a sacred garment.  
—Martha Graham, from *Blood Memory*

**Response:** All women's bodies are beautiful.

**Two:** The body has its own way of knowing, a knowing that has little to do with logic, and much to do with truth, little to do with control, and much to do with acceptance, little to do with division and analysis, and much to do with union.  
—Marilyn Sewell, from *Cries of the Spirit*

**Response:** All women's bodies are beautiful.

your body? With sexuality? How are they connected to your spirituality? Or how are they not connected? How would you like them to be connected?

Create a collage that reflects your experience of these connections. Or, draw or write about these connections. Consider what you want to affirm about the images that come to you, and for what you may need to seek healing. Spend about fifteen minutes and then we will share them with one another.

### Sharing

What reflections do you have about your collage or drawing? What images or words stand out? What do they say about your connections with your body, sexuality, spirituality? What would you like to share?



## Intergenerational Circles: L

A WATER program for women focus  
Diann L. Neu and

**Three:** Over the years our bodies become walking autobiographies, telling friends and strangers alike of the minor and major stresses of our lives.  
—Marilyn Ferguson, from *Aquarian Conspiracy*

**Response:** All women's bodies...

**Four:** The rain beats on me, but the rain cannot wash off the beauty of my body.  
—Yoruba Proverb

**Response:** All women's bodies...

**Five:** these hips are big hips / ... / they don't like to be held back. / these hips have never been enslaved, / they go where they want to go / they do what they want to do. / these hips are mighty hips. / these hips are magic hips.  
—Lucille Clifton, from *Two-Headed Woman*

**Response:** All women's bodies...

### Reflection and Imaging

These readings talk about loving our bodies and ourselves. Think about your own experience in your body, loving your body, perhaps struggling to love your body. What has been your journey with

**Song:** "Love, Love, Love," 4-part round  
Love, love, love, love,  
people we are made for love.  
Love each other as yourself,  
for we are one.

### Body Centering

Stand in mountain pose. Place your feet shoulder width apart. Press your hands together at your ribs. Imagine roots emerging from your feet, growing into the floor, down into the ground, connecting you deep within the earth. Stand for a moment, feeling your strength and your rootedness. Pay attention to what your body is saying. Be at home in your body.

### Blessing for Our Bodies

By Diann Neu, from *Women's Rites*

Let us rise and give thanks for our bodies. For this blessing, repeat the last line of each verse in the first person.

**Speaker One:** Praise to you, Divine Wisdom-Sophia, for creating us in your image.  
**Response:** Praise to you, Wisdom-Sophia, for creating me in your image.

**Speaker One:** Praise the heart. Place your hand on your heart. Feel your pulse, your heartbeat. (Pause) Praise to you, Wisdom-Sophia, for our hearts.

**Response:** Praise to you, Wisdom-Sophia, for my heart.

**Speaker Two:** Praise blood. Stretch and move, bend forward and backward. Pay attention to the circulation of blood throughout your body. (Pause) Praise to you, Wisdom-Sophia, for our blood.

**Response:** Praise to you, Wisdom-Sophia, for my blood.

**Speaker Three:** Praise lungs. Place your hands on your rib cage, take a deep breath, inhale and exhale, expand and contract your lungs. (Pause) Praise to you, Wisdom-Sophia, for our lungs.

**Response:** Praise to you, Wisdom-Sophia, for my lungs.

**Speaker Three:** Praise bones and muscles. Touch some of your bones and muscles.

(Pause) Praise to you, Wisdom-Sophia, for our bones and muscles.

**Response:** Praise to you, Wisdom-Sophia, for my bones and muscles.

**Speaker Four:** Praise breasts, wombs, and ovaries. Touch your breasts and womb, or where they used to be. (Pause) Praise to you, Wisdom-Sophia, for our breasts, wombs, and ovaries.

**Response:** Praise to you, Wisdom-Sophia, for my breasts, womb, and ovaries.

**Speaker Five:** Praise female bodies.

Recognize the design of your body. (Pause) Praise to you, Wisdom-Sophia, for our beautiful bodies.

**Response:** Praise to you, Wisdom-Sophia, for my beautiful body.

back together and share a large circle backrub.

### Naming Our Circle

This circle is for each one of us. It is a safe space to dig deeper into the intersection of sexuality and spirituality. As we know from the first session, this is a broad topic and there are many directions we could take it. Tonight we hope to listen and learn from one another, and allow our own questions and wisdom to guide us in our discussion and sharing.

Let us begin by naming our circle. Say your name. In one word or one phrase, share something that stands out to you from our circle the first session. (Sharing)

### Lighting a Candle

We light this candle to honor the sacred that is a part of this space. We honor the sacred that is present when women gather, the sacredness in each one of us, and the sacredness of our bodies.

**Chant:** "Woman Am I," traditional

### Discussion and Advice-sharing

This circle gathers to discuss sexuality and spirituality, to ask questions, share advice, to learn from each other. What a rich circle of knowledge! What topics or issues do we want to pose to develop this connection tonight? What questions do we want to ask of this circle of wise women? What advice do we need?

Take a piece of purple paper and write down a topic or question you want to put on the table for our discussion. We will then put them in a bowl, draw them out one at a time, and open the circle for whomever wants to reflect aloud on each one. We may split off into pairs for some of the topics.

Pick a shell, hold it, and admire it during our sharing time. In between each question/issue that we draw, we will pass our shells, and sing the following refrain:

**Song:** "Love, Love, Love," 4-part round

### Sending

Pass the energy around by holding hands around the circle and by singing a final refrain.

© Diann L. Neu, D.Min., is cofounder and codirector of WATER. Anna B. Roeschley is a WATER Associate for 2007-9.

## Loving Our Bodies, Our Selves



g on sexuality, spirituality, and healing  
Anna B. Roeschley

**Speaker Four:** Praise the brain. Place one hand on the top of your skull and the other over the back of your skull. Gently massage your scalp. (Pause) Praise to you, Wisdom-Sophia, for our brains.

**Response:** Praise to you, Wisdom-Sophia, for my brain.

**Speaker Five:** Praise eyes. Open and close your eyes. Look around the room. Look into the eyes of those here. (Pause) Praise to you, Wisdom-Sophia, for our eyes.

**Response:** Praise to you, Wisdom-Sophia, for my eyes.

**Speaker One:** Praise ears. Place one hand over each ear. Remove your hands. Listen to the sounds around you. (Pause) Praise to you, Wisdom-Sophia, for our ears.

**Response:** Praise to you, Wisdom-Sophia, for my ears.

**Speaker Two:** Praise vocal chords. In a whisper, all at the same time, say your name. (Pause) Say it louder. (Pause) And louder. (Pause) Praise to you, Wisdom-Sophia, for our vocal chords.

**Response:** Praise to you, Wisdom-Sophia, for my vocal chords.

**Closing Chant:** "Woman Am I," traditional

### SESSION 2

#### Materials Needed

Slips of paper with hopes and guidelines from the first session, candle, bowl of rocks or shells, basket with blank slips of papers (purple) and pens, coffee/tea, snacks.

#### Setting

Circle chairs around a center table. Place the papers with hopes and guidelines on the table. In the center place a candle, bowl of rocks or shells, and a bowl or basket to collect new papers.

#### Welcome

Welcome to Session 2 of *Loving Our Bodies, Our Selves*.

#### Massage

Let us open our circle-time tonight by waking up our bodies, giving them some love, and letting go of tension, stress, things that are weighing on us. Split up into groups of three. Two people take turns massaging the third person on her back, head, hands, and feet. Draw the group

## In Memory of ...



From Joseph Buzy of Frederick, MD: In memory of **Peg Buzy**.

From Pamela B. Ray of Altoona, FL: In honor of **Robert Clothier, M.D.**

From WATER: In memory of **Kristen Wenzel**, Ursuline Sister, educator, and administrator.

From Jeanne Audrey Powers of Claremont, CA: In honor of **Diedra Kriewald**, a very popular former faculty member at Wesley Seminary, now living in Kenya where she and her husband are teaching for seven months in the seminary at the Methodist University there.

From Kitty Madden of Matagalpa, Nicaragua and Adrian, MI: In memory of **Patricia Madden** and **Mary (Madden) Peters** as well as their mother **Ruth** and father **George**.

From Gail Ruth Egleston of St. Louis, MO; Sister Diane Rapozo, BVM, of Dubuque, IA; Rockhaven Ecozoic Center in House Springs, MO; Mary E. Hunt and Diann L. Neu, Silver Spring, MD: In loving memory of **Sister Tobias Hagan, CSJ**, of Rockhaven, 1936-2009. Tobias was a pioneer in women's spirituality work, the director of Rockhaven retreat center outside of St. Louis, and a trusted, spirited companion.

From Juanita K. and Stephen J. Csontos of Alexandria, VA; Carol M. Connelly of Washington, DC; Kathleen M. Waugh of Alexandria, VA; Warren E. Brown of Washington, DC: In loving memory of **Elaine Sonosky**, an early supporter of Catholic women's ordination and an active participant in the Good Shepherd Catholics for Shared Responsibility.

From Patricia C. King of College Park, MD: **Elaine Sonosky's son, Paul**, has been a valued member of our staff in Environmental Torts, Civil Division, USDOJ for many years. We honor her memory.

From Catherine (Kay) Miller of Cleveland, OH: In honor of Program/Artistic Director, **Cece Miller**, for midwifing SacredSpace with her creative imagination & tenacity.

From Virginia Anne Day of Southport, CT: In memory of my Mother, **Virginia O'Leary**, for Mother's Day.

From Keun-Joo Christine Pae of Granville, OH: In honor of deeply admired theologian **Chung Hyun Kyung**.

From Barbara Steinberg of Owings Mills, MD; Louise P. Kelley of Silver Spring, MD; Mary Alcuin Kelly and Fern Hunt of Silver Spring, MD; Kathleen M. Shorter of Hyattsville, MD; Mary E. Hunt, Diann L. Neu and Min Hunt-Neu who called her "Grandma Betty:" In memory of **Betty J. Bosmyer**, mother of **Cheryl Nichols**, a WATER volunteer, and a beloved part of the SAS worship group.

From Ellen Mearns Bechtold of Butler, NJ: To honor my mother, **Marian Mearnsa**, a courageous woman and my daughter, **Sarah Guenter**, an equally courageous teacher and new mother.

From Richard Blanchfield of Oceanside, CA: My 70th birthday was on Mother's Day. I honor **my Mom** who died giving me life (May 10, '39).

From Sister Rachael Dumont, RSM, of Atkinson, NH: In memory of **my mother**, who passed away on April 16, 2008.

From WATER: In memory of **Leon Howell**, journalist extraordinaire and committed social justice worker who proved that men, especially with daughters and a wonderful wife, can be feminists.

From WATER: In memory of **Mary Jane Patterson**, a Presbyterian elder whose distinguished career included social work, missionary activity in Africa, and a storied tenure at the Washington, DC, Presbyterian Church (USA). She leaves a large community of activists and friends who appreciate her tireless efforts for justice.

From WATER: In memory of **Marcella Althaus-Reid**, feminist theologian who insisted that liberation include sexuality as well as economics, women as well as queer people of all stripes. Her *Indecent Theology* opened the door for new thinking about bodies and the divine.

## A Radical Act of Presence in the Face of Femicide

What do we do in the face of statistics that tell us one in two Congolese women have experienced sexual violence, reports that say that in the past ten years more than 200,000 Congolese women and girls have been raped, an average of 40 women per day in the province of South Kivu alone? How do we respond to a situation where thousands of women's and girls' insides are being ripped apart because militias are systematically demolishing communities, where the planned methodological destruction of women's reproductive capacities is being used as a tactic of war? What are we to do in the face of femicide?

On April 1, people in the WATER community responded in a radical act of presence. We came from around the Washington, DC, area on a damp and drizzly night to say, through our gathering, that gathering matters; to say, through our coming together, that we know the horrific injustices done to women in the Congo and we are not silent.

We read and shared stories, lit candles prayed prayers. Our silence was sacred and our solidarity was shared. What stands out, though, is the reminder that presence is powerful. Solidarity is no small thing. In the face of something as hopeless and overwhelming as femicide, sometimes the act of gathering is all we can muster. Let us find hope in what is radical about such an act, not in what is lacking.

We are reminded that we do not gather alone. Our circle of solidarity at WATER is part of a broader campaign called the Congo Sabbath Initiative, an effort to engage faith communities in educating people about sexual violence in the Congo. Services, teach-ins, programs similar to ours are being held across the country between January and April 2009. Money raised goes to build a greatly-needed center for survivors of rape and torture in Bukavu.

We hope that radical acts of presence will continue, small and simple may they be. May our solidarity speak loudly in efforts to end sexual violence in the Congo and worldwide. To learn more and get involved, see [www.vday.org](http://www.vday.org).

# Resources

Bendroth, Margaret Lamberts and Virginia Lieson Brereton. **WOMEN AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY PROTESTANTISM**. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002 (350 pages, \$19.95).

A good way to appreciate the breadth and depth of Protestant women's contributions to their churches and society. It is great to read the names of our own—Peggy Billings, Joan Martin, Claire Randall, Ann Patrick Ware, SL, among so many others—who made ecumenical sisterhood alongside the men's clubs they encountered. Read the sections on black and Chinese women and the International Association of Women Ministers to learn about the many approaches to equality.

Brasher, Brenda E. and Lee Quinby, Editors. **GENDER AND APOCALYPTIC DESIRE**. Oakville, CT: Equinox Publishing, 2006 (182 pages, \$26.95).

Scholarly treatments of millennial matters and women make this a unique volume that will appeal to the specialist but includes some accessible studies like Carol Mason's on anti-abortion terrorism and Tina Pippin's "The Joy of (Apocalyptic) Sex."

Breezeale, Kathryn A. **MUTUAL EMPOWERMENT: A THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE, INTIMACY, AND REDEMPTION**. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008 (162 pages, \$17).

Renewing the concept of marriage as a function of social change is a worthy task. This approach takes seriously intimate violence as part of the picture. It is heartening to see so many sources quoted who do not themselves live in heterosexual marriages. This feminist scholar is not preaching to the choir. Well worth giving those with whom we counsel.

Briggs, Kenneth. **DOUBLE CROSSED: UNCOVERING THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S BETRAYAL OF AMERICAN NUNS**. New York, NY: Doubleday Publishing Group, 2006 (258 pages, \$24.95).

Maybe the Vatican could save some trouble by just reading Kenneth Briggs' study of the way in which women religious have been exploited by the Roman Catholic Church. Of course women tell their

story best but this is a good primer on the issues.

Chelley-Hodge, Candace. **BULLET-PROOF FAITH: A SPIRITUAL SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR GAY AND LESBIAN CHRISTIANS**. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008 (160 pages, \$17.95).

This is a how-to guide for dealing with the slings and arrows of conservative Christianity. The author, a United Church of Christ minister, writes with flair and lives with verve.

Clack, Beverley, Editor. **EMBODYING FEMINIST LIBERATION THEOLOGIES**. New York, NY: Continuum Publishing, 2004 (260 pages, \$29.95).

Lisa Isherwood's appointment as Professor of feminist Liberation Theologies at the College of St. Mark and St. John in Plymouth was the occasion for these essays. Years later the works of Naomi Goldenberg, Marcella Althaus-Reid, and Lisa herself still push the horizons of embodied theology.

Day, Linda and Carolyn Pressler, Editors. **ENGAGING THE BIBLE IN A GENDERED WORLD: AN INTRODUCTION TO FEMINIST BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION IN HONOR OF KATHARINE DOOB SAKENFELD**. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006 (260 pages, \$29.95).

Colleagues of well respected and beloved biblical scholar Katharine Doob Sakenfeld offer a wide array of essays mostly on the Hebrew Bible. Their feminist biblical hermeneutics flow from Professor Sakenfeld's rich teaching and mentoring.

Epp, Eldon Jay. **JUNIA: THE FIRST WOMAN APOSTLE**. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005 (138 pages, \$16).

Feminist scholars have clarified that Junias ought to be Junia. What it means and what a difference it makes are explored in this volume.

hooks, bell and Amalia Meso-Bains. **HOMEGROWN: ENGAGED CULTURAL CRITICISM**. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2006 (145 pages, \$15).

These two important voices in conversation demonstrate how African American and Latina

women struggle toward understanding. They achieve an "over the kitchen table" dialogue about important issues.

Harnsby, Theresa J., Translation and Annotation. **SEX TEXTS FROM THE BIBLE: SELECTIONS ANNOTATED & EXPLAINED**. Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2007 (173 pages, \$16.99).

A handy little compendium of the sources which can be used to do one's own interpretative, educational, and pastoral work.

Khan, Janet A. and Peter J. Khan. **ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN: A BAHAI PERSPECTIVE**. Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing, 2003 (367 pages, \$15.95).

The practice of equality is part of Baha'i life. This book explores the roots and lays the foundation for men and women to live in right relation.

Kichline, Kathleen MacInnis. **SISTERS IN SCRIPTURE: EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIPS OF BIBLICAL WOMEN**. New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2009 (112 pages, \$16.95).

Catholic women seeking biblical study of women in scripture have begun to develop their own approaches. This volume introduces the 'how to' as well as some of the insights that scholars have gleaned.

Marcos, Sylvia. **TAKEN FROM THE UPS: GENDER AND EROS IN MESOAMERICAN RELIGIONS**. Boston, MA: Brill, 2006 (146 pages, \$99).

A specialized volume of anthropological data and insights into the lives and views of Mesoamerican people. Bringing post-colonial perspectives to the work, Dr. Marcos nonetheless allows the sources to speak for themselves.

Monro, Anita. **RESURRECTING EROTIC TRANSGRESSION: SUBJECTING AMBIGUITY IN THEOLOGY**. Oakville, CT: Equinox Publishing, 2006 (194 pages, \$24.95).

Complex and textured, this study in ambiguity a la Julia Kristeva offers intellectual challenges and spiritual questions. It is for a sophisticated reader who wants to enter into the delights of technical theological wrestling.

Russell, Letty M. **JUST HOSPITALITY: GOD'S WELCOME IN A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE**. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009 (124 pages, \$19.95).

This last book by Letty Russell, edited posthumously by her dear friends, is as fresh as her earlier writing. She was, after all, the expert on her topic—hospitality as an expression of justice in a world in which it is hard to be different. This is a fitting capstone to her many books, articles, classes, Shalom Meals, and expressions of friendship to the world and its inhabitants. Legions of people miss her but many more will experience the essence in this lovely book.

Schneider, Laurel C. **BEYOND MONOTHEISM: A THEOLOGY OF MULTIPLICITY**. London, England: Routledge, 2008 (207 pages, \$29.95).

New insights into the complexity of divine reality and how to cope with it come from feminist scholar Laurel Schneider. She makes the post-modern case for plenty vs. scarcity in things godly.

Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. **THE POWER OF THE WORD: SCRIPTURE AND THE RHETORIC OF EMPIRE**. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007 (266 pages, \$30).

Global empire is the context in which scriptural analysis is done. This foundational text offers a critical feminist decolonizing approach that leaves aside empire and embraces a radical democratic space. It is a remarkable contribution to the nexus of biblical studies and political science.

Scott, Anne Firor, Editor. **PAULI MURRAY AND CAROLINE WARE: FORTY YEARS OF LETTERS IN BLACK AND WHITE**. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006 (194 pages, \$24.95).

Fascinating women in their own right, Pauli Murray, a lawyer and the first African American Episcopal priest, and Caroline Ware an historian and consumer advocate, develop a friendship during the 1950s and beyond. Selections of their letters compiled here reveal their personal and political struggles and the love that sustains.

Winston, Kimberly. **FABRIC OF FAITH: A GUIDE TO THE PRAYER QUILT MINISTRY**. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2006 (118 pages, \$24).

This book captures many women's experiences of piecing together their lives and their loves in cloth and thread.



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Our soul must perform two duties.

The one is we must reverently wonder  
and be surprised.

The other is we must gently  
let go and let be,

always taking pleasure in God.

—Julian of Norwich (1342-1419)

from *Meditations with Julian of Norwich*  
by Brendan Doyle, c. 1983.

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