



water wheel

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

Editorial

"Women-Church: Weavers of Change" is the latest in a series of church and world-changing conferences. This time the range of women's spiritual, political, ethnic and sexual experiences is celebrated because it is good. WATER is a member group of the Women-Church Convergence, which together with other women's groups is sponsoring the event. Topics will range from breast cancer to racism, from clergy sexual abuse to ending denominational foot-dragging. Albuquerque is the place to be April 16-18, 1993 as the next chapter is written in religious history.

Many people ask what women-church means and why we insist on using a term which might seem exclusive. Among other things, it means that women are religious agents who seek to express and live out our faith perspectives without censure and with enthusiasm. Some celebrate eucharist and others chant; some smudge and still others meditate. One tie that binds is a respect for diversity and a commitment to eradicate racism; another, the effort to yoke belief with action so that religious women around the world can transform patriarchal structures. Women-church has immodest goals for a reason: they need to be accomplished for justice to prevail. Period. That is why Audre Lorde is so inspiring. She set the pace, albeit well beyond women-church, but a pace and a style we embrace.

Women-church takes many expressions. Happily, it is alive and well inside some institutional churches where feminist ministers and parishioners embody it and embolden their colleagues to encourage it. It is equally thriving beyond such organizations, in the living rooms and classrooms where feminist/womanist/mujerista theologies ground efforts of base communities to live toward a "discipleship of equals." Women-church is not the answer to all of the world's ills, but it is an enriching start.

What the women-church movement will look like after the Albuquerque meeting is an open question. But that it will be fortified, yes, even changed, for the kind of coming together of different women with myriad commitments is a graceful given.

After Audre Lorde

by Mary E. Hunt

The death of Audre Lorde, November 17, 1992, did not compute. I read it in a little obit in the *Washington Post* several days after the fact, then waited for the *New York Times* piece to really let it sink in. She was, after all, a "Warrior Poet" and they don't die. Newspapers make mistakes. I was waiting for the correction.

Some women theologians at the American Academy of Religion meeting the next week did not even know that she had died; some men theologians did not even know she lived. Papers and sessions dedicated to her memory were how some people found out. Granted it was not the death of Kennedy, but how could every newspaper and news program not have featured it prominently? Where were the specials and the reports of the funeral?

The grief stricken look on others' faces when they heard of her death made obvious that I was not the only one to feel this loss somewhere

value. My radar worked overtime sensing that the death of Audre Lorde marked just such a moment. Maybe I'm just rationalizing my own grief, but if so, so be it. The death of Audre Lorde, once it sank in, stands as a division in time, a B.C./A.D. kind of bench mark. Maybe she felt she could go after the new administration was elected. Maybe she had done all she could to send death by cancer to hell. Maybe she was simply finished with what she had planned this time around. What remains, at least for me, is now so commonplace that I have had to dig to recall how it got there.

I first saw Audre Lorde when she spoke at a conference in San Francisco in the '70's. She swept down the aisle of the auditorium at a women's conference (the content of which I have long forgotten though I can still see her face and her dress and her friends) in a flowing African print. She was a presence of the most powerful sort, loads of women talking with her

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very deep. "Audre Lorde died" was a mantra that sister believers chanted, a mingling of disbelief with awe. I memorialized her in the last issue of this publication: "a beacon bigger than the sun, leaving a vacuum bigger than the moon."

One could honor her memory, and honor it again, and somehow nothing was enough, yet too much would have been profane. Are we so few who grieve? Or is it in fact that her life and death (1934-1992) were bookends on a period during which many aspects of who she was—African American, woman, lesbian, writer, activist, poet, theorist—came together in various constellations to define a new reality?

Theologians sniff out ultimate meaning and

and obviously enjoying her company. I had read some of her poetry and knew that she was a lesbian mother among myriad accomplishments, chief of which, as luck would have it, was survival.

I had seen her writings in the many publications of the early days of the women's movement like *Chrysalis* and I had read her in *The Black Scholar*. But she was among the black pioneers in the predominantly white women's movement, and she did not hesitate to take on, in print or public, even the most well respected feminists. It did not occur to me that I, then a young, white Euro-American would-be writer, would ever speak with her. I never did. I had
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WATER is a feminist educational center, a network of justice-seeking people that began in 1983 as a response to the need for serious theological, ethical and liturgical development for and by women. We work locally, nationally and internationally doing programs, projects, publications, workshops, retreats, counseling and liturgical planning which have helped thousands of people to be part of an inclusive church and society.

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After Audre..

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conversations with her in my mind; reading her books was conversation enough. But her being and her writing shaped me and I was not alone. I still have conversations with her in my mind.

The second and last time I saw her was many years later when she addressed another women's audience. This time she was at Georgetown University, many books and years later, a well known battle with cancer in full swing. She was the self-described "Black, Lesbian, Feminist, Warrior Poet, fighting the good fight in spite of it all." There she stood, more Afrekete than afraid, in the gaudy hall of a university whose namesake case came to symbolize discrimination against lesbian/gay people. Her presence, her poetry, the reading and reciting, the applause hallowed a place that had been desecrated by its own ideology; how small the uni-

we speak, maybe only a whisper next to her roar, but we speak, especially to each other even when we don't like what we hear. She showed us how in the interviews that she and Adrienne Rich published. It wasn't banter nor bravado, just frank talk that showed us how it is done across race lines and between friends. She didn't try to make it look easy, just to make it happen.

She lived globally. Raised in New York City the daughter of Caribbean immigrants, Audre Lorde lived in Mexico and Europe when not in the U.S. or finally back in the islands from which "my foremothers, my forebearing mothers, those Black island women who defined themselves by what they did" came. I imagine it was a hassle, carrying bags and waiting for late airplanes, more than it was glamorous, seeking cures and carving out a lifestyle that would stave off disease and permit pen and paper to touch if ever so lightly.

Ironically, she is somehow bigger than it all,

*Ironically, she is somehow bigger than it all,
dead from the cancer she wrote about,
but more alive than ever...*

versity seemed next to her. It is easy to romanticize someone after death but that night one just had to say, again in her words, that "For women, then, poetry is not a luxury... Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so that it can be thought." I thought even Georgetown might be redeemable.

What is so astonishing about Audre Lorde is how quickly so many things that she observed, contended, caressed have become commonplace. How often we in theology affirm that "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," and "The erotic as power" without batting an eye. We know what it means to be "sister/outsider" without having to explain, yet we only have the words and concepts because Audre Lorde gave them names. And we in theology are but a handful of her debtors.

It seems so obvious, yet before her there were no such words, or at least they were not used the way she used them. That is to have made a contribution, but even as I write the words it sounds like "she gave at the office" when what I mean is I'm different because of her. How to say it and not seem fawning, how to say it in a way that equals the dignity and courage without making even those words cheap...

We learned from her: "I was going to die, if not sooner then later, whether or not I had ever spoken myself. My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you." And so

dead from the cancer she wrote about, but more alive than ever as so many of us grope to tell our children what she meant, how she was, even as we still sift through it for ourselves. No one country could claim the body, but those who would enshrine her words are a country all our own, our common passport the sense that "None of us can do it alone. It will be done and we will do it together." Next in line. There is a nation of us now and we are growing. We have outlived her cancer, though we, too, count dead among our number as we try to beat the odds and make change.

She used the word "deep" a lot. I don't think she meant that she was deep nor that she thought her words were deep in the ways that affected amateur poets might. Rather, she was more rooted in the heart of the matter than most of us will ever be, yet she invited us there, and we went. She wrote: "Every woman I have ever loved has left her print upon me, where I loved some invaluable piece of myself apart from me--so different that I had to stretch and grow in order to recognize her. And in that growing, we came to separation, that place where work begins. Another meeting." Audre Lorde died. We have work to do.

Mary E. Hunt, Ph.D., co-director of WATER,
is a feminist liberation theologian and ethicist.

Oz and En Zed: WATER's New Mates

WATER co-directors Mary E. Hunt and Diann L. Neu had the privilege of meeting many of the religious feminist activists of Australia and New Zealand during a January sojourn. Beautiful summer weather and the warm welcome of new friends convinced Mary and Diann that it was even worth missing the Clinton inaugural.

Rosemary Neave and Susan Adams provided hospitality in Auckland, New Zealand, where Diann and Mary did a workshop entitled "Living Feminist Ethics." It was edifying to see that so many women would converge in the middle of summer vacation to discuss and celebrate. It was equally amazing to realize how many people in New Zealand are working on feminist issues in religion--ordained women, active feminists, the Women's Resource Centre, the Spiral Community (including fine men)--all of whom gave generously of their time and talent to make it a wonderful exchange.

WATER staff were impressed by the claim of what a difference women's ordination has made in that country, and how committed people are to asking hard questions. Our resource center now has publications from these women (including the deliciously titled *Gossiping the Gospel*). We left confident that we had just seen a tiny corner of an important movement, anxious to see more.

Melbourne-area movers and shakers Coralie Ling, Janet Scarfe, and Gwen Benjamin provided the first Australian orientation. Diann and Mary joined Aruna Gnanadason of the World Council of Churches' unit on Women in Church and Society for another large group conversation, reflection and liturgy with a terrific group of Melbourne folks.

Aruna was fresh from a fact-finding/solidarity trip to Bosnia/Herzegovina where she had spoken with women who had been raped. She encouraged women around the world to wear black on Thursdays as a protest against rape [editor's note: WATER recommends this action]. Mary lectured on the transforming impact of friendship; Diann led a moving liturgy on beginning a new year together.

Casa Sofia (Santiago, Chile) founders Peg

Moran and Monica Hingston now reside in Tourquay, Australia, on the Great Ocean Road, a magnificent beach town. WATER staff fit right in, quickly shedding business clothes for the laid back look, fluorescent tee shirts and sandals, and considered an early retirement.

Mary dragged herself away, lamenting as she left that life isn't fair and that Diann gets all the fun. Wrong. She joined Marie Tulip, Jean Gledhill and Jean Skuse (among hundreds of wonderful women and men) for the National Council of Churches of Australia's historical conference, Living Under the Southern Cross, outside Sydney in Richmond in the Blue Mountains near the Hawksbury River. Another hardship post...

The conference was a lively week of lectures and discussions on the Michan theme "Act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly together" and liturgies focused on water, all held in a huge open tent. It opened and closed with the raising and lowering of the aboriginal flag, a moving ceremony since it was the first time such had taken place on the campus. Highlights were so plentiful that they defy listing, but surely the lecture by Suliana Siwatibau of Vanuatu on development in the Pacific was one, the chance to be with young and old alike in a rousing experience of ecumenical church.

There was fun aplenty, including a Bush Dance on the eve of the inauguration (except it is folk dancing) and a fabulous excursion down the Hawkesbury in searing heat. When Mary took a turn at the wheel, participants mumbled something about the boat seeming to veer left. Mary's lasting impression was of many people who seem empowered by the kind of theological reflection she is promoting, left, right and center.

The magical visit to Oz included a stop at Cairns, gateway to the Great Barrier Reef. Obviously the tourist promotion is all understated, as nothing prepared the WATER types for snorkeling amid coral splendor and visiting aboriginal lands. A first visit to the region capped by a dip into another reality can only be followed up shortly by more.



North-South Dialogue

A dozen North American theologians, a dozen Latin American theologians and one South African gathered in Mexico City in December 1992 under the auspices of Catholics for a Free Choice for a dialogue on Religion, Ethics and Reproduction. WATER staff member Mary E. Hunt, a longtime board member of CFFC, participated in the gathering which brought together a diverse group from each continent.

The historic nature of the meeting was evident as the many issues and complex questions which have been part of informal conversations were put on the table. WATER's "Women Crossing Worlds" visits have long included discussion of these matters in small groups of women in barrios and centers. Starting points differed with regard to legal matters--abortion being legal in the U.S. and illegal in virtually every Latin American country--but the same questions of access, economics and ethics were shared as attention focused on reproductive health services for marginalized women in both hemispheres.

Pleasure was an unexpected topic, one which panelists agreed needs further exploration if we are to replace outmoded prescriptive ethics with person-affirming and life-affirming approaches to sexuality. Language was considered key--how we name issues and who gets to name them is essential to the shifting power equations on our respective continents.

North American participants came away awed at the courage and stamina of Latin American women providing health care against great odds recalling the days when abortion was illegal here. Latin American colleagues seemed supported in their efforts, buoyed by the knowledge that they are working in a global struggle for justice for women. The dialogue continues through correspondence, articles and interchange, but there was a big step forward that weekend in Mexico which only face to face meeting can afford.



Knowing the Background

Being a daughter and having a mother is a uniquely common experience to women and girl-children of all classes, races, and nationalities. It is an encounter that forms who we are; therefore, we each need to take time to integrate this relationship into our lives.

This ritual invites participants to remember their relationships with their mothers. It was first celebrated for Mother's Day. Use it as a guide for a Mother's Day Liturgy, an after Mother's Day ritual, or any time you or others need to focus on healing the daughter and mother relationship.

Preparing to Celebrate

In the center of a circle of chairs, place a low altartable and drape across it a blanket or a quilt that carries healing memories. Next to the fabric put two candles, a glass of milk, a plate of seasonal fruit that is cut up and arranged artistically, a bowl of salt and a bowl of water, and a gathering of shells, rocks, pine cones, nuts, seeds and small candles.

The Ritual

Calling to Gather

This season of Mother's Day reminds us that we are all daughters. We have each had or have a mother. This uniquely common bond includes us in a world full of many emotions: pain, expectations, anger, hurt, love, pride, joy, fulfillment, disappointment, and more. Being a daughter and having a mother is one of the most profound experiences of a woman's life.

Let's think about what it means to be a daughter, what it means to be in relationship to the female lineage of our family.

Lighting the Candles

(One person lights two candles in silence: one candle for daughters, the other for mothers.)

Naming the Circle

We are here as daughters of the women in our own families who have gone before us and given us life. Recall the female lineage in your family. (Pause.)

Let us pass a lighted candle and share the names of these women now as we acknowledge ourselves as their descendants. (e.g. I am Diann Lynn, daughter of Mary Kathryn, daughter of Catherine Mary, daughter of Anna, aunt to Angela Marie, Christina Mary, Julianne Michele, Tabatha Joe, Tiffany Lynn, Maria Elizabeth, Michelle Therese, Kathryn Marie, and Sarah Joan. Continue naming until the circle is complete.)

Mothers in our families, you have named us and have given us life. Our Foremothers, be here with us. Please repeat.

Our Foremothers, be here with us.

We Are All Daughters:

by Diann L. Neu

Singing Together

"Womanriver Flowing" by Carole Etzler
from *Womanriver*, c 1984

Womanriver flowing on
Womanriver flowing on and on (2x)
Womanriver flowing on.

Womanriver, how you comfort me,
Flowing on through every century,
Flowing on to what is yet to be,
Womanriver flowing on. (Chorus.)

Remembering the Relationship

The daughter/mother relationship is one of the most intense a woman experiences. It is primary and it is strong. It can include wonderful, empowering experiences that we want to pass on, and it can contain frightening, disabling memories that we want to eliminate. Listen to women's experiences.

Audre's Story

from "Black Mother Woman" by Audre Lorde
in *From a Land Where Other People Live*,
c Broadside Press

...I have peeled away your anger
down to its core of love
and look mother
I am
a dark temple where your true spirit rises
beautiful and tough as a chestnut
stanchion against your nightmares of weakness
and if my eyes conceal
a squadron of conflicting rebellions
I learned from you
to define myself
through your denials.

Martha's Story

from *Daughters and Mothers* by Julie Firman
and Dorothy Firman, c 1989

"You know, my mother is definitely the weak point in my life in this world. It's just the most confusing, most unfulfilling relationship I have. I work on myself so much, and have so many beautiful, loving friends, it just doesn't seem right that I can't reach my mother, that I can't show something real with her, you know. It just doesn't seem right that I can't communicate with her at all."

Marge's Story

from *My Mother's Body*
by Marge Piercy, c 1977

My dear, what you said was one thing
but what you sang was another, sweetly

subversive and dark as blackberries
and I became the daughter of your dream.

This body is your body, ashes now
and roses, but alive in my eyes, my breasts,
my throat, my thighs. You run in me
a tang of salt in the creek waters of my blood,

you sing in my mind like wine. What you
did not dare in your life you dare in mine.

Shirley's Story

"Mother," by a woman in prison,
from *The Institute for Women Today*

My mother taught me manners.
She knew them very well.
I accepted and I used them
Though I damned them all to hell.

My mother taught me cooking,
cleaning, and to sew,
but now that I am grown up,
you'd never really know.

My mother taught me all these things,
but I ask the Lord above
why she took such pains to teach me
everything but love.

Maya's Story

by Maya Angelou from *Double Stitch*, c 1991
by Patricia Bell-Scott, Beverly Guy-Sheftall,
and the SAGE Women's Educational Press

She stood before me, a dolled up pretty
yellow woman, seven inches shorter than my
six-foot bony frame. Her eyes were soft and her
voice was brittle.

"You're determined to leave? Your mind's
made up?"

I was seventeen and burning with rebellious
passion. I was also her daughter, so whatever
independent spirit I had inherited had been
increased by living with her and watching her
for the past four years.

"You're leaving my house?"

I collected myself inside myself and answered,

"Yes. Yes, I've found a room."

"And you're taking the baby?"

"Yes."

She gave me a smile, half proud and half
pitying.

"Alright, you're a woman. You don't have a
husband, but you've got a three-month-old
baby. I just want you to remember one thing.
From the moment you leave this house, don't
let anybody raise you. Every time you get into
a relationship you will have to make conces-
sions, compromises, and there's nothing wrong

Healing the Daughter/Mother Relationship

with that. But keep in mind Grandmother Henderson in Arkansas and I have given you every law you need to live by. Follow what's right. You've been raised."

May's Story

"A Hard Death" by May Sarton, from
Collected Poems 1930-1973, c 1974

I saw my mother die and now I know
The spirit cannot be defended. It must go
Naked even of love at the very end.
"Take the flowers away" (Oh, she had been
their friend!)
And we who ached could do nothing more—
She was detached and distant as a star.

Let us be gentle to each other this brief time
For we shall die in exile far from home,
Where even the flowers can no longer save.
Only the living can be healed by love.

Singing the Refrain: "Womanriver..."

Reflecting Together

As we think about our relationships with our mothers, many stories pass through our memories. We have probably experienced every kind of emotion in this daughter/mother relationship because we are human. Long-time kinships with the living or the dead carry years of experience. What stories do you remember most about your relationship with your mother? Take a moment and think about them, legacies you want to renounce and legacies you want to reclaim. (Pause.)

Renouncing Mother's Legacy

Some spirits of our mothers we need to renounce. We have shed many tears over them. Salt purifies, cleanses and neutralizes. It is said to repel certain spirits. As we pass the bowl of salt and the bowl of water, put salt into the water as you name aloud some part of your heritage which you renounce. This is an opportunity to let go, to give to the water something you don't need anymore. (Sharing.) Let us banish to Mother Earth this salt water which symbolizes our tears shed because of our mothers. (One woman pours the salt water into the earth.)

Singing the Refrain: "Womanriver..."

Reclaiming Mother's Legacy

Some spirits of our mothers we need to reclaim. This quilt which my grandmother made represents roots and wings, comfort and healing. I have covered myself with it many times. Come, wrap yourself in this quilt and tell

whatever family story you want to share, or just take the quilt silently. If your story has comforting feelings, ask us to rock you in the quilt. (Sharing. When the sharing ceases, continue by saying:)

Let's each hold onto the quilt and put our arms around one another as we sing a lullaby.

Singing A Lullaby

"Lullaby" by Cris Williamson,
from *Live Dream*, c 1976

Like a ship in the harbor,
Like a mother and child
Like a light in the darkness, I'll hold you a while.
We'll rock on the water, I'll cradle you deep,
And hold you while angels sing you to sleep.

Meditating with the Wise Old Woman

Feeling the power of this circle, let's visit the wise old woman. Make yourself comfortable in a chair, or on the floor. Close your eyes, breathe deeply, relax and center yourself. (Pause.)

Imagine you are walking in a lush, green meadow in the foothills of a mountain. You smell fragrant flowers, hear chirping birds, see awesome mountains, touch velvety moss, and taste delicious berries. Just ahead you discover a small trail that leads to a cave. This is the home of a very wise woman who can offer you guidance. Take this path and walk toward the wise woman's home. (Pause.)

As you approach the cave, you smell a sweet fire, and you notice the silent wise woman illumined by the glow of the flames. (Pause.) Stand by the fire, put some more wood on it, then sit quietly. As the fire burns more brightly, you see the wise woman more clearly. Take some time to become aware of her—her face, her eyes, her posture, her clothes, her body. She is compassionate and wise and completely devoted to you. She is like an ideal mother. Pay attention to your feelings about her. (Pause.) Carry on a conversation with her, ask her questions and hear her answers. Ask her about general or specific concerns that you may have. She might answer you with words, or she might also answer you with a gesture or a facial expression, or she might show you something. How does she respond to you? (Pause.) Continue to talk with this wise woman. (Pause.)

Soon you will have to say good-bye to this wise woman. Say anything else you want before you leave. (Pause.) As you are about to bid farewell, the wise woman turns, reaches into her fabric bag, and searches for something very special to give to you. She takes a gift out of the bag and gives it to you to take home with you. Look at the gift. Feel it, touch it, hold it. Thank the wise woman and ask her to tell you more

about the power of your gift. (Pause.)

Gently bid farewell to the wise woman. Make an agreement with her that you will visit with her frequently. Begin walking on the trail, noticing carefully where you are going, so that you will remember how to find your way back to the wise woman when you want to visit her again. Be aware of your surroundings and of how you feel.

Bring your gift with you as you return to this room. When you are ready, slowly open your eyes, breathe deeply and stretch. You are wide awake and filled with energy. (Pause.)

Sharing of Gifts

In front of us are symbolic gifts—shells, rocks, pine cones, nuts, seeds and candles. Let these gifts represent to you the gift the wise woman gave you. Take one, name the gift you received from the wise woman, and share with us anything you wish. (Sharing.)

Blessing and Sharing Fruit and Milk

We are the fruit of the womb, raised first on mother's milk. And so today we share fruit and milk as symbolic food. (The blessing picks up the plate of fruit and the cup of milk.)

Blessed are you, Holy Mother, Eternal Source, for giving us life. Nourish us, again and again, as we share with the next generations the life we have received and the life we have nurtured. Blessed be the fruit of our wombs.

Let us pass this food to one another saying: "May you be nourished and renewed." (Eating and drinking.)

Sending Forth

Let us go forth from this place with the blessing of daughters and mothers. Please say after me.

Blessed be all the mothers of mothers. (Echo.)

Blessed be all the daughters of daughters. (Echo.)

Blessed be all the daughters of mothers. (Echo.)

Blessed be all the mothers of daughters. (Echo.)

Now and forever. (Echo.)

Wherever we are. (Echo.)

(She extinguishes the candles.)

Singing Together: "Womanriver..."

Greeting of Peace

Let us open our circle by blessing one another with peace. (Blessing.)

Diann L. Neu, feminist liturgist, theologian,
therapist, co-founded and co-directs WATER.

Thursday Strategy

Women raped in war is an age-old phenomenon which must stop now. The current atrocities in Bosnia/Herzegovina are now common knowledge: women raped and forced to bear the children of marauding soldiers as an extra measure of punishment. Stupid questions like how many times it happened, whether the women are credible and other non-starters only add insult to injury. The point is to declare all of this unacceptable, a war crime, and prosecute it according to international conventions. A civilized world can do no less.

A delegation of women sponsored by the World Council of Churches bore witness to this horrific situation. As religious women, they were savvy enough to suggest a sign, a sacrament of solidarity if you will, that all people of good will can wear as a protest against rape. The sign is black clothing to be worn every Thursday of this year all over the world. Thursday was chosen in solidarity with Madres de Plaza de Mayo, the Women in Black in Israel/Palestine and others who conduct their protests on Thursdays. Black is not to be interpreted as mourning, but as solidarity. At a recent liturgy planned by WATER staff for International Women's Day, women wore black ribbons, like the red ones worn to support the efforts to stop AIDS.

The protest is expected to raise questions. "Why are you wearing black on this beautiful spring day?" This presents an opportunity to discuss with one another the situation in the former Yugoslavia, more so, to note where and how else this same tactic is imposed. But the protest is only a beginning, with letters to our governments, to the U.N. and even to church officials, all ways of putting pressure to bear to stop these and all rapes now.

In Memory of Her

from Margaret Crow, Oakland, CA:

Anne Ditto, a longtime friend who urged "Give yourself a flower for your soul every day."

from Betty Jones Sykora, Minneapolis, MN, on the centennial of her mother's birth, November 17, 1882:

Mary Bolger Jones died at ninety, and ten years before that posed this question, "I wonder if there's a woman alive who feels the same about herself as she did ten years ago?" A devout Irish Catholic, she felt that the church could not update itself fast enough.

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Thanks, Mom Introducing the Mothers Fund

by Carol Scinto

My mother, a farm girl from South Dakota, dreamed of traveling—to Europe, Asia, South America, Africa, everywhere, especially places with high mountains. She married instead, and bore eight children (one died at birth). When her marriage came apart after twenty years, she went to work to support her family, using the only marketable skills at her command. She scrubbed floors: in others people's houses, in a store after closing hours, at a hospital. Then she cooked: at the hospital, in an all-night cafe, at a university dining hall, for a Seattle chain of home-style cafeterias. By the time she retired, she was accomplished, underpaid and noted for her pies.

Still she dreamed of traveling. With limited funds, she set off by herself on a bus from Seattle in late fall to see Montreal and Quebec. Never an outgoing woman, she found to her regret that she no longer had the nerve or stamina for such adventure. After that she traveled only to see relatives, and lived her dreams by reading avidly, or by listening to the stories of her children and grandchildren returning from their journeys to New Zealand, China, Saudi Arabia, the British Isles, Scandinavia, Japan, Nepal. When she died two years ago at the age of 92, her ashes were scattered at sunset from a plane circling her beloved Cascade peak, Mt. Rainier.

Joe's mother, daughter of immigrants, had no desire to leave the neighborhood where she was born. In her eyes, the world came to New York, not the other way around. She just wished living there were easier, safer. So she dreamed of acquiring knowledge to overcome the poverty, discrimination, crime, disease, violence that threatened on every side. Married by arrangement, widowed abruptly, left with three young children to rear, she took a grueling night shift job at the Post Office, her mind set on

educating two sons and a daughter.

All three of her children earned advanced degrees, professional standing, awards and distinctions that afforded her great pride. One week before she died last November at the age of 92, they gathered for a family birthday party in her honor, paying tribute to the woman who prized education above all gifts, yet herself had only trade school training in sewing corset covers and chemises.

The Mothers Fund Joe and I initiated in January is our attempt to honor our mothers' dreams by helping other women realize theirs. We've asked WATER to use the fund, \$10,000 from our mothers' painstakingly accumulated estates, to make small but strategically focused grants every year, anywhere in the world, that will help selected women in each of two ways: with practical projects for feeding, clothing, sheltering their families (I think of this grant as "egg money" in memory of Florence Blythe Murdock's farm origins); and with educational opportunities such as conferences, courses, tuition or training (I call this grant "pin money" in tribute to Josephine Gentilesca Scinto's brief independent career as a milliner).

We've invited family members and close friends to add to the fund as well as to the list of mothers and "other mothers" it honors. My sister Gael Willingham and our friend Barbara Chiancone have already made welcome contributions. At WATER's wise discretion, we hope "Flo and Jo" grants will send our mothers' spirits to faraway places and new heights of understanding.

Carol Scinto is a dedicated supporter of WATER and a regular volunteer in the office. She is also the mother of four daughters, sister of two, grandmother of one (to date).

Around the Office

The friendly new voice on the phone at WATER is Nancy Barber. She is the Administrative Assistant about whom one asks "What did we do before Nancy?" She brings skills to the staff; as important, she keeps things light and lively.

Swedish theological student Helena Johansson is the latest international intern. Writing a master's thesis on women-church and its implications for ministry, she is a participant-observer in the many manifestations of the movement, most of which at one point or another seem to pass through WATER's portals.

Iliff Theological Seminary student Tisa An-

ders, attending the Wesley Theological Seminary's National Capital Semester for Seminarians, completed her field placement at WATER. She writes that one of her main goals was to learn the "nuts and bolts" of running a small, nonprofit organization. "Wherever I am and wherever I go, the fundraising information and skills I received from WATER go with me and will greatly benefit me," she notes, adding "WATER is a particularly good site for a person who wants to explore nontraditional ministries, peace and justice issues, and feminist issues."



Resources



Becher, Jeanne, ed. **WOMEN, RELIGION AND SEXUALITY: STUDIES ON THE IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS ON WOMEN.** Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991 (265 pages, \$14.95).

Report by the World Council of Churches' Sub-Unit on Women as it looks at sexuality across religious traditions. What saves this volume is the responses by members of those traditions who were not originally asked to participate. Contrasts are telling and helpful.

Cadorette, Curt, Marie Giblin, Marilyn J. Legge and Mary H. Snyder, eds. **LIBERATION THEOLOGY: AN INTRODUCTORY READER.** Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992 (307 pages, \$15.95).

A fine collection for use in introductory courses and discussion groups where an overview will invite more in-depth study. Of special interest to WATER are articles by Maria Pilar Aquino, Chung Hyun Kyung, Ivone Gebara, Mary E. Hunt and Mary John Mananzan.

Collins, Patricia Hill. **BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT: KNOWLEDGE, CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE POLITICS OF EMPOWERMENT.** New York: Routledge, 1991 (255 pages, \$16.95).

A comprehensive treatment of the social construction and political implications of black feminist work in a range of disciplines synthesized into a usable theory. A must for readers who want to understand the big picture, the impact of African American feminist consciousness on intellectual history.

Grey, Mary. **FEMINISM, REDEMPTION AND THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION.** Mystic, CT: Twenty-third Publications, 1990 (251 pages, \$16.95).

Redemption is not a popular feminist theological topic, but Mary Grey handles it admirably and with synthetic creativity.

Hagan, Kay Leigh, ed. **WOMEN RESPOND TO THE MEN'S MOVEMENT.** San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992 (192 pages, \$12).

Short but snappy takes on the men's movement by women including Gloria Steinem, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Margaret Randall, Starhawk and others. Consensus seems to be that we all want men to move but not the mythopoetic way of Robert Blye. Nicole Holander's cartoons are the highlight.

hooks, bell and Cornell West. **BREAKING BREAD: INSURGENT BLACK INTELLECTUAL LIFE.** Boston: South End Press, 1991 (174 pages, \$12).

A rich resource for understanding how women and men, in this case African Americans, can and must work together. Of special note is the focus on communities of faith as formative in the life and work of intellectuals.

Morrison, Toni. **PLAYING IN THE DARK: WHITENESS AND THE LITERARY IMAGINATION.** Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992 (91 pages, \$14.95).

A painful analysis, right on target, of how race has functioned as a dominant metaphor, both of presence and absence. Essential for those who claim that such concerns are trivial or politically correct.

Newsome, Carol A. and Sharon H. Ringe. **THE WOMEN'S BIBLE COMMENTARY.** Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992 (416 pages, \$20).

General readers, sermon writers and scholars will find insights on biblical texts having to do with women. A century after Elizabeth Cady Stanton and her colleagues attempted a similar project, this volume shows how far we have come and points the way for future work.

Oduyoye, Mercy Amba and Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro, eds. **THE WILL TO ARISE: WOMEN, TRADITION AND THE CHURCH IN AFRICA.** Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992 (230 pages, \$16.95).

To be an African woman and a Christian in the late 20th century presents complex challenges that these authors point out. The range of countries and denominations represented helps to stress the range of new possibilities emerging in Africa for the world church.

Pellauer, Mary. **TOWARD A TRADITION OF FEMINIST THEOLOGY: THE RELIGIOUS SOCIAL THOUGHT OF ELIZABETH CADY STANTON, SUSAN B. ANTHONY, AND ANNA HOWARD SHAW.** Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing Co., 1991 (427 pages, \$60).

A helpful in-depth look at the work of these three pioneers with appropriate claims as to just how partial, albeit important, white women's contributions have been to religion. Here's hoping for more such elements of the tradition. An expensive series but good for libraries.

Primavesi, Anne. **FROM APOCALYPSE TO GENESIS: ECOLOGY, FEMINISM AND CHRISTIANITY.** Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991 (324 pages, \$14.95).

Some argue that these are irreconcilable elements, but if they can be put together this is a running start.

Ramey, Mary. **ADULT CHILDREN, ADULT CHOICES: OUTGROWING CODEPENDENCY.** Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1992 (154 pages, \$10.95).

Finally someone responds to the pervasive myth that we are all codependent or becoming so. Mary Ramey writes crisp prose, marshals evidence and offers creative, effective options to emotional gridlock.

Redmont, Jane. **GENEROUS LIVES: AMERICAN CATHOLIC WOMEN TODAY.** New York: William Morrow and Co., 1992 (381 pages, \$23).

Destined to reign as the definitive treatment of the many ways a Catholic woman can be as the new century begins. Jane Redmont's page-turner informs, entertains and edifies.

Scott, Kesho Yvonne. **THE HABIT OF SURVIVING.** New York: Ballantine Books, 1991 (246 pages, \$9).

A painful yet courageous book about the hard times many African American women encounter as they survive in a racist society.

Stuart, Elizabeth, ed. **DARING TO SPEAK LOVE'S NAME: A GAY AND LESBIAN PRAYER BOOK.** London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992 (162 pages, \$10).

When SPCK refused to publish this book after the Archbishop of Canterbury spoke against it, the volume got a real boost. For U.S. readers it is a mild collection of respectable, hardly worthy of censorship, prayers.

Wallace, Ruth A. **THEY CALL HER PASTOR: A NEW ROLE FOR CATHOLIC WOMEN.** Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992 (204 pages, \$14.95).

Case studies have their limits, but this look at twenty women pastors of Catholic parishes is a hint of things to come. Whether this will be a "cheap grace" solution to the male-priest shortage or a harbinger of shared ministry remains to be analyzed. But these cases show that Catholic women, like Protestant, Jewish and other women, are fully capable of ministerial leadership.

CORRECTION: CRAFTING A BETTER WORLD is available from Church World Service, P.O. Box 968, Elkhart, IN 46515.



Birth, Care and Feeding of a Women-Church Group

by Mary E. Hunt and Diann L. Neu

Women-church or women-spirit groups seem to spring up like wild flowers. One day we wish they existed, and the next day some committed people just get together and voila, a group is born. These groups are meaningful while they last, but just as magically they seem to end, trickle off and then it is often a new season or three, perhaps several years, before another one starts in the same area.

It is sometimes a good thing when groups disperse, like a relationship which has grown tired, but we hear more often that people wish they could have kept their group going. We hear from others that they wish they belonged to one, to which we always say "Start one;" to which they inevitably reply "How?" Our forthcoming manual, "Birth, Care and Feeding of a Women-Church Group," is our answer. Here is a sneak preview:

1. Groups work best when they are convened not by one charismatic person, or one woman

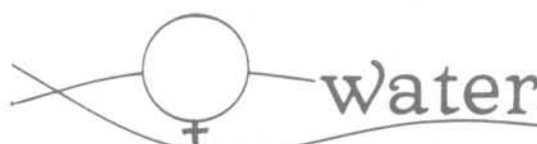
who needs something so badly that she will start it herself and keep it going single-handedly. Rather, they work when a small core of people share common beliefs and needs; for instance, a belief in the power of women as holy and the need to express it. From such a committed core will emerge a plan and a pattern for becoming a group. Coordination is key to continuing life.

2. The women-church groups we have participated in include a combination of community, ministry and meaning. That is, they gather because people want to be together periodically (every two weeks seems optimum in cities while less frequently is usually the case where distances are a factor). A shared meal is essential; pot lucks are popular. Members come to know each other in more than a perfunctory way, to minister to or better, to pay attention to each other's needs. Likewise, the groups that endure spend a good bit of time discussing issues, pushing around ideas, but

they also know when and how to be quiet together.

3. Worship, ritual, liturgy, whatever name best suits the group, is a central reason for being. The groups which put time and attention into this experience seem to glean the richest results. Logical, of course, but it is surprising how many groups think that worship "just happens if you let it flow" rather than realizing that it is more like a well-planned party where the hostess can enjoy the flow because she has thought through the various dimensions to make it happen.

There is much more to say and do to start groups, nurture them along, network them with one another and help them end gracefully when the time comes. But we'll save that for "Birth, Care and Feeding of a Women-Church Group," making its debut at the Women-Church conference April 16-18, in Albuquerque and available thereafter through WATER.



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