

waterwheel

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

What A Difference A Decade Makes

by Mary E. Hunt

Ten years ago, forward-looking women leaders of the World Council of Churches, as well as a few insightful men, insisted that Christian churches had overlooked and undervalued women long enough. They encouraged that global ecumenical body to launch the Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women, a worldwide effort to look systematically and critically at the situations faced by women and dependent children in church and society.

I write with deep gratitude to those women, their colleagues and successors, who have held fast to the original intention and stayed firm in their insistence that justice be done. In Harare, Zimbabwe, in December 1998, at the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the World Council of Churches, the Decade will come to its official close with a Festival and some serious talk about next steps. It is in some ways too early to judge what a difference the Decade has made, but I offer these preliminary reflections in the hope that it will make even more of a difference as time

goes on.

The purpose of the Decade was "to provide a framework within which WCC member churches could look at their structures, teachings and practices with a commitment to the full participation of women. It was an opportunity for churches to reflect on women's lives in society, and to stand in courageous solidarity with all women." The Decade had its own genius: local efforts loosely networked through the Women's Programme of the WCC. Kudos to Aruna Gnanadason (and before her Anna-Karin Hammar) and colleagues, under whose direction this huge effort took place.

Women from small villages to big cities, from Africa to Canada, from teenagers to crones, took part in activities, participated in worship services, sang and prayed using Decade resources, discussed and exegeted, petitioned and painted their way to new self and community understandings of what life for women, and in particular for Christian women, ought to be. This unprecedented output of materials, programs and

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This unprecedented output of materials, programs and people-power changed many women's ways of thinking and acting.



Logo of the Decade Festival: Visions Beyond 1998.

Editorial

There must be more going on in the world than President Bill Clinton's sexual exploits. But even natural disasters, newcomers to the nuclear club and the Taliban atrocities are eclipsed by the ongoing specter of "sex, lies and videotapes" that has fed the seemingly insatiable appetite of the US media for scandal.

To read this episode in American history solely through a lens trained on sex, however, is to miss the big story. The real tale here, which will only be obvious too late, when the full impact is felt, is that this monumental distraction has allowed Washington to "fiddle" while many of the country's poor, elderly and ill "burn."

Lost in the back pages of newspapers with special sections of verbatim transcripts and reports is news that welfare "reform" is now closing in on poor women with children who will max out their

benefits shortly. Then what? A number of nursing homes are closing their doors to Medicaid clients and some HMO's are declining to take Medicare patients. Where do they go? People with HIV and AIDS face a raft of new laws that compromise their rights. What next?

It is curious to see the role of religion in politics this time around. The President has cloaked himself in three clergy advisors, but it is not at all clear that modern therapeutic techniques are part of their offering. Clergy reactions range from intelligent guesses about sexual addiction to mindless rants about God's wrath. Can't religions offer more?

One clear task of religious people is to learn to ask the right questions. In this case, see above for four to ponder while the band plays on.



Diann Neu, Mary Hunt, Aruna Gnanadason and Marga Buehrig at a gathering in Zurich, Switzerland.



ISSN 0898-6606

Vol. 11 • No. 3 • Fall 1998

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Circulation: Cynthia Lapp

Computer Consultant: Jessica Weissman

Graphic Artists: Acknowledged when known, and always appreciated.

WATER is a feminist educational center, a network of justice-seeking people that began in 1983 in 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.

WATERwheel is published quarterly by the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual. Annual subscription, \$35. Additional copies of this issue can be ordered for \$5 each. Complimentary copies are available on request for conferences, seminars, classes or discussion groups. Send inquiries and comments to:

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people-power changed many women's ways of thinking and acting. This is no small accomplishment. But it is not the whole story.

Let us recognize what the Decade has not accomplished. Through no fault of its organizers, the Decade has not transformed kyriarchal Christianity into the feminist vision of a "discipleship of equals." That kind of miracle was not in the plan! However, the recalcitrance of many member churches, not least among the orthodox, but more subtly, perhaps, among the more seemingly progressive brethren, has become obvious.

Some ecumenically active women have begun to refer ironically to the program as "The Ecumenical Decade of Women in Solidarity with Churches" since in many instances this became one more way in which women act as the backbone of their communities. Despite notable support from selected male WCC and denominational officials, the Decade, like so many efforts by women to transform patriarchal structures, was met with at best silence, and at worst defiance.

Despite this reaction, the accomplishments of the Decade are amazing when measured in the change in consciousness abroad in many churches. Close to home, in the US the term "re-imagining" has crept into progressive religious conversation. It was, after all, the name of the 1993 Decade-related conference that caused unimaginable havoc led by conservative forces (cf. **WATERwheel**, Vol. 6, No. 4, "Re-imagining: I Wish You Had Been There" and **WATERwheel**, Vol. 7, No. 2, "Re-imagining Re-imagining"). Now, Re-Imagining is an organization all its own, and church women regularly speak of "re-imagining" their faith without fear that they will be struck by lightning. That intellectual and moral boldness alone is cause for celebration.

In many places around the world, notably Latin America, Asia and Africa, small groups of women have met to discuss their lives and faith, using materials prepared by the WCC. The fruits of their reflections have been fed back to their denominations, causing church leaders (mostly men) to reassess their views of women's places and roles in ecclesial life. This has not been easy, and it has required of these women new resources and new courage, something the Decade has produced in quantity. Australian, European and others have followed suit with similar results.

At the mid-point of the Decade, creative women of the WCC set up 75 teams to visit 330 churches, 68 national councils of churches, and 650 women's groups to get concrete data on the situation they faced. Teams were "Living Letters" that

... justice comes not in decades
but in generations...

articulated the state of the churches, a model the writer Paul might have envied.

The good news is that women are the steadfast pillars of the churches who are making common cause with secular groups to do what needs to be done to bring about justice. The bad news is that violence and racism are alive and well in churches as well as beyond, economic injustice is rampant especially against women and children, oppressive theological and biblical teachings reinforce these problems, with women's sexuality suspect and divisions between women exacerbated rather than healed. Such a frank assessment, with international witnesses collaborating on the testimony, and with inhospitable responses at many turns, is no cause for celebration.

One might expect the WCC women to turn their considerable energies elsewhere. But true to their roots in the faith of Madeleine Barot, Secretary of the Commission on the Cooperation Between Women and Men, and Brigalia Bam, Director of the Women's Sub-Unit, who gave shape and content to the Women's Programme, as well as Dame Nita Barrow, Marga Buehrig and Lois Wilson, the first women co-presidents, they have planned a celebration of their successes and a time to carve out next steps. They have learned from other struggles that justice comes not in decades but in generations, each one building on the strength of the ancestors and finding in its own generation the pleasure of one another's company, the satisfaction of working on something that needs fixing. While no substitute for substantive structural change, women have learned to sustain energies through keeping priorities in order. Celebrate they should!

So it will be in Harare in late November, when 1200 women gather to "Celebrate our struggles and commitment to the church and spell out our vision for the church and our societies beyond 1998." Be forewarned: this will be fun and fruitful. African women will lead the way, hosting visits to their local churches for women from around the world. Their strength in the face of conflict, their faith in the midst of discrimination, and their determination in the development of their societies is typical of what the Decade has found and encouraged among Christian women.

The Festival itself is richly deserved—a time to dance, feast and worship in celebration of what women have done to bring churches to accountability and at the same time to have deepened bonds among us. But it will also be a time for further education, networking and strategizing on the major findings of the Decade with regard to

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Shared Garden III: Recife, Brazil

Flowers in the inner-courtyard pond were in full bloom when we arrived. They looked even fuller two weeks later when we left the former seminary turned retreat center in the outskirts of Recife after the third Shared Garden: Beyond Violence, Women, Solidarity and Forces for Change. This northeastern Brazilian city of one and a half million people in the state of Pernambuco is a beautiful beach town and yet another impoverished area where sugar growers take advantage of cheap labor and people struggle to survive.

The Garden opened with teams of women, formed from more than fifty participants from nine countries and seven states of Brazil, visiting local communities, talking with women and children, learning of their struggles, indeed what gives them hope. Resulting reports formed the basis of our study and strategizing "to move beyond violence."

This Garden, like the ones before in Santiago, Chile, and Washington, DC, relied on team leadership of women from Conspirando, WATER and the local Casa do Mulher through which Ivone Gebara and her team organized the event. Most participants came from Latin America, but a generous sprinkling of German, Swiss, Australian and US women made a diverse mix. The strong presence of women of African descent (from Africa as well as Brazil and the US) brought into focus the results of colonialism and the need for racial justice. Another plus was the religious mix, including a leader of the Yoruba movement.

A Brazilian economist set the tone at the outset, predicting current economic problems will worsen as global markets shift. Theologians looked at religious dimensions of future prospects, and liturgists drew issues into focus for celebration.

Throughout there was a remarkable effort at communication—skillful translators, eager students, everyone straining to hear and understand, to be heard and understood despite the mix of Portuguese, Spanish, some English.

Brazilian women were the most welcoming of hostesses. Dancing, dancing and more dancing brought all into the circle, including certain participants more skilled in left than right-brained activities. This, plus wonderful

music, helped to keep us energized as we dealt with the harsh reality of violence against women, ecological damage passed on to our children and religious issues that stand in the way of full personhood for most.

Our Brazilian friends made sure we all spent a day at their legendary beaches, enjoyed an evening of modern dance at the local theatre, were introduced to Recife's many churches. As is the custom in the Gardens, an open session was scheduled with local people who cannot attend the whole event. It is a way to share wealth and listen to questions of a general audience.

This Garden focused on "Feminism and the Struggle against Violence," with remarks by theologians Ivone Gebara and Mary E. Hunt, educator Doris Munoz and Yoruba priest Mae Stella. When asked how we deal with biblical materials, panelists, in Garden form, handed the question to colleagues in the audience. Without skipping a beat, several Garden people made salient remarks, culminated by the Rev. Audrey DuPuy of Sister Church in Cincinnati telling an alternative creation story from her recent "starring role" as Eva in a Garden exercise on language about the divine. Her redaction included Eve discovering the divine aspects of herself. That she told the story in English translated by a Portuguese-speaking woman from Tanzania only deepened the impression that new ways of thinking are to be encouraged, and women are unafraid to take on the hard questions.

Thus the audience was able to see what we did for two weeks—begin to build teams of thinking women, each with her own expertise to add to the mix. No one expert gave "the answer," but together, from many places and perspectives, we could build a meaningful response. This change in method is part of what makes the Shared Garden so powerful as a model for future theological and theological work.

Plans for future Gardens are contingent on evaluation of the first three. WATER, Conspirando and the women of Recife are grateful to the Ford Foundation for its generous support and to the many individuals, communities and groups that funded this work.

In Praise of Women's Creativity by Mary E. Hunt

They see a need, and choose to fill it. *Praise be.*
The ravages of injustice are simply too much to bear any longer.
The options for children are too few.

They dream a world, and vow to create it. *Praise be.*
It does not take a genius to see how things could be different.
It takes a group, however small, to begin the task.

They open a center, and find a way to fund it. *Praise be.*
Ten parts energy, creativity and will combine with one part money.
The doing is all, and all can do something.

They offer programs, and the possibilities grow. *Praise be.*
Women come, then their daughters, nieces, friends.
Soon community takes shape.

They strive to be inclusive, and the project becomes richer. *Praise be.*
So many women, so much talent, the possibilities expand.
The work of social change begins at home.

They struggle, and some groups go out of existence. *Praise be.*
It is not how long they last, but what work they do, what lives they touch.
Another group starts, the spiral continues, fortified by their efforts.

They connect, and partners become teams, teams networks. *Praise be.*
A center is only as powerful as its colleagues.
Luckily, their number is legion and their impact gently cosmic.

For these women, *praise be.*
For the women before them, *praise be.*
For the ones who follow them, *praise be.*

This prayer is written in thanksgiving for all of the women who have created and sustained the women's offices and centers that continue to be the backbone of the grassroots efforts to transform kyriarchy. An adapted version will appear in "Sing Out New Visions/Women's Prayers, Poems and Reflections."

In 1988 the World Council of Churches launched the Decade as "a ten-year program within which churches would look at their structures, teachings and practices with a commitment to the full participation of women." The Decade project is over, but its agenda is unfinished; it is urgent to challenge churches and the ecumenical movement to keep up the momentum of solidarity. It is necessary to thank valiant women for our work, our commitments, our faithfulness in the struggles for justice. Women of all religious traditions have kept faith under incredible circumstances in churches, synagogues, mosques, sweat lodges, ashrams, and meeting places. We are indeed valiant for our spirituality, our social justice and our persistence toward change. This liturgy honors the power and actions of valiant women. A version was celebrated at a 1997 Call to Action Conference in Detroit, MI. Use it as a model for your community. Credit Diann Neu for direct quotes.

Preparation

Place a basket of bread, cups of wine and juice, a bowl of water, plants and flowers on a central table. Invite readers for each part.

Gathering Song: "Gather the Dreamers" by Kathy Sherman, **Gather the Dreamers**, c. 1990

Gather the dreamers,
And wake the sleeping,
Now is the time to give birth to the dream.
Gather the dreamers, a new day is dawning
The time is now
And the earth is calling our name.

Call to Celebration

(One proclaims:)

Welcome to our celebration: "Thanks to Valiant Women." This is the season to harvest. This is the season to remember saints. This is the season to give thanks for all good blessings.

Women of faith are harvesters: we bake and bless the bread, we set the tables, we create the organizations.

Women of faith are saints: we clean up the messes, we take care of the children and the elders, we bury the dead.

Women of faith are good blessings: we keep the faith alive during this in-between time that can be a very mean time.

Today, we need to do what is rarely done. We need to thank women of faith because the churches do not thank us for who we are and what we do.

So, Sisters and Brothers,
Let us lift our spirits and give thanks for valiant women of faith and for interfaith women's organizations,

Let us lift our voices and give thanks for women's spirituality communities and for women-church groups which create new models of church.

Let us lift our hearts and give thanks for one another.

Song: Gather the dreamers...

Reading from the Book of Wisdom

(Two readers alternately proclaim:)

1: Wisdom has built herself a house; she has prepared her food, mixed her wine and set her table... she calls to all in the cities and in the town... come and eat of my food and drink of the wine I have made. (Proverbs 9:1-5)

Response: You are wisdom, Holy Wisdom, Holy Wisdom you are.

2: Who can find a valiant woman? She is far more precious than jewels. Give her a share in what her hands have made. Let her works tell her praises. (Proverbs 31:10)

Response: You are wisdom, Holy Wisdom, Holy Wisdom you are.

1: Wisdom calls aloud in the streets... I will pour out my heart to you... tune your ear to wisdom and your heart to truth... then you will understand who God is and discover love of life... you will understand justice and the ways of happiness. (Proverbs 1:20, 2:1,6)

Response: You are wisdom, Holy Wisdom, Holy Wisdom you are.

2: Wisdom is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs at the days to come... Many are the women of proven worth, but you have excelled them all. (Prov. 31:25, 29)

Response: You are wisdom, Holy Wisdom, Holy Wisdom you are.

Litany of Women

(One lights a candle and holds it up while another cantors the song.)

Refrain: "Spirit of Our Elders" by Kathy Sherman, **Coming Home**, c. 1993.
Spirit of our elders,
Dance, oh dance in me. (2x)

(The candle is passed to a reader, who proclaims:)

Holy One, Wisdom-Sophia, Source of Life, we give thanks for the rich history of women from whose lives we now reap our own liberating hope. Their re-imaginings allow us to dream dreams with Pentecostal power. Let us name them.

We give thanks for our foremothers: Sarah, Hagar, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, and the mothers of the twelve tribes, with whom Wisdom-Sophia first established her covenant.

We give thanks for our Biblical foresisters who kept faith alive: Miriam, Deborah, Han-

Thank Valiant

by Diann

nah, Huldah, Esther, Ruth, Naomi, Judith, Sanna, Mary, Elizabeth, Lydia, Prisca.

We give thanks for our feminist theologians who teach us to challenge hierarchal, patriarchal, kyriarchal teachings: (name them).
(The candle is passed to the next reader.)

Refrain: Spirit of our elders... (2x)

We give thanks for our many feminist ministers and liturgists, those among us who minister sacramentally without the bishop's hands having been laid upon us.

We give thanks for our women who have caused ecclesiastical uproar: Joan of Arc, Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena, Hildegard of Bingen, Sor Juana de la Cruz, foundresses of religious communities threatened with excommunication; Theresa Kane, Geraldine Ferraro, Mary Ann Lundy, Carmel McEnroy, Ludmilla

Javarova, Ivone Gebara, Catholic women who celebrate the Eucharist, all women who re-imagine ways of being holy.

We give thanks for our feminist activists who involve us with human rights and liberation struggles: *(name them)*.
(The candle is passed to the next reader.)

Refrain: Spirit of our elders ... (2x)

We give thanks for our artists and musicians: *(name them)*

We give thanks for our feminist organizations: women's spirituality communities, women-church groups, Women-Church

ks to Women

L. Neu

Convergence, Church Women United, Re-Imagining Community, The Grail, WATER, *(name others)*.

Who are the valiant women of faith who have inspired you? *(Pause)* All together, let us share their names in a loud voice for the world to hear. *(Sharing)*
(The candle is placed on the altar)

Refrain: Spirit of our elders... (2x)

Reading: from the Gospel of Luke (1:46-55), transformed into "A Magnificat for Today" by Diann L. Neu.

Our souls proclaim the greatness of God.
We magnify Her Holy Name.
Our spirits rejoice in Wisdom-Sophia, our Liberator,
For She has looked with favor on us
The time has come to claim our heritage.

Yes, from this day forward all generations will call us blessed.

For great things have been done through us
And those who went before us.

Holy is our name.

We have shown mercy and strength as women,
from age to age.

We have gathered courage and steadfastness
And moved to heal the brokenhearted with tenderness and care.

We have called forth truth and created a new design for living justly.

Yes, we have been hungry and have filled each other with good things.

For we have kept our promises and journeyed and struggled in the hope of our dreams...

Touching and healing... laughing and crying... questioning and loving...

Yes, indeed by our living and our faithfulness,
By our passions and our courage,

All generations from this day will be blessed.

Reflection

(One invites us:)

We have much to be thankful for. We are on holy ground and in holy space. What thoughts come to your mind when you hear "thanks to valiant women of faith?" What would you like others to thank you for? Let words of thanks emerge from within you now and speak them aloud, if you wish, to three or four gathered around you. *(Sharing)*

Refrain: Spirit of our elders... (2x)

Water Ritual

(One says:)

In the center of our table is a bowl of water representing a sacred well. Wells throughout the ages were sacred in spirituality. Water is a symbol that will be used to close the Decade. Well dressing, a custom in Celtic spirituality, involved placing plants and flowers near a source of water as a way of honoring the precious gift of water from the Holy One. Let us honor valiant women of faith. *(Several women place plants and flowers around the water and offer one of the following blessings:)*

Blessed are you, Source of Life,
for sharing life-giving water with your people.
Blessed are you, Holy Spirit,
for hovering over the water.
Blessed are you, Wisdom-Sophia,
for bringing rain to dry lands.
Blessed are you, Ever-flowing River,

for watering our shared gardens.

Blessed are you, Miriam, for dancing your people through water to promised lands.

Blessed are you, Women Water Carriers, for finding hope and carrying water from sacred wells to thirsty towns.

Blessed are you, Giant Tear, for weeping with us because of the violence women experience from the churches, synagogues, mosques, ashrams, and religious places.

Blessed are you, Risk-takers, for striking rocks so water will flow to quench our thirst.

Blessed are you, Eternal Spring, for filling our jars with water and changing it into wine.

Blessed are you, Mirror of Creation,
for reflecting to women our holiness.

Let us bless ourselves with this water as a symbol of receiving women's gifts. Come, take some water and bless yourself. *(Blessing)*

Blessing: Phil 1:3-9

(One prays:)

I thank my God whenever I think of you; every time I pray for all of you, I pray with joy, remembering how you have helped to spread the Good News from the day you first heard it right up to the present. I am quite certain that the One who began this good work in you will see that it is finished when the day of Christ Jesus comes. It is only natural that I should feel like this toward you, since you have shared the privileges which have been mine: both my chains and my work defending and establishing the gospel. You have a permanent place in my heart.

Sending Forth

(Four blessers conclude:)

- 1: Filled with thanksgiving, go in peace, for the God of our ancestors is always with us.
- 2: Go in love, for we were conceived with dreams and promises.
- 3: Go in self-dignity, for we image the Holy One.
- 4: We are valiant women of faith. We are church. Let us greet one another with peace.

Song: "Sister, Carry On" by Carolyn McDade, **Sister, Carry On**, c. 1992.

Sister, carry on (2x)

It may be rocky and it may be rough,
But sister, carry on.

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What A Difference...

(Continued from page 2)

women's well being. We have much to do as the injustices linger among us as well as beyond us. The agenda is clear:

- **Economic justice**—the negative impact of globalization on the world's women
- **Participation in the life of churches**—the continuing unequal opportunities that women face on all levels in churches
- **Racism**—the new, virulent strains of racism and xenophobia that infect Christian institutions and society at large
- **Violence against women**—the recognition of the growing threat this poses to women, and how churches can be helpful

This agenda will go with the women delegates into the halls of the Harare Assembly where a session will be dedicated to these matters. The outcome, in terms of concrete programs and next steps by the WCC, will tell what a difference a decade makes. But that is only part of the story.

None of the savvy WCC women are naïve enough to think that the Assembly and eventually the member churches will embrace these matters as priorities any time soon. Or, if they do, no one I know is holding her breath that monumental changes will come of it. In fact, the problem of heterosexism is next on the Council's plate, with some conservative churches poised to truncate any efforts at inclusion of lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered people as early as possible. Nonetheless, some of the same stalwart souls who pushed the Decade within Council circles are back in place to move on this justice front as well, using some lessons learned during the Decade on how to negotiate change. I am confident that they will handle it.

These women, and all of us who have been involved in one small way or another in the events of the Decade, know that the most important difference is how we look at one another and ourselves. We now see one another as "church," as that assembly of the "discipleship of equals" that does the work of love and justice with all who wish to participate. We are not bound by denominational limits, hung up in squabbles about communion, or worrying about who will process ahead of whom and in what garb. Rather, I imagine that the solidarity strains of the Festival will be heard from all points on the globe, and the children will dance in a circle that stretches from pole to pole. What a difference a Decade makes.

For more information contact: *The Women's Programme, Programme Unit III – Justice, Peace and Creation, World Council of Churches, 150 rte de Ferney, P. O. Box 2100, 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland; Phone (+41-22) 791 62 13; Fax (+41-22) 791 03 61.*

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God-Talk, Girl-Style

by Cynthia Lapp



My new theological endeavor is to come up with new language to teach my three year old daughter about God. I have been trying to find language that she can understand but that doesn't offend me. Practically since she could speak she's been asking, "What is God? Who is God?" I've tried to explain, but my "new" concepts of God are too abstract for someone of her concrete size. So we struggle along, singing the old songs with changed words, telling bible stories with names for unnamed characters and praying prayers of her invention, giving thanks that "we love each other and that I can go to Nana's house and then go home again."

I share with you some ideas I have used that work with Cecilia. I am interested in what you use in teaching your children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews and friends.

Cecilia loves the story of Noah (Gen. 7-8) which becomes the story of Noah and Hogleh, (a biblical name I've given his unnamed wife). She says, "We don't know what their children are named." Well, actually we do know the

sons' names but not having come up with names for the women I haven't introduced them yet. Soon she will name them herself.

The story of the hemorrhaging woman who is healed by Jesus (Mark 5) took on a new twist when Cecilia declared that upon being healed the woman and Jesus hugged and kissed each other.

A story that I never heard at all has become one of Cecilia's favorites. Five sisters, Noah, Mahlah, Hogleh, Milcah and Tirzah, go before Moses to ask for land (Num. 27 and 36). Moses isn't convinced of their case but God is, and the law is changed to favor the women.

While some days teaching the bible in a girl friendly way feels like a losing battle, I keep on in the struggle, knowing that if I do not, she will get only the unfriendly version, at church, at school and in a society that has God talking to kings and men but rarely to queens and women, much less queens and women talking back.

Cynthia Lapp, MTS, is staff at WATER.

WATER-Blessed

by Pauline Maheux, osu



WATER, welcoming and inclusive, where everyone, regardless of age, religious background or sexual orientation is made to feel at home. This has been WATER's gift to me.

Grace, my intern companion, is at the beginning of her journey; I, on the other hand, am entering my twilight years. WATER embraced both realities and challenged each of us to ask our questions, define our needs, move toward action. Indeed, WATER is where Maiden, Mother and Crone come together to witness to the wholeness of women's potential.

I came with questions, hoping for answers. Answers received were not exactly those hoped for. Rather than "do this or that," or "this is the way things are," I experienced affirmation of myself as a "wise" woman. I saw firsthand how, when women tell their stories and experience their goodness, boundaries established by cultural norms cease to hold both meaning for and power over us.

As I return to Canada and to my religious community I am more than ever convinced

that we, as religious women, have both the opportunity and the resources to continue to create safe places where women can gather to discover and live their potential. Our resources enable us to be about the task of seeking connection with women, all kinds of women, connection that will empower us to be about efficacious change. One of the challenges as we approach the millenium is to have the courage and the honesty to name ourselves as sexual beings, lesbian and/or heterosexual, thus unleashing the creative power that is ours as communities of women.

I leave WATER both saddened and joy-filled. It is hard to say good-bye to new friends, yet I rejoice in the knowledge of my lasting connection with the women of WATER.

Editors' Note: Since returning to her community, the Ursulines in London, Ontario, Pauline has launched several projects at Brescia College incorporating ideas nurtured at WATER. She promises to keep us informed of developments at the Center for Women and the Sacred.

Books

Berling, Judith A. **A Pilgrim in Chinese Culture: Negotiating Religious Diversity.** Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997 (157 pages, \$18).

A respectful, accessible book on Chinese religions. Berling introduces material with care and clarity.

Brootan, Bernadette J. **Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism.** Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996 (412 pages, \$34.95).

A welcome contribution to scholarship and activism on the place and role of lesbians in early Christianity, this opus will establish new boundaries in the debates and new insights in the process.



Castle, Carol. **Made in Her Image: Exploring New Perspectives in the Bible and Christian History.** Minneapolis: Re-Imagining, 1997 (155 pages, members \$15 set, non-members \$25 set; guide alone \$10).

This resource and the accompanying guide for facilitators make gentle introductions to biblical materials for mainline church people searching for something more.

Collier-Thomas, Bettye. **Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979.** San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1998 (345 pages, \$25).

Listen up. Good preaching is an art form. This collection is like a visit to a first rate gallery.

Fine, Irene, editor. **The Shabbat Series: Excellence in Education for Jewish Women.** La Jolla, CA: Woman's Institute for Continuing Jewish Education, 1998 (200 pages, \$12.95).

The Institute makes careful scholarship available to a wide public. This collection is but a sample of their many offerings.

Goss, Robert E. and Amy Adams Squire Strongheart. **Our Families, Our Values: Snapshots of Queer Kinship.** Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press, 1997 (290 pages, \$19.95).

A variety of opinions reign on the question of what makes a family and what queer family values ought to be. This collection includes the range, with ideas argued on the basis of plenty of experience.

Greene, Dana. **The Living of Maisie Ward.** Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997 (255 pages, \$25).

American Catholic intellectual history this century was shaped by Sheed and Ward books. Thanks to Dana Greene's thorough scholarship, we have a full picture of a dynamic woman who made much of it happen.

Grey, Mary C. **Beyond The Dark Night: A Way Forward For The Church?** London: Cassell, 1997 (147 pages, £14.95).

It is not clear that anyone has the answer for this question, but Mary Grey asks it intelligently and with integrity.

Kanyoro, Musimbi R.A., editor. **In Search Of A Round Table: Gender, Theology And Church Leadership.** Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1997 (187 pages, \$16.90).

All Christian denominations will be faced with this challenge when they read Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Wanda Deifelt, Ranjini Rebera and others in this collection.



Park, Therese. **A Gift Of The Emperor.** Duluth, MN: Spinsters Ink, 1997 (360 pages, \$10.95).

A breathtaking novel based on facts about the fate of so-called "comfort women" from Korea during World War II. How the human spirit endures is sometimes beyond comprehension. Read it and weep.

Pharr, Suzanne. **Homophobia: A Weapon Of Sexism.** Berkeley: Chardon Press, 1997 (91 pages, \$12.00).

This is a welcome new edition of a classic.

Phayer, Michael and Eva Fleischner. **Cries In The Night: Women Who Challenged The Holocaust.** Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1997 (160 pages, \$15.95).

Stories of seven Catholic women who aided Jews raise the question of how courage and "doing the right thing" are embodied.

Robert, Dana L. **American Women In Mission: A Social History Of Their Thought And Practice.** Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996 (444 pages, \$30).

A sharper feminist lens would have improved this volume, but the wide scope of denominations and groups makes it a helpful first step in telling this important history of women in religion.



Sadler, Kim Martin, editor. **The Book Of Daily Prayer, Morning And Evening, 1998.** Cleveland: United Church Press, 1997 (384 pages, \$12.95).

If you are looking for a book for daily meditation and want language that is poetic and inclusive, this one works well.

Shah, Sonia. **Dragon Ladies: Asian American Feminists Breathe Fire.** Boston: South End Press, 1997 (241 pages, \$17).

These women make it clear that Asian immigrants in the US are giving feminism a new political, economic and social dimension.

Spencer, Daniel T. **Gay And Gaia: Ethics, Ecology, And The Erotic.** Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1996 (464 pages, \$19.95).

This clear and comprehensive analysis adds an important voice to the many conversations on liberation, ecological and sexual theologies.

Journals

Vashti's Voices: A Journal Exploring Theologies For A Just Future. Women's Resource Center, New

Zealand, Spring 1997 (44 pages, NZ\$22/year).

For Children

Musleah, Rahel and Michael Klayman. **Sharing Blessings: Children's Stories For Exploring The Spirit Of The Jewish Holidays.** Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997 (64 pages, \$18.95).

Such beautiful art work by Mary O'Keefe Young, and such direct, compelling prose make this a gorgeous book for adults and children alike who will learn about the holidays with pleasure. A model for other traditions to follow in explaining their customs, sharing their traditions.

Videos

Gebara, Ivone. **An Evening At Water With Ivone Gebara.** Available from WATER, 8035 13th Street, Silver Spring, MD 20910 (87 minutes, \$20).

Brazilian feminist theologian Ivone Gebara lectures at the second Shared Garden program on her perceptions of the women's movements in Brazil and her own problems with the Vatican. An ideal discussion starter for feminist liberation theological work.

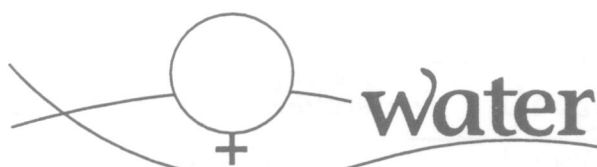
Harrington, Beth. **The Blinking Madonna And Other Miracles.** Available from New Day Films, 22D Hollywood Ave., Hohokus, NJ 07423 (58 minutes, \$199/\$60 for rental).

A must-see especially for those raised Catholic in the '50s, authentic down to the school uniform. The "miracle" is marvelous; the deep truth of many miracles comes to the fore. Well done.

U.S. Ecumenical Women's Network: Beijing and Beyond. **Look at the World through Women's Eyes, c/o Justice for Women, NCC, 475 Riverside Dr., Room 572, NY, NY 10115.**

A good summary of the commitments and dynamics at Beijing where religions were an important aspect of the analysis and action.





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Donors to WATER receive WATERwheel free.

Where the Action Is

Thanks to the professional hand and eye of longtime supporter **Nancy McMurray**, **WATERwheel** now wears a dashing new look. Until her recent retirement, Nancy owned her own firm, Yowagraphics. She is executive editor and graphic designer of *Woman's Monthly*, a periodical calendar for the women's community in the greater Washington/Baltimore metropolitan area.

The Alliance grows in part because WATER staff are out and about, meeting people, working on projects, and learning, learning, learning. This summer may lead the way in miles traveled and cultures sampled.

Mary Hunt ventured to Uppsala, Sweden, to participate in the doctoral defense of **Solveig Boasdottir**, Visiting Scholar at WATER. The dissertation, *Violence, Power and Justice: A Feminist Contribution to Christian Sexual Ethics*, was well received.

Carol Scinto, editor of the manuscript,

joined in the festivities. The highlight was a celebratory dinner at which women of Solveig's Icelandic family (mother, sisters, daughter) wore traditional dress. Choral music so famous in that culture was featured, thanks to the marvelous family choir.

Mary preached at Lutheran Cathedral in Vasteras, Sweden, for the Lutheran clergy and bishop on "From Generation to Generation: A Church Our Children Can Consider." She lectured in Lund on "Avoiding the Traps: Sex and Spirit in a Globalized Economy" as part of a conference on sexuality and spirituality. She and **Diann Neu** met with Nordic feminist theologians **Anna Karin Hammar** and **Ann-Cathrin Jarl** to discuss shared work.

Mary joined colleagues from five countries in Amsterdam for the second meeting of a collaborative project on "Women's Religious Wisdom on Sexuality" under auspices of the Religious Consultation on Population, Reproductive Health and Ethics.

After the third Shared Garden in Recife, Brazil (see accompanying article), **Mary** and **Diann** visited **Barbara de Souza** in Rio de Janeiro, where she promotes health through the Comunitarias de Saude do Canal do Anil, a clinic in a poor neighborhood, for which she

won an award from women of the United Church of Christ. The WATER duo also conducted a workshop on theology and liturgy with the Methodist-directed **Hagar Group**, Afro-Brazilian women of faith in Rio.

In Switzerland in September, **Mary** and **Diann** attended the opening of the Marga Buehrig Foundation, a group providing modest funding for women studying feminist theology, in the spirit of WATER's longtime and still active colleague **Marga Buehrig**.

At home, **Diann** facilitated WATER's Feminist Spirituality Group in which women focused on integrating spirituality and sexuality in their lives. She gathered WATER's Feminist Liturgy Community to create and celebrate inclusive rituals from a feminist perspective.

Mary and **Diann** joined women in Seattle, WA in September for a WATER event/women's gathering, "From Many Shores: Currents of Feminist Spirituality, Solidarity and Social Action" organized by **Elise deGooyer**.

Internships continue at WATER. **Jean Hammond** of Blacksburg, VA brought Voices of Sophia to WATER during a fall internship. **Janet Walton** is interning at WATER as a much-valued computer specialist.