Shoulder to Feminist Theological Shoulder

By Mary E. Hunt

When men talk about making history they frequently speak of standing on the shoulders of giants. Women in the various suffrage movements, especially in England, understood themselves as standing shoulder to shoulder. The anatomical difference is telling.

The women's model prevails in theological circles. It was much in evidence at the Harvard Divinity School Women's Studies in Religion Program conference, "Religion and the Feminist Movement," held in Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1-3 November 2002. Both audience and speakers huddled to look closely at the impact and future directions of our work.

The conference was the first of what I hope will be many efforts to reflect systematically on "the interconnections between religion and second wave feminism." Director Ann Braude set out "to elicit and document the collective narratives of religious women who have advanced a movement." Activists and scholars, practitioners and students, religious professionals and interested colleagues from cognate disciplines came together for an unforgettable weekend of lectures, recollections and visionary presentations.

For me the gestalt experience was having many dimensions of the past, present, and future of our field in one room. Of course many people were missing and many groups were underrepresented. But that only points to the need for more such gatherings, scrupulous attention to archiving our work, and critical reflection on its scope and content. Organizers and participants deserve credit for paying attention to this important history before some of those who have been a part of it can no longer remember and/or articulate it on their own terms.

The speakers' roster was replete with movers and shakers. A sample of the content conveys the flavor of a rich offering. Charlotte Bunch, president of the Center for Women's Global Leadership, linked her deep roots in the Methodist Church with her lifelong commitment to human rights, citing support from church women bureaucrats as key to her success at empowering women around the world. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, professor at Harvard Divinity School, reminded the audience that when asked with whom she studied feminist theology she answered that scholars, practitioners and students, religious professionals and interested colleagues from cognate disciplines came together for an unforgettable weekend of lectures, recollections and visionary presentations.

The conference was the first of what I hope will be many efforts to reflect systematically on "the interconnections between religion and second wave feminism."

We appreciate the ongoing financial and moral support of our friends and donors. We wish you Seasons Blessings and a New Year filled with peace.

Carolyn Farrell, BVM, of the Gannon Center for Women and Leadership at Loyola University, and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza of Harvard Divinity School strategize the future of feminist work in religion at the "Religion and the Feminist Movement" conference.

(Continued on page 2)
Retired women in religion may prove to be among the most "dangerous."

(Continued from page 1)

a role in the so-called secular arena. It would be interesting to hear from Betty Friedan, Ellie Smeal, Gloria Steinem, Patricia Schroeder, and the like to know from their perspectives what, if any, impact we have had.

Judith Plaskow, professor at Manhattan College, and Carol Christ of the Ariadne Institute in Greece, coedited influential anthologies, collecting the early writings of the movement in books that sparked the imagination of many in the field. They were Yale doctoral students together forging new ways to be religious feminists—Judith in Jewish feminist studies, Carol in theology and Goddess studies.

Mary Daly, writer and activist, described her exodus from patriarchal religion—both the literal walkout from Memorial Church in November of 1971 and the figurative move "beyond God the father" that transformed the theological landscape. Rosemary Radford Ruether, now at Pacific School of Religion at the Graduate Theological Union, laid out the roots of her theological scholarship and activism in civil rights and anti-war efforts of the 1960s, commitments that continue to inform her work for peace in the Middle East and her tireless feminist scholarship. Historian Gerda Lerner provided interesting contextualizing remarks from beyond the field.

Drew Divinity School professor Ada-Maria Isasi-Díaz recalled her efforts to develop mujerista theology from the communal reflections of her Latina sisters. Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, retired from William Paterson University, located her work in the evangelical Christian tradition. From inclusive language to seeing gay/lesbian/bisexual and transgender people as dear neighbors, from women’s spirituality to her current focus on transgender concerns, Virginia, like others who come from very conservative backgrounds, brings the best of her tradition and creates the rest.

Delores Williams, professor at Union Theological Seminary, brought wise womanist insights to the mix, pushing the horizons for future generations. Rifat Hassan of the University of Louisville, articulated her experience as a Muslim woman, both the challenges in a field dominated heretofore by Christian and Jewish colleagues, and the complexity of being religiously observant in any tradition.

Blu Greenberg, president of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, explored similar challenges to being religious from her Orthodox starting point. Letty Russell, retired from Yale Divinity School, provided a vivid account of her life's work, a dynamic combination of social activism and scholarship.

Striking similarities were articulated by Protestants and Catholics struggling for women's ordination (Nadine Foley, Donna Quinn, and Betty Bone Schiess). Similar dynamics were at play for lesbians wishing to be out in their churches (Jeanne Audrey Powers), for evangelical women in higher education (Robertia Hestenes), and Mormon feminists who have been excommunicated for their theo-political beliefs (Margaret Toscano). In each instance, the patriarchal institutional machines are threatened by truth claims to women's full personhood. They reject the messengers with a vengeance. The stories are at once of pain and triumph, courage and commitment, pluck and luck. One wonders whether religious institutions deserve such marvelous women.

Lois Wilson of the United Church of Canada moved into government after decades of church work. She illustrated how religious values can be lived out in public service with aplomb. Addie Watt of the Church of God engaged in labor organizing as an integral part of her mission. Writer Vicki Noble spoke of how she incorporates Buddhist insights into her counseling practice. In all, the variety and diversity of women’s efforts to be religious feminists continues to deepen.

Several of my long-term observations were confirmed at this meeting. First, since I was a graduate student in the 1970s, I have been impressed by the collegiality of women in the field. Of course I don’t romanticize the turf battles, petty jealousies, and real intellectual differences that go with the terrain. But on the whole I think our strength is collective and it works. I have experienced the support and encouragement of so many women in this field that I can only hope to repay it by sharing my resources with others. I saw that happening in the halls at Harvard where some of the best conversations, per usual, took place over cups of tea. Pity we didn’t have more structured time for such exchange. It would be good in
Thank you for your spring issue of WATER-wheel on clergy sexual abuse. My thanks to Diann Neu ("Walking with Truth-Tellers," WATERwheel, Spring, 2002) who included in her liturgy excerpts from Victim to Survivor: Women Recovering From Clergy Sexual Abuse (United Church Press, 1991), a book I edited. My response here is an update on one of the women who contributed to the book. As the following paragraphs state, she has since taken her own life.

To demonstrate the lifelong effects of sexual abuse, I want to share that Et Al, one of the contributors to the book whose story Diann cited in the liturgy, took her own life about a year ago. She would not mind my revealing her name, Marian, for she spoke publicly about her abuse. Besides, her actual name allows us to see her as a real woman living with real pain.

Marian's reasons for ending her life were many, but central to all of them was sexual abuse. Her father sexually molested her when she was a child. When, as a teenager, she took her pain to a priest, he too sexually abused her. Later, when she took her accusations against the priest to the Catholic Church, the church did not investigate. Its spokesperson discounted her to the media by saying she was mentally ill. Yes, she suffered from mental illness, but its genesis was sexual abuse.

For most of her adult life, Marian's main concern was getting the message out that sexual abuse exists and that it is extremely damaging. She was frustrated that people's response to her was usually silence. When Victim to Survivor came out she called the local paper, told them she had contributed, and volunteered to be interviewed. Though even her picture was in the paper, not one person from her church mentioned the article to her. Marian died alone. Her parents were dead, her siblings alienated because she spoke publicly about how their father had abused her. Her church, which could not be with her in life, could not be with her in death either. Her neighbor and closest friend, Daryl, had died earlier in the year.

Shortly before she died, Marian sent me a photograph of her as a small child. The picture, she said, was taken before the abuse. Her eyes sparkle. It's clear that she loves life. A lifetime of pain separated that child from the fifty-year-old woman who decided that living was harder than dying.

Shoulder to ...

(Continued from page 2)

the future to have direct dialogues between women from various theological generations for mutual enlightenment and strategizing.

A second observation is that there is no way to disconnect feminist work in religion from social activism. Thanks to Rosemary Radford Ruether, Ilene Stanford and others, a petition against a U.S.-led war in Iraq was circulated at the conference and released to the media. Another whole meeting could focus on the specific impact of feminist work in religion on public policy, past and future.

Third, longstanding problems of racism, Christian hegemony, heterosexism, colonialism, not to mention sexism itself, persist as if untouched by our efforts. I do not mean to contradict my enthusiasm for the myriad accomplishments of the past four decades. I mean to acknowledge that there is so much left to do that it feels at times as if we are still on page one. The odds are formidable and the backlash severe.

Finally, the truth that women get more radical as we get older is especially relevant to women in religion. Young women asked edgy questions convincing me that the field is in good hands. Many graduate students got a crash course in their own history that weekend. Yet I was most heartened by the fact that age seemed only to intensify and focus women's analysis and commitments. Of course each generation has its own experience and integrity, but the older women, and even those of us who are middle aged, conveyed a sense of urgency about the work at hand.

Retired women in religion may prove to be among the most "dangerous." Witness three of our own in action. At the November 2002 American Academy of Religion/Society for Biblical Literature meeting in Toronto, Rosemary Radford Ruether circulated a hand-written petition to thank Francoise Ducros, press spokeswoman for Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, who lost her job for saying out loud what many people think, namely, that a certain U.S. president is "a moron." Rosemary even passed a knit hat for donations to send flowers as our sign of support.

At the same meeting, Letty Russell chaired a panel on "Gender, Faith, and Responses to HIV/AIDS in Africa," a project of Yale Divinity School and USAID "to work in solidarity with women in Africa to examine the intersection of gender, faith, poverty, and AIDS." Jeanne Audrey Powers is an activist par excellence for women and gay/lesbian/bisexual and transgender persons now that she has finished her work in the United Methodist Church bureaucracy. Standing shoulder to shoulder with these women, and with the many graduate students, professors, ministers, and activists who were or wished they could have been at the Harvard conference gives me confidence and motivation to do this work for decades to come. It clarifies that I am well accompanied. For information on the conference and other offerings from the Women's Studies in Religion Program at Harvard Divinity School, see www.hds.harvard.edu/wsrp.

Mary E. Hunt, Ph.D., feminist theologian, is cofounder and codirector of WATER.
Most children in Iraq are probably afraid that the United States will start bombing their country soon. Many children in the United States will not forget the sunny day in September 2001 when terrorist attacks, unprecedented in U.S. history, changed their lives. Most children who live in Montgomery County, Maryland, will not forget the sniper attacks that caused them and their parents to fear going outside this fall.
All of these children will certainly hear the adults in their lives tell stories of these difficult days. They will read about them in their history books. As these times remain in our memories, how will we talk to our children? What will we teach them about peace?
This liturgy invites us to pray with children. Gather your children, nieces and nephews, neighbors and friends together with the adults in their lives, and pray and work for peace.

Preparation
Invite two children to read the prayer. Gather paper, pencils, crayons, and markers to have for the drawing and sharing. Have cookies and juice for the closing.

Call to Gather
Thank you for coming here today so we can be together and pray for peace. A terrible thing happened (add where the event took place, for example, in the United States on 11 September 2001, or in Maryland during the sniper attacks). Who can tell us the story? (Invite the children to share what they know. Affirm their feelings.)
This was very scary, and it still is. Yet, we have to work for peace so children around the world will not have bad things happen to them, their families and friends.

Naming the Circle
Let’s promise to work for peace now. Let’s say our names and then say, “I want peace in the world.” (I am Diann. I want peace in the world.)

Song: “Paz Queremos Paz,” Traditional.

Paz, queremos paz,
Y libertad en este mundo.
Peace, we want peace,
And liberty in this world.

Prayer
(Two children read, alternating line by line.)
1. Dear Love, that’s the name many people call you.
2. Dear Spirit, that’s the name others call you.

1. We pray for the children who live in the United States.
2. We pray for the children who live in Afghanistan and Iraq.

1. We pray for children who use their allowance money to go to the movies.
2. We pray for those who have no blankets to keep them warm.

1. We pray for children who eat three meals and snacks each day.
2. We pray for those who can’t find any food to steal.

1. We pray for children who give their parents kisses every day.
2. We pray for those whose moms and dads were killed in war.

1. We pray for children who are encouraged to do more.
2. We pray for those who don’t get a second chance.

1. Dear God of many names, give peace to all the children of the world.
2. Dear God of many names, give peace to the whole world.

Song: “Paz Queremos Paz,” Traditional.

Paz, queremos paz,
Y libertad en este mundo.

Peace, we want peace,
And liberty in this world.

Reading: “Imagine Living” by Diann Neu

Imagine living in the mountains of Afghanistan or Iraq.
You wear a veil and search for food to eat.
Five times a day you pray to Allah for peace on earth.

Imagine living in a crowded city in China.
You shop at street stalls and ride your bike to work.
Every day you pray to the Buddha for peace on earth.

Imagine living in the Hopi Nation.
You make beautiful pottery and live in the pueblo.
Every day you pray to the Great Spirit for peace on earth.

Imagine living on the west coast of Africa.
You grow yams and walk five miles to school.
Every day you pray to Oshun for peace on earth.

Imagine living on the other side of town, or in another state.
You have different neighbors, a different job, a different lifestyle.
Every day you pray to your God for peace on earth.
If you want peace in the world, shout yes. (Yes)
If you want children in the world to live in peace, clap your hands. (Clap)
If you promise to work for peace, stomp your feet. (Stomp)

Now let’s sing a song and dance for peace.

Song and Dance: “Hevenu Shalom A’Leychem,” traditional Israeli melody, arranged by Sandra Joan Billington, dance steps by Diann Neu.

(Hold hands and circle right)
With words of peace now we greet you.

(Circle left)
With words of peace now we greet you.

(Circle right)
With words of peace now we greet you.

(Raise hands together and step into the center of the circle)
We bring you peace in God’s name,

(Stomp right foot)
Peace,

(Stomp left foot)

(Lower hands and back out of the center)
We sing shalom.

He-ve-nu sha-lom a’ley-chem.
He-ve-nu sha-lom a’ley-chem.
He-ve-nu sha-lom a’ley-chem.
He-ve-nu sha-lom, sha-lom, sha-lom a’ley chem.

Greeting of Peace
Let’s give everyone a hug of peace. (Hugging)

Sending Forth
Let’s share cookies and juice with one another.

Sharing
Can you imagine children around the world praying and working for peace every day? Are you praying and working for peace every day?

Let’s write letters to the children in Afghanistan and Iraq, and to President George W. Bush, and tell them how much we want peace. Let’s draw pictures to show what peace means to us. (Pass out paper, pencils, crayons, and markers. When everyone has finished, gather back together.)

Let’s read the letters we wrote and let’s talk about the pictures we drew. (Sharing)

Litany of Peace
What does peace mean to you? Finish the sentence, “Peace means…”

NEW BOOK

WOMEN’S RITES
Feminist Liturgies for
Life’s Journey
By Diann L. Neu

"New voices are calling for new rituals. Communities need liturgies to honor a women’s biological passages: menarche, menstruation, miscarriage, abortion, childbirth, menopause, and old age (called ‘croning’). Some women need rituals dealing with battering, sexual abuse, rape, trauma, and violence. Some families need ceremonies for coming out and holy unions. Women-church communities and feminist spirituality groups, groups from diverse cultures and religions, the lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer communities, and persons with disabilities are developing new rites that fill the spiritual, political, and justice needs of their members."

Women’s Rites: Feminist Liturgies for Life’s Journey is a collection of new feminist liturgies Diann designed that celebrates and pays tribute to women’s physical, spiritual, and emotional rites of passage.

The book covers such subjects as:
+ Blessing Women at Life-Changing Times
+ Designing Feminist Liturgies for Women’s Life Passages
+ Creating Community
+ Honoring Women’s Blood Mysteries
+ Making Reproductive Choices
+ Mourning Loved Ones
+ Women’s Life Cycle Liturgies Worldwide

Other Recent Books from WATER
• Return Blessings by Diann L. Neu, $20
• Peace Liturgies by Diann L. Neu, $15
• Good Sex: Feminist Perspectives from the World’s Religions by Patricia Beattie Jung, Mary E. Hunt, Radhika Balakrishnan, $20

Order from WATER, 8035 13th Street, Silver Spring MD 20910, 301-589-2509; water@hers.com

Please send me:
____ copy(s) of Women’s Rites @ $23 each $____
____ copy(s) of Return Blessings @ $20 each $____
____ copy(s) of Peace Liturgies @ $15 each $____
____ copy(s) of Good Sex @ $20 each $____
TOTAL (includes postage) $____

Name
Address
City/State/Zip
Email/Phone

WATERwheel Fall 2002 5
WATER's late summer and fall have been a veritable whirlwind of interesting work. A sketch follows of some of the events your financial support helps make possible.

**Staff At Work**

Kudos to longtime WATER staff person The Rev. Cindy Lapp who was ordained to the ministry in the Hylattsburg Mennonite Church. The event was a moving celebration that featured many women, including little ones like her daughter Cecilia who danced and read scripture. WATER wishes Cindy many happy and fulfilling years of ministry.


Diann has been busy writing this fall. Her book, *Return Blessings: Ecofeminist Liturgies Renewing the Earth*, was published in September 2002. You can order both of her books from WATER. See order form on page 5.

Hello, and an all too early goodbye, to Erika Callaway, an M.Div. graduate of Vanderbilt Divinity School, who filled an important staffing gap this fall. Her sure skills and deep commitment to women's well-being will serve her well in her chosen field of anti-violence work, as they served WATER well during her short but sweet stay.

Welcome back to Laura Bernstein who is now our data base manager. Laura worked at WATER years ago through the LEAP (Life Experiences Activities Program) and returns now as part of our *In a Different Style* program. We welcome her back with confidence that our database is in good hands.

Susan Davies, professor at Bangor Theological Seminary, graced WATER during part of her sabbatical year. She wanted and created good conversation on a range of topics, including how progressive religious folks can be supportive of one another within and beyond religious institutions.

Mary Hunt has been on the road again. She taught a summer school course at Iliff Theological Seminary in Denver on "Same-Sex Love and American Religion." Watch for a similar one in June 2003 at Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley. Dr. Hunt joined the board of the newly formed Frontier Internship in Mission Foundation dedicated to raising funds to support ecumenical international exchanges.

She had the privilege of speaking at the 25th anniversary of the Center for Women and Ministry in the South in Durham, NC, where beloved colleague Jeanette Stokes has pioneered artistic, spiritual and political work. See the Resources section for the Rev. Stokes' wonderful book, *25 Years in the Garden* with Mary's Foreword.

Mary's lecture for the Zygon Center in Chicago was on the new shape of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. That group is looking creatively at the intersection of scientific and theological issues in an effort to stem the tide.

Mary Hunt provided a contextualizing introduction to Mary Daly at the Harvard "Religion and the Feminist Movement" conference. She pointed out that Dr. Daly's major contribution is to create intellectual and spiritual space for people to imagine ways of being other than those offered by patriarchal religions.

In Boston, the epicenter of the Catholic Church's priest pedophilia and cover-up scandal, Dr. Hunt spoke at the Massachusetts Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice on "Faith and the Freedom to Choose." She joined The Rev. Dr. Bryan Hehir, President of Catholic Charities USA, for a spirited dialogue at Regis College's symposium on "Women, Church and Society." In both gatherings she called for substantive structural change, not cosmetic tinkering with a fundamentally corrupt and inadequate kyriarchal system.

**Collaborations**

WATER is part of a broad coalition of groups—including Women-Church Convergence, Catholics Organizations for Renewal, Voice of the Faithful, and survivors groups—that is committed to eradicating the heinous crimes of abuse and violence. When the Catholic Bishops' met in Dallas and in Washington, DC, we were there to stand with survivors and fortify efforts for real change.

The Feminist Liberation Theologians' Network met at the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature gathering in Toronto this fall. The discussion focused on the implications of the current economic situation and priorities for feminist work in religion. WATER sponsors the group, which will discuss issues of feminist pedagogy next year at the Atlanta meeting. Meanwhile, contact water@hers.com for info on how to access the group's e-mail discussion list.

The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Scholar Activists in Religion met at the same venue thanks to WATER's leadership. Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, author of the Lambda Literary Award winning *Omnigender: A Transreligious Approach* (Pilgrim, 2001), made an insightful presentation on transgender persons. This topic challenges fundamental assumptions about gender, sexuality and theo-politics.

We were pleased to participate in and co-sponsor the CLOUT, Christian Lesbians Out, meeting in Washington, DC. The theme of the meeting was "Women and HIV/AIDS: A Cry for Compassion." Particular attention was on HIV+ women and children who are the fastest growing cohort of those infected in the U.S. Workshops on transgender concerns, sexuality and the like added to a rich program. Anti-racism work by predominantly white organizations like CLOUT is a challenge we embrace.

---

**NEEDED: A Few Good Women**

Do you have skills you would like to share with WATER?

- Are you a closet fundraiser waiting to come out by volunteering to help with donations?
- Are you a web expert just dying to contribute your skills to a web page that needs revision?
- Are you retired and looking for a place to ply your editorial skills?
- Do you have an afternoon to spend at a busy, friendly office that needs help shelving books and handling routine mailings?

If so, we need YOU at WATER. Call 301 589-2509, or e-mail water@hers.com to offer your time and talent. Many thanks!
Resources

A how-to manual for staying healthy and sane in life-long struggles for justice. Practical, political, and insightful.


Perpetrators need help to cease and desist abuse. This slim study may provide some ideas for pastoral implementation.


Economics is a prime concern for feminist theology/theory. How to do justice in a globalized economy is the conundrum


More “feminine” than “feminist,” this workbook will encourage women to seek their birthright in the spiritual realm.


The history of women in religious congregations is a rich taproot of feminist inspiration. Julie Billiart inspired many.


A beautiful collection of photos and stories, analysis and history about women who have made an enormous difference in ecumenical work worldwide. A treasure.


An indispensable resource for understanding and supporting trans people in Christian churches. Issues and problems are addressed by someone who has walked the walk.


Future wars will be fought over water. This Indian activist shows how the greed and cavalier assumptions of powerful people/nations threaten the wellbeing of the planet. The key is moving toward a deeper sense of communal property.


Wiccan leader Starhawk chronicles her efforts to bring feminist spiritual values to social change work. She displays remarkable courage in the face of well-organized government forces bent on keeping demonstrators and those who articulate a different worldview away from policy makers. How wonderful that pagans and witches show the way toward peace.


An ecological/egalitarian focus this year makes this calendar more useful than ever.


Mary Hunt writes in the Foreword: “Jeanette Stokes has created the genre of feminist inspirational writing. Quite simply, no one does it better.”


Who knew Florence Nightingale was a Unitarian mystic much less radical theologian with an 800-page manuscript of her own? A substantive recovery of a storied historical figure.

For Our Children


If Noah rounded up the animals, Naamah was in charge of the plants. Obviously both of them were successful as this charming story makes clear.
Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual
8035 13th Street, Silver Spring, MD 20910-4803 USA

Address Service Requested

WATERwheel (ISSN 0898-6606) is published quarterly by the
Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual. Annual subscription, $35.
Additional copies of this issue, $5 each. Complimentary copies available on request for
conferences, classes, discussion groups, family, friends, and colleagues.

WATER is a feminist educational center, a network of justice-seeking people that began in 1983 in
response to the need for theological, ethical and liturgical development for and by women. We work
locally, nationally and internationally doing programs and projects, publications and workshops,
counseling, spiritual direction and liturgical planning which help people
actualize feminist religious values and bring about social change. If you would like to subscribe for
weekly updates from the office and occasional news from colleagues in the field,
send a message to majordomo@kerr.com with the words "subscribe water-I" (that's water-hyphen-letter "I", NOT number 1) in the body of the message.

Mary E. Hunt and Diann L. Neu, co-founders and co-directors

For more information about WATER:
Phone 301-589-2509; Fax 301-589-3150
water@hers.com; www.hers.com/water