



water wheel

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

Editorial

How times change. The first multi-race elections in South Africa signal a triumph of right over might, morality over money, persons over ideologies. The smile on Nelson Mandela's face as he cast his ballot was like the other bookend of his historic walk out of prison, glories of the human spirit rarely glimpsed in a lifetime. A tough road lies ahead in South Africa, but only the most hard boiled could miss the trace of hope, the journey from those first steps of freedom to a majority-rule government. That the elderly and disabled voted first is surely a lesson for older democracies.

And change. President Nixon joined the human race in death. The instant revisionist history took many off-guard, suggesting that regardless of what one does in a lifetime, all is forgiven in death. Nice thought, but after the flags returned to their full upright position, most people recovered a sense of moral equilibrium, able to separate the wheat from the chaff, the pernicious actions of a resigned-in-disgrace president from a person who admittedly dedicated his life to public service, such as it was. All the eulogies in the world will never erase Kent State, Cambodia and Watergate, nor let people hear the word "plumbers" and think they are the ones who come and fix a leaky drain. Such legacies die hard.

What is qualitatively new is that never again will apartheid hold sway at the ballot boxes in South Africa, and never again will the U.S. presidency be seen as an untouchable office which confers infallibility on its occupant. Moreover, the memories of those who lost their lives in the struggle for freedom are finally honored in South Africa, while in the U.S. never again, please God/ess, will the cabinet and inner circles of the president be so white, so male and so arrogant. Times change, and we with them. Blessed be. Let it be so.



Longing For Belonging

By Mary E. Hunt

Community is on many people's mind in the late 20th century. Or so it seems judging by the inquiries I get for theological resources, places where people can worship in inclusive peace, names of people who belong to women-church and other groups in the caller's region. When I ask if there is "anything else" they want, the answer is inevitably "community," which turns out to be the reason many people call WATER in the first place.

Like sex, community seems to be something no one talks about unless they don't have enough of it, in which case their conversations are peppered with it. It may be endemic to this kind of work, but the spate of requests of late pushed me to reflect on why the longing for belonging, and why now?

Baby boomers are reported to be flocking back to churches and synagogues in record numbers

beyond the many and varied barriers to human community, at least in the United States, which has raised individualism to an art form. Shared beliefs allegedly transcend class, race, gender, nationality, even age and ability.

However, a good look at most religious groups shows far more homogeneity than most people care to admit: whole churches that are mono-racial, others that represent a fairly thin band on the economic spectrum, whether wealthy, comfortable or poor. The success of ethnic churches proves that if religion is about our most deeply held beliefs, we hang onto them as long as we can even when our "people" have been in the country for several generations. Even the much-touted base communities of liberation theologies tend to be fairly homogenous, a place where belonging to a small group fulfills a need to know and be known on intimate terms.

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after decades of absence. It may be the news that vitamins do not necessarily make up for eating junk food. Or, it may be some new people finally have the disposable time to search for meaning. It might be that the delay in having children simply held back the tide, and now with children in tow people need places to have values reinforced and holidays celebrated. In any case, because boomers have long set trends, it is worth wondering why.

Those concerned are more than boomers. People of every generation seem concerned, from the Generation X people whose rock stars sing despair, to the elders among us who deserve more than most religions currently deliver as they ponder life from the other side of middle age. I suggest that the common longing for belonging that most of us experience is a normal part of growing up, old and on. In our time it is simply made more difficult in a culture which has become increasingly atomistic and privatized.

Religions provide a way to belong, to get be-

Women, at least in the twentieth century, participate in religious groups far more than men. As feminist, womanist, mujerista and other women's theological sources have helped to deconstruct and reconstruct virtually all faith traditions, there is still precious little real community for most women outside of family members or a small circle of friends. There is nothing wrong with these of course, but we seem to want more. There are pockets here and there: womenspirit and women-church groups, a progressive parish or congregation with a feminist minister, a congregation with a supportive rabbi, or perhaps a lesbian group where one does not have to rehearse fundamentals constantly. But these are still the exception rather than the rule, leading me to conjecture that the rise of cafes and trendy coffee bars is really a response to the need for "public" places to be together. Sail through one on a Sunday morning and see for yourself! Hidden behind those newspapers, nurs-
(continued on next page)

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and always appreciated.

WATER is a feminist educational center and 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 a part of an inclusive church and society.

WATERwheel is published quarterly by the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual. Annual subscription, \$35. Address inquiries to the WATER office. Additional copies of this issue can be ordered for \$5 each. **Complimentary copies are available on request for conferences, seminars, classes or discussion groups.** Include street address and daytime telephone number of the person ordering materials. Send inquiries and comments to:

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Longing... *(continued from page 1)*

ing a mug of java, are many people whose parents and grandparents built the now often empty houses of worship.

For most people in most places, especially outside of big cities, pickings are slim when it comes to really feeling at home religiously. Maybe pioneer feminist theologian Nelle Morton was right that "the journey is home," but most people I know would like to get off the road for a bit, settle in and belong somewhere, even if just for a while. Like the Motel 6 ad, they want someone to "stay up and leave the light on" for them. It does not strike me as much to ask.

The urgent need for community is in evidence where one might least expect it. For example, traditional Catholic women's religious orders are on the wane, virtually over as we knew them in my Catholic youth. Median age for U.S. nuns is 66.6, with only 3% under the age of 40. With only 94,000 members, their total numbers are less than half of what they were in the heyday, and dropping fast due to the high percentage of older sisters. It does not take advanced work in statistics to determine that these groups, once a pillar of their church, and later forming part of the bulwark against patriarchy, will not exist in current form by the turn of the century. It is useful to note that the sisters tend to live to ripe old ages, perhaps the surest sign that community is healthy for humans and other living things.

What will replace them is on all of their members' minds, with associate, co-membership and other programs attracting people in record numbers as the number of vowed members dwindles. In many communities more people want to "associate" than "join," a real sign that it is time to

ures, and retire as early as possible to an equally isolated dotage. Along with more heart attacks, the gradual increase in lifestyle and work choices for women in this century has also brought more of the previously male-dominated experiences of isolation. For many women who relied on family for connection, even those ties are strained. Thanks, but no thanks.

There is no magic cure for the longing for belonging. Still, several caveats help. First, as Sister Teresa Kane observed some years ago with regard to her church, it is not very productive to look to patriarchal institutions for what they are constitutionally unable to be or to give. It only results in needless frustration. The next step is obvious: for women to create communities on the basis of new needs and expectations, embracing men and children as we go, so that the legacy of post-patriarchal religion will be increased and not decreased caring, more accountability and a plethora of pleasure.

Second, such creations are dicey because needs and expectations are very real and precious to their owners. This is fair warnings to groups that purport to be communities to respect the power of their own claims, not to promise more than they can deliver, not to trifle with people's deepest longings. Such needs create gurus and avatars of all stripes, inevitably leaving searchers bereft of real connection and lacking personal power. At best, they create elitist, hierarchically-structured communities; at worst, they impel would-be adherents to seek ever deeper isolation, away from their poisonous promises. The challenge is to create communities in which people can satisfy their own needs, but it takes some doing.

Third, the move from ego-centric to eco-centric

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rethink the categories of membership and acknowledge that most people just want to "belong" in a way that does not do violence to their integrity, a tall unto impossible order for women's communities in a patriarchal church. Justice invites these women to take their time and make their changes with dignity, to teach the rest of us how such profound change happens gracefully, how the charisms that undergird their foundations will take new shape. Other communities have only to wish them well and bid them welcome.

The nuns are not alone in this shifting sand of community, even if their situation is among the most graphic. Rather, I think they are simply one example of the many and varied ways in which people, especially women, are seeking to live in economically feasible and spirituality integral ways despite the social pressure to achieve one's individual potential, earn six fig-

ure long term planning gives important shape to the communities of the future. They cannot simply be made up of human animals who bond to survive the rigors of an increasingly hostile environment. Rather, they need to be made up of human and other animals, as well as an ecosystem which is factored in as more than the backdrop for community, but which is the very matrix in which it is set.

Community building has never been an easy task. Needs and expectations change, fatigue overcomes good will, and the capricious spirit of oneness is not easily contained. Still, we long to belong, a longing that can be satisfied with the right measure of care and luck. The collective religious vocation of the late twentieth century seems to be in its fulfillment. Shall we?

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

AIDS, AIDS And More AIDS

by Mary E. Hunt

The first issue of this newsletter, Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring 1988, carried a lead article on AIDS entitled "Making Moral Sense Before, During and After AIDS." I am proud that we started off on the right foot, asking the right questions even if we had few answers. But I am disappointed unto distraught that seven years later I must return to the same subject of suffering, loss, death, despair, and the added urgency to care for those who survive. The pandemic continues unabated with the 16 million people HIV positive in 1993 expected to reach 28 million by 1996. If there is any comfort in these words, it is that they are now read by thousands more than read my first piece. Maybe that helps, even just a little.

Every day I read the obituaries in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, and ev-

of them turn up positive as well. My nagging concern is for their mothers, for women who are as unsung in this as in most arenas.

In New York City, for example, AIDS is the leading cause of death for women aged 25-29, most of whom are African American or Hispanic. The Center for Disease Control reports that AIDS leads the cause of death for all women aged 25-44 with heterosexual sex the primary means of transmission for women. Worldwide, 40 percent of HIV infected people are women.

Shortly before he died, a friend told me that of his dozen or so closest friends, eleven were either dead or diagnosed so his own death had a certain, albeit perverse, logic. Another friend asked me to make sure his lover finished his degree program, adamant that his illness not hold

Deaths out of time are one thing, but lying about them, being ashamed of the dead, demeaning people in their dying only make it worse. It has gotten worse, not better. Ask the survivors.

ery week I read them in the *Washington Blade*, the local lesbian paper. Mine is more than a casual read because I am conscious of how many men are dying, and I wonder how many women and children who die of AIDS never make the papers. Of course, I subtract my age from the ages of the deceased—don't we all—and realize that far too many of my generation are dying young. It is like a war without the possibility of conscientious objection.

There ought to be prizes for obituary writing. By now I have read every euphemism for AIDS-related complications, every effort to pretend that pneumonia in an unmarried man survived by his parents and siblings really was the underlying cause of death. Are we to forget antibiotics, when of course a compromised immune system is the real problem? People deserve their dignity, and no less so families on the occasion of the death of a loved one. Deaths out of time are one thing, but lying about them, being ashamed of the dead, demeaning people in their dying only make it worse. It has gotten worse, not better. Ask the survivors.

I have been to my share of funerals and memorial services. I have lost close friends and acquaintances—my best male friend's lover, my clever travel agent, a close colleague whose theological voice is stilled, a child who never grew up. The AIDS I know, what's in my face, is mostly mediated through gay men. But I volunteer with so-called "boarder babies," and some

back his dear one's progress. The generosity I understand, but I can't yet grasp what it is like to lose all of your friends. I am not sure whether in an epidemic it is really a blessing to survive.

I am sure Camus would venture an opinion, but the only way I can approach it is to personalize such loss to my friends. I try to imagine if one month Diann were diagnosed, then Kathy, a year later we'd lose Deb, and down the pike a bit, Peggy. We'd still be reeling from burying Diann, and Jane would take a turn for the worse. The mind has no memory of pain, philosophers say, but I respectfully submit that neither does it have an imagination capable of encompassing such devastation. It is like a premature old age for a whole generation, and there is seemingly no light at the end of the tunnel.

Meanwhile, the meal programs grow, the buddy systems expand, sex education continues, clinical trials progress, support groups wax and wane, housing opens for those who need it, heroic investigative work continues, and now the movies have begun. The money is still disgracefully tight. The red ribbons are *de rigueur*. But I would trade all of them, and most everything else, for being able to write about the last case. The meanwhile is a mean while.

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



On Altar Girls

Altar girls in the Roman Catholic Church are symbolic of the bind women in religion experience generally. They are an idea whose time is past in a new paradigm when it finally comes to fruition in patriarchy. Consider the dilemma and apply the dynamics to your own situation.

After centuries of exclusion, young girls can now join their brothers at the altar. The Pope has decreed it. So it is. But, warns the Vatican, this is not the first step toward women priests. Toward women plumbers, perhaps?

Unaccustomed as feminists are to anything that looks like a victory, we know we are supposed to cheer. Yet, there is something wrong with this picture, indeed several things.

First, enlightened Catholic parishes have used altar girls when the Pope wasn't looking for a decade. If anything, we are applauding the Vatican for catching up with its people. It reminds one of the old days, when wives would let their husbands, who *finally* come around to an idea, think that it was theirs in the first place. This is not behavior to reinforce.

Second, now that girls can do it, does anyone really need altar servers of either gender? As communities increasingly adopt more informal styles of worship, the role of altar server is going the way of the theological hoop skirt. The shortage of priests and advances in sacramental theology mean that the whole community celebrates. Encouraging our daughters to be altar servers is implicitly reinforcing an outmoded theological model, a high price for justice.

Third, some altar boys have received more than a blessing in the sacristy, causing adults to think twice about having our children of either sex alone with priests. The tragic instances of priest pedophilia evidence the need for serious conversations about boundaries and strict enforcement of professional standards of conduct. Caution is not over reaction.

Nonetheless, the news about altar girls is good, maybe the one small step we will see in a lifetime in a church which moves at a glacial pace. Critical attention is necessary to all such advances lest the complex of patriarchy ensnare even as it seems to liberate. Every so-called gain for women in religion needs to be scrutinized with equal care, and applauded with equal ginger.

Let Justice Roll Down

by Diann L. Neu



Background

Each of us yearns to belong to a community of people who share our core values and beliefs. Most of us desire to participate in community activities and to share our skills and talents to create a community spirit. For many of us the traditional places where we found community in the past no longer sustain us. Instead, many of us find nourishment in spiritual support groups, such as women-church. These groups encompass a growing body of women, men and children who are gathering together as a community of believers, leaving patriarchy, and working to create a "discipleship of equals."

This liturgy celebrates community. It uses the symbol of water, the universal element that is traditionally used in ceremonies that mark community belonging, to focus the power of women-church. It has been adapted for use with many communities. Use it to welcome new people into your community, i.e. in baptism or naming, to celebrate as women-church, or to focus women's gifts in your community.

Preparation

Place a table with a cloth on it in the center of a circle of chairs. Put a bowl, pitcher of water, and towel on the table.

Call to Celebrate

It is indeed good to be here with so many wonderful friends to celebrate as a community. We represent all women, men and children who seek and struggle to be community. We yearn to share our skills and talents with those who seek to make a difference in the world. We desire to cast our lot with those who believe that we can do more together than we can individually.

We walk through these doors with blessing, certain that justice rolls down like water. By being here, we bless this place and challenge all to stand with women on women's terms. We receive and give a blessing.

So welcome to a celebration of water, a celebration of women-church. Let us together walk through these doors with blessing.

Song: "Walk Through These Doors," by Marsie Silvestro, on *Crossing the Lines*, copyright 1987, Moonsong Productions.

(Four dancers, each carrying a lit candle in each hand, dance in to different verses. Each places one candle in a different place in the room and uses the second candle to light a candle on the altar. Twelve candles in all are lit.)

Grandmothers whose names we call,
Ancient ones whose spirits have flown,

Refrain:

Walk through these doors with blessing.
Walk through these doors with peace.
Walk through these doors as holy ones.
Enter the words we speak.

Children laughing in the day.
Mothers crying in the night... *(Refrain.)*

Pauli Murray and Marjorie Tuite,
Nelle Morton and Anne Bennett... *(Refrain.)*

Foremothers of every race,
Women standing strong and free... *(Refrain.)*

Naming the Circle

This evening we speak the words of the community of women who have gone before us: Marge Tuite, Nelle Morton, Anne Bennett, Pauli Murray, all of our foremothers. They are the words of those who would like to be here, and they are the words of those who are here.

When you think of the word "community," what word or phrase captures your thoughts and feelings. Let us begin to create our community here by speaking our names, and sharing a word or phrase about community. *(Share as a whole group if the circle is small. If it is large, invite people to talk with someone they don't know.)*

Call to Gather

(A bell sounds over the voices and calls all to attention.)

Invocation

Many times we have heard church bells ring and have gathered as a community to pray. Tonight we gather in praise of justice for women. Let us pray:

Loving Spirit of Community, we praise you for calling us together in your name. On this night of celebration, refresh us with joy and renew us with power that justice may roll through us like water. Wellspring of Life, Source of Wisdom, Ever-flowing Stream. Amen. Blessed be. Let it be so.

Presentation of Water

Many women, men and children are yearning for a renewed form of community. They are leaving patriarchy and working to create a "discipleship of equals." We recognize among us the varieties of people who are women-church by inviting a few to come forward, give testimony and pour water into our common bowl.

(Four women bless the water: a feminist woman working within the institutional church, a pregnant woman, an older woman, a young woman representing the next generation. Each is given the idea of the blessing, i.e.,

"I bring water to our gathering this evening to symbolize my need for women-church. I need women-church because... My experience is..." She walks to the table, presents the water she is carrying using her own words, pours water into the bowl and stands in a circle around the table. When each woman has presented water, the song begins.)

Song: "Creation of Peace," by Carolyn McDade, on *We Come With Our Voices*, copyright 1979 Surtsey Publishing.

We'll build a land where we bind up the broken.
We'll build a land where the captives go free
Where the oil of gladness dissolves all mourning.
Oh we'll build a promised land that can be.

Chorus:

Come build a land where sisters and brothers
Anointed by God then create peace

Like Water...

Where justice shall roll down like waters
And peace like an ever flowing stream.

We'll build a land where we bring good tidings
To all the afflicted and those who mourn.
We'll then give them garlands instead of ashes.
Oh we'll build a land where peace is born.
(Chorus.)

Come build a land where mantles of praises
Resound from spirits once faint and once weak.
Where like oaks of righteousness stand her people.
Oh, come build the land my sisters (people) we seek. (Chorus.)

Reflection Together

We are here to celebrate the power of community in our lives. Each of our experiences is unique. We are strengthened and stretched as we share these with one another.

Let's take a few minutes to reflect on the following questions that focus this experience.

Why do you need community?

What is your experience of community?

Think about these questions, then turn to someone next to you and share your reflections. (Sharing.)

Song refrain: "Creation of Peace"

Chorus:

Come build a land where sisters and brothers
Anointed by God then create peace
Where justice shall roll down like waters
And peace like an ever flowing stream.

Poem: "Water Women," by Alla Bozarth-Campbell, reprinted by permission from *The Witness*, 1985.

(Dancers dramatize and dance to the poem.)

We do not want
to rock the boat,
you say, mistaking
our new poise
for something safe.

We smile secretly
at each other,
sharing the reality
that for some time
we have not been
in the boat.
We jumped
or were pushed

or fell
and some leaped
overboard.
Our bodies form
a freedom fleet
our dolphin grace
is power.

We learn and teach
and as we go
each woman sings;
each woman's hands
are water wings.

Some of us have become
mermaids or Amazon whales
and are swimming for our lives.

Some of us do not know how to swim.
We walk on water.

Blessing of Water

Yes, we not only walk on water, we bless with water, we drink water, we cleanse ourselves with water, we grow flowers with water, we cook with water, we break water with birth, we relax in water. Water has many uses. Water symbolizes the holy in our bodies. Let us extend our hands, palms up and bless this water, a symbol of the various people who comprise women-church.

Blessed are you, Life-giving Source, for you give us water to quench our thirst, refresh our bodies, and nourish our spirits. Bless us with abundant water for thirsty people and for a thirsty earth.

Song: "Come Drink Deep," by Carolyn McDade, on *Rain Upon Dry Land*, copyright 1993, Surtsey Publishing.

(Dancers bless the water during the first verse.)

Come drink deep of living waters;
Without cup bend close to the ground;
Wade with bare feet into troubled waters
Where love of life abounds.

Blessing of One Another

Come to the water, bless yourself and bless someone else. After you have given and received a blessing, stand around the center space so that we can all be gathered for the closing.

Song: "Come Drink Deep," by Carolyn McDade

I turn my head to sky rains falling;
Wash the wounds of numbness from my soul;

Turn my heart in tides of fierce renewal
Where love and rage run whole.

Come rains of heaven on the dry seed;
Rains of love on every tortured land;
Roots complacent awoken in compassion
So hope springs in our hands.
Come drink deep.

Final Blessing

Sisters and brothers, take this revolutionary power of community to the city centers and village corners of the earth.

Go forth to all places of the universe to speak truth and to overthrow oppressors, to heal the broken and to dance with children.

Go forth in the name of the Creator, the Goddess of Love and Challenges, the God of the small and the powerless.

Go forth and bless the world with your steam. Go forth and embrace one another with your love.

Greet with Peace

Let us hug one another to strengthen our bonds as a community. (Greeting of Peace.)

Song: "Song of Community," by Carolyn McDade, on *Rain Upon Dry Land*, copyright 1979 Surtsey Publishing.

We'll weave a love that greens sure as spring
Then deepens in summer to the fall autumn brings
Resting still in winter to spiral again
Together my friends we'll weave on,
We'll weave on.

A love that heals friend, that bends friend,
That rising and turning then yields friend.
Like the mountain to rain, or frost in the spring,
Or darkness that turns with the dawn.
It's by turning, turning, turning my friend
By turning that love moves on.

Diann L. Neu, M.Div., LGSW, is co-director of WATER.





Announcing: WATER On-Line

Response to our initial feelers about e-mail access to WATER has been more than sufficient to justify this new program aspect of our work. It is exciting to think that feminists in religion have overcome the technophobia so usual in our circles and are harnessing this efficient, economical means of communication for helpful purposes.

All you need is a computer with a modem, and access to the electronic highway in the sky, also known as Internet. If you are new to this scene, ask a friend to help you hook things up and dial away.

Once you find your way, you can get on the WATER list by sending a message to water-request@his.com. Include in your message the word Join, Add or Describe, as well as your name and e-mail address. If you want to get off of the WATER conversation, use water-request@his.com but include in your message the word Delete, Unsubscribe or Remove along with your name and e-mail address.

Once you are on, you can simply communicate with WATER directly at water@his.com. You will start to receive periodic messages from the WATER office, as well as from other people on the mailing list. For example, someone may offer information on an up-coming conference, a suggestion for a "must read" book, or a question about where to find some information.

The sky's the limit though, of course, good manners are still paramount. We hope to post something every Friday, not a missive but some "elegant intervention" as Kevin Gordon would say, to keep the conversation lively. Other people will post as appropriate.

WATER does not charge for access to this service, but of course donations are welcome because it takes staff time and energy to make this happen. We think it is worth it to bring our Alliance into closer touch. We hope you do too and will support it generously. Be sure to let us know when you donate that e-mail has played a part in your WATER experience so we can assess the need. Onward to the 21st century!

WATER Programs

Everyone can't come to WATER programs, so we bring word of WATER programs to you. Spring programs of note include two Saturday Seminars with Mary Hunt which generated a good deal of conversation.

"I Don't Know What I Believe Anymore" featured a discussion of the relationship between changing feminist theologies and changing feminist faiths. Participants discovered that while intellectual headway has been made on issues like God/ess, language and liturgy, that fundamentals like whether one is theistic, monotheistic or polytheistic, what one thinks about death, meaning and relationships remains to be explored. These deeply held beliefs which function often at the level of presuppositions invite reflection as part of renewed faith perspectives.

A day on "Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics (COYOTE) and Replace Them with New Feminist Thinking" was equally thought-provoking. (The title was borrowed from the union of prostitutes in San Francisco founded by Margo St. James.) Discussion focused on ecofeminism as the signal move beyond ego-feminism, and on the connections between religion and violence. Participants pushed a range of issues using readings from Carol Adams' *Ecofeminism and the Sacred* and from Joanne Brown and Carol Bohn's *Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse*.

Spring liturgies included three evenings with Diann Neu which invited participants to pay attention to their spirituality. "Merrymaking: A Mardi Gras Festival" focused on being festive and celebrating ourselves as beautiful women. Participants named the circle by smudging each individual to purify her of trouble, and by welcoming her beauty saying, "May beauty surround you." Each one chose a scarf, put it on, reflected on and shared about the questions: How do you affirm your beauty and goodness? How do you celebrate and make festivity part of your life? Of course, people blessed and ate pancakes, sang and danced.

"Let the Winter Go" invited women to put the hard winter behind and notice the unfolding of

spring. It began with an Exorcism of Winter to which participants responded, "Go, winter, go." Depart, deadening spirit of winter from our lives.

"Go, winter, go."

Be gone, all slippery ice, slushy sleet, beautiful snow and piercing winds...

Be gone, all ice, sleet and cold in our personal lives: snide remarks, judgmental statements, cruel jokes, nasty gossip, untruthful comments...

Be gone, times of loneliness and harshness...

WATER people planted flowers in honor of Anglican women in England who had just been ordained. Participants shared readings and songs about spring.

"The Earth Is Our Mother" celebrated Earth Day by calling upon our planet home to "teach us and show us the way." Participants placed in the center of the circle symbols of the earth--soil, shells, rocks, flowers, water, bread, juice, wine--which were blessed and shared at various times throughout the ritual. Women reflected on the line from the poem by Tanikawa about cherry blossoms, "once in spring / I with god / had a quiet talk." How do you talk in springtime with God, with Sophia, with the mystery of life, the Holy One?

A breakfast meeting featured the video "Maybe We're Talking About a Different God," about the Rev. Janie Spahr, Presbyterian minister barred from taking a pastoral position because she is an honest lesbian. It is hard to watch such a story unfold and still have any respect for institutions which claim to be about love and justice despite such behavior.

Another breakfast meeting focused on the Minneapolis "Re-Imagining" conference. People who had attended reported firsthand on what went on--the content, music, art, ambiance, spirit of the event--before turning attention to the vicious backlash which has followed. It was fun to relive the event, share it more widely, and set the record straight, at it were, about what really happened.



Resources



Comstock, Gary David. *GAY THEOLOGY WITHOUT APOLOGY*. Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1993 (184 pages, \$10.95).

A gay male approach to theology which encompasses the "big picture" of global politics and social action. Dr. Comstock theologizes graciously, unself-consciously, and with liberation for all on the horizon.

Feinberg, Leslie. *STONE BUTCH BLUES*. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1993 (304 pages, \$10.95).

A landmark novel which opened this reviewer's eyes and heart to the world of transgendered people. It is easy to include the word in a politically correct laundry list, but it is hard to overestimate the suffering, love and courage of these "he-she" people who paved the way for gender-benders all. A good companion is Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis' *BOOTS OF LEATHER, SLIPPERS OF GOLD: THE HISTORY OF A LESBIAN COMMUNITY*. New York: Routledge, 1993 (434 pages, \$29.95) which provides a thorough anthropological look at a Buffalo, NY, community of working class lesbians from a range of racial groups, challenging the assumption that Stonewall began it all.

Fiorenza, Elisabeth Schussler. *DISCIPLESHIP OF EQUALS: A CRITICAL FEMINIST EKKLESIA-LOGY OF LIBERATION*. New York: Crossroad, 1993 (372 pages, \$19.95).

This accessible compilation of Elisabeth's writings, from her earliest work on women in ministry to her democratic feminist vision of church and society, proves how prophetic and practical she has been all along. Luckily her influence has been profound on feminist theology; with this publication it can be more widely felt.

Gaard, Greta. *ECOFEMINISM: WOMEN, ANIMALS, NATURE*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993 (331 pages, \$18.95).

Essential reading to understand ecofeminism on its own terms as a comprehensive movement for liberation here articulated by a range of creative thinkers.

Herman, Judith Lewis. *TRAUMA AND RECOVERY*. New York: Basic Books, 1992 (276 pages, \$14).

Safety, remembering/mourning and reconnecting form a three-part strategy for moving from trauma to recovery. Simple yet indispensable for all helping professionals to understand and practice with clients.

hooks, bell. *SISTERS OF THE YAM: BLACK WOMEN AND SELF-RECOVERY*. Boston: South End Press, 1993 (194 pages, \$14).

A trusted voice for justice brings her ethical acumen to the question of self-recovery. Real wisdom where the personal has never been more political, and vice versa.

Hubbard, Ruth and Elijah Wald. *EXPLODING THE GENE MYTH: HOW GENETIC INFORMATION IS PRODUCED AND MANIPULATED BY SCIENTISTS, PHYSICIANS, EMPLOYERS, INSURANCE COMPANIES, EDUCATORS, AND LAW ENFORCERS*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993 (224 pages, \$24).

Perspective and perspicacity on gene research. This wise antidote to unbridled enthusiasm is a welcome addition to the conversation.

Imbens, Annie and Ineke Jonker. *CHRISTIANITY AND INCEST*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992 (298 pages, \$14.95).

A prophetic start at sorting through the many layers of religion and sexual abuse. A painful yet important read.

Jay, Nancy. *THROUGHOUT YOUR GENERATIONS FOREVER: SACRIFICE, RELIGION, AND PATERNITY*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (194 pages, \$27.50).

A signal study in feminist sociology of religion by an important teacher, published posthumously. Sacrifice will never look the same.

Jordan, June. *TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES: AFRICAN AMERICAN NOTES ON THE STATE OF THE UNION*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1992 (228 pages, \$24).

This is what turn of the century writings need to be for social change to be possible. Wisdom, clarity and commitment to justice characterize June Jordan whether on politics, an earthquake, or sexuality.

Korsak, Mary Phil. *AT THE START... GENESIS MADE NEW*. Louvain, Belgium: European Association for the Promotion of Poetry, 1992 (200 pages, \$22).

A new translation from the Hebrew which makes Genesis read like a good story, an epic poem.

Russell, Diana E.H., editor. *MAKING VIOLENCE SEXY: FEMINIST VIEWS ON PORNOGRAPHY*. New York and London: Teachers College Press, 1993 (320 pages, \$19.95).

Thoughtful, diverse yet always clarifying essays on pornography which help to move a difficult debate toward legal and ethical resolutions.

Starhawk. *THE FIFTH SACRED THING*. New York: Bantam Books, 1993. (496 pages, \$21.95).

Starhawk uses the genre of the epic novel this time to advance her message of peace, creativity and ecological attention.

Townes, Emilie M. *WOMANIST JUSTICE, WOMANIST HOPE*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, AAR, Academy Series, No. 79, 1993 (228 pages, \$19.95).

Emilie Townes sketches the life of Ida B. Wells-Barnett, social change advocate, civil rights worker and committed church woman, to ground her own womanist social ethics. Solid scholarship, clear writing and comprehensive analysis make this an excellent foundation.

Umansky, Ellen and Dianne Ashton., editors. *FOUR GENERATIONS OF JEWISH WOMEN'S SPIRITUALITY: A SOURCEBOOK*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992 (350 pages, \$18).

A treasure trove of spiritual wisdom, this is a great read and an even greater reference. A must for every religious feminist's library.

West, Cornell. *RACE MATTERS*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993 (112 pages, \$15).

A readily accessible intellectual tour de force, this book is a tool in the hand of those who seek to break racism's deadly grip.

Williams, Delores S. *SISTERS IN THE WILDERNESS: THE CHALLENGE OF WOMANIST GOD-TALK*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993 (287 pages, \$19.95).

This broad ranging womanist treatment of Hagar as a survivor lays a groundwork for future theological construction. African American women who trust in God are a resource for the next generation of religious leaders and models of renewed churches.

On Video

"MAYBE WE'RE TALKING ABOUT A DIFFERENT GOD," a documentary and discussion guide on the struggle for justice by The Rev. Jane Spahr whose call to serve the Downtown Presbyterian Church in Rochester, NY was negated by her denomination. This first rate film is produced by John Ankele and Anne Macksoud. Available from Leonardo's Children, Inc., 26 Newport Bridge Rd., Warwick, NY 10990, \$32.35.



Grace Notes

Bishop Susan Morrison received the Anna Howard Shaw Award at Boston University School of Theology in recognition of her pioneering efforts in the United Methodist Church. Reports of the celebration indicate that a festive time was had by all.

Carol Scinto, roving WATER ambassador (with her husband, Joe) to New Zealand and Australia, joined Auckland's Spiral Community for activities and visited the Women's Resource Centre where **Rosemary Neave** keeps in touch with WATER.

Former intern **Ute Harle** writes that she and her colleagues are "ready to start our own project" after her several months at WATER where she appreciated learning "the close connection between politics and spirituality."

Presbyterian Lesbian Gay Concerns new co-moderator **Laurene Lafontaine**, in true David Letterman style, lists in her top ten benefits of being a "recovering" graduate of the school: "9. Having the common sense to give my money to

WATER instead of Princeton Theological Seminary." Well done. Now if only Mr. Letterman would follow suit.

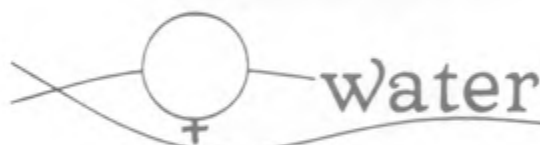
From **Mary J. Shanahan**, a Visiting Scholar at WATER from Scotland, comes a follow-up reflection: "February at WATER was a welcome space and a refreshing experience. I was introduced to a wealth of resources and had opportunity to study the research just completed on women's spirituality groups in the United States. Arriving at WATER with a rather thread-worn spirituality this seemed like a good place to begin. The study highlighted several issues including the value of bonding both for empowerment and for survival. It also demonstrated the commitment of such groups to creating something new. WATER itself is a good example of this. In the office is a beautiful hard-



crafted water jug--an appropriate symbol--a jug filled up, running over, poured out and somehow never empty." [Editor's note: The study is the result of a Lilly Endowment Grant to explore feminist spirituality groups. It is entitled *Defecting in Place: Women Claiming Responsibility for Their Own Spiritual Lives*, by *Miriam Therese Winter, Adair Lummis and Allison Stokes, forthcoming.*]

"I have brought back to Scotland warm memories of a cold February. Memories of families, groups and networks who received me and gave of their time and resources, of Mary Hunt for her attention and helpful supervision, and of many happy hours given to exploring and enjoying Washington. To each and all a sincere thank you, and I hope to be back."

Emily Jane Style gave the welcome present of a WATER subscription to **Gail Cruise-Roberson**, a social activist, on the occasion of the first communion of her daughter, **Justice Cruise Roberson**. An early start is a real gift.



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WATERwheel, Vol. 7, No. 1, Spring 1994

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