



water wheel

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

Editorial

Try as we might to avoid unproductive conversations, the wrong questions continue to be asked. Or so it seems from the hideous assault on social programs for people who are poor while so many, including religious people, debate the obvious and miss the boat which is often a big ship. We at WATER specialize in trying to focus useful questions so that we might inch our way toward some sane answers. It is a challenge:

Example One: *Health care* is a right, not a privilege. It is more like going to first grade than getting a new car, something we all need because we are bodies, not because we have jobs or are married to people who do. Imagine if this idea grounded the debate instead of starting with insurance companies.

Example Two: *Shannon Faulkner* may have been overweight and out of shape, near a nervous breakdown and otherwise fragile, but so what? What kind of shape were Citadel officials in when they permitted, better, probably encouraged, young men to delight in the defeat of a young woman? And how many people even know that this case is not so much about a woman in the men's room as it is about whether we believe that state monies should be used for the education of our boys and not our girls?

Example Three: *O.J. Simpson* may be innocent or guilty of the crime with which he was charged, but what does it mean that people in the US are convinced along racial lines? For example, studies show that African American people think he was innocent because they can imagine he was framed. European Americans are equally convinced he was guilty and walked because of his money. The hideous words of Mark Fuhrman only reinforce the racism most people prefer not to address. Long after the jury returned its verdict, anti-racism work will continue to require priority attention.

At WATER we struggle to ask helpful questions, to stay out of debates that divert, to keep our facts straight and our vision clear. It is a challenge.



Feminist Ministry

by Mary E. Hunt

Feminist ministry is an idea whose time has come, even if there is only emerging discussion of what it entails. Images abound-- the pregnant pastor, the rabbi with her husband, the priest and her life companion. Denominations that ordain women think they have arrived, while those that do not, notably Roman Catholicism, think they are staving off the last days by holding out. What none of them realize is that feminist models of ministry will challenge all of their categories and result in new forms of being communities of faith. Moreover, most Christian people no longer go to church, so most ministry will take place beyond the walls anyway.

The occasion of the twentieth anniversary celebration of the Women's Ordination Conference, entitled "Discipleship of Equals: Breaking Bread/Doing Justice," is an opportune time to think through the matter of feminist ministry. Of course the Roman Catholic case is unique. No other Christian group has a monarch (some might say moral dictator) and few others permit so little by way of shared decision-making. But it nonetheless provides a useful outline for how some have moved from the desire for ordination

with feminism because hierarchy is incompatible with justice. Kyriarchy goes well beyond patriarchy, which has come to be seen in a gender-focused way; kyriarchy, literally, lordship or mastery over others, is structured by the many and pervasive interlocking forms of oppression--especially race, class and gender--that converge to privilege some at the expense of others, generation after generation. The genius of the term is that it evokes the familiar ecclesial "Lord have mercy" and effectively demonstrates the central role of such religious traditions in the organization and stabilization of kyriarchy.

The *ekklesia* of women is a necessary and compelling antidote, a way to live out feminist ministry. Its roots lie in the good faith efforts of women to transform kyriarchal religions from the inside and their encountering serious structural stumbling blocks. Of course for Catholic women this has been slow going at best. Twenty years ago, inspired by the strides made by other Christian women, including Lutherans and Episcopalians with their focus on sacramental priesthood, we imagined some of our women ordained. Women priests were accepted like pregnant men,

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to an utterly different approach to the question of ministry with implications for other groups as well.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza argues that feminist priesthood is an oxymoron because "the radical democratic equality of the discipleship of equals stands in contradiction to the essential religious status difference of hierarchical office which is conferred in and through ordination in exchange for the promise of obedience and submission." Her pioneering work on *kyriarchy* and the *ekklesia of women* lays the theological foundation for this claim and the constructive new groupings necessary to replace it.

Her insight is that kyriarchy is incompatible

even though the vast majority of congregants and religious were women (nuns still outnumber priests at least 3 to 1). But just as reproductive technologies inch toward alternatives to pregnant women, so too has the notion of a woman priest taken hold. Now in the United States upwards of 60% of Catholics favor them. Strong role models in the Anglican and Lutheran communities have paved the way, and society has changed so that barring women from any job is viewed by most progressive people as wrong.

Hundreds of us trained for priesthood, often doing better than our male colleagues in both academic and pastoral work. We proved to our-
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WATER is a feminist educational center, a network of justice-seeking people that began in 1983 as a response to the need for serious theological, ethical and liturgical development for and by women. We work locally, nationally and internationally doing programs, projects, publications, workshops, retreats, counseling and liturgical planning which have helped thousands of people to be a part of an inclusive church and society.

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

selves and the rest that there was finally only misogynist discrimination which in Catholicism gave men seven sacraments and women six. History will herald the steadfast leadership of the Women's Ordination Conference to keep this injustice before the public. At the same time, the Vatican's intransigence deepened, and its tiresome repetition of how women were not at the Last Supper, how women could not possibly symbolize the marriage relationship of Bridegroom Priest and Bride Church, eroded its credibility.

Such a theological embarrassment is hard to take seriously. But it is lethal in that it inscribes the symbols of essential difference between women and men, and it reinforces a hierarchical view of how ministry will be carried out. Nothing could be further from the meaning of "discipleship of equals," and nothing could be more efficient in granting religious blessing to systems of domination. All of this conspired to demand a paradigm shift in models of ministry.

Early on, the issues of mandatory celibacy, clericalism and hierarchy were studied and rejected by Catholic women who would be priests. Most of us wanted no part of such a model, though some few women were willing to accept some conditions for getting a foot in the door. Others, knowing the door would be slammed

Far from reinscribing a female role, what is different about feminist ministry is that it includes everyone. It is not the auxiliary to the ordained, but a wholesale replacement of that elitist model with one which is inclusive of all. Logically, certain people at certain times will be asked to fulfill certain tasks—for example, I expect my community will long prefer that I teach rather than sing a solo. But the important difference is that feminist ministry does not exist alongside, more realistically, below, kyriarchal ministry, but replaces it. Period.

What about women who are already ordained, or men, for that matter? Is this approach just the sour grapes of Catholic women who cannot achieve the real thing? No, it is a serious reappraisal of the dangers of kyriarchy and a firm resolve not to enter into it. Since Catholicism is kyriarchal in perhaps the deepest relief, other denominations will need to reassess according to their own situations. But the fundamental issue is clear: feminist ministry involves widespread participation, empowerment of all, especially women as religious agents. It means communal responsibility for what was previously reserved to priests, namely, the liturgical, educational and fiduciary aspects of the community.

Outside of church settings, feminist ministry is equally helpful. It is an invitation to form communities of justice-seekers who will engage in the long term work of social justice from a

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firmly on the foot, began to move into women's base communities which are part of what is now the women-church movement. These local groups worship in house churches, usually sharing a meal and a liturgy on a monthly or bi-weekly basis. I belong to one called SAS, or Sisters Against Sexism, which has been meeting continuously since 1979. No one is ordained; everyone participates, and the sun rises and sets as it always has.

Feminist ministry takes many forms. It is not the feminist equivalent of ordained ministry because it does not presume a radical separation between one sort of person and the other, i.e., between lay and ordained. Rather, it is more like a common calling, what all baptized people are invited to do on the basis of their participation in a faith community. In that sense, it is the common work of paying attention, providing education, keeping food on the table, worrying about finances, comforting, visiting, burying, that women have always done.

base of people who share values, support one another, and construct a quality life in the meantime. What more do we need? Why should we settle for less?

Study Questions

1. How is feminist ministry lived out in your community?
2. What impact does feminist ministry have on your faith?
3. What models of feminist community and ministry do you foresee for the next century?

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

Shared Blessings

WATER welcomed a group of ten European women (nine German and one Dutch)—pastors, students and administrators—for a week of study and reflection in July. Dr. Herta Leistner, director of the Women's Study and Training Center of the Protestant Church of Germany in Geinhausen, worked with Mary Hunt to imagine and arrange the trip.

The German center chose liturgy and ritual as the focus for its first three years of existence. A visit to the United States was programmed for intensive exposure to our styles and innovations even though the visitors work mostly in formal church settings. WATER staff Diann Neu and Mary Hunt conducted a "Re-imagining Advent" program at the Center last year, so this "women crossing worlds" experience served to fortify our bonds.

Lectures, workshops and discussions formed the formal basis of the program. But for WATER people the highlight was sharing our hearths and homes with these new friends. From the opening circle when we gathered to welcome our guests (and then take them home for needed sleep) to the final blessing and departure, we were enriched by the presence of such vibrant women whose ministries and efforts for justice, though different in style, coincided so deeply with our own. We were privileged to see the unfolding of new relationships between those from the former East Germany and the former West Germany, and we were delighted to strengthen our long-time bond with friends in the Netherlands.

A return visit by WATER women is under discussion. As the world shrinks because of fax and internet, air travel and ecumenical participation, these kinds of exchanges become all the more vital.

Herta reports: When we landed at Dulles Airport, Mary Hunt welcomed our group of ten, and then the heavens opened, pouring rain upon us. Thus we arrived at WATER!

Visiting WATER was a special experience for us. Over the years we had gained a lot from

Diann Neu's feminist liturgies published in WATERwheel, and Mary Hunt had challenged our thinking in several conferences in Germany with lesbians and women interested in feminist theology. Now we could see both Mary and Diann in their own context in their own place. They had organized a terrific study week for us, including many WATER-women, the staff and the friends who hosted us.

We celebrated liturgies together. We discussed the meaning and development of feminist liturgies. We got an update on the latest trends in feminist theology and ethics in the US. Guest speakers such as Mary Collins, Associate Professor for Liturgy at Catholic University; Martha Ann Kirk, liturgist and dancer from San Antonio, TX, and Victoria Rue of the Institute for Religion and the Arts, Berkeley, CA, gave us a sense of how white American feminists are dealing with liturgy and expressing their spirituality.

From WATER, the journey took us to Grailville in Loveland, OH, where we got to know the Grail Community, an independent, international women's organization with members in 20 countries. Our last week we spent with the Maryknoll Sisters in Ossining, NY, where we also met Rosemary Radford Reuther from Chicago and Ivone Gebara from Recife, Brazil.

For us as women from a Protestant background, all employed by the church but all urgently wanting changes in our churches, it was good to realize how two women, Diann and Mary, living outside a church which refuses their full participation, still are a strong power influencing all churches by being their own religious agents and offering a special space for and cooperation to women who are still inside the different churches. We recognized how important our national and international women-networks are, how we need each other in the struggle for justice for women and justice in the world. WATER refreshed us for our journey and our everyday life at home.



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Women-Church Convergence Update

The Women-Church Convergence held its fall meeting in San Antonio, TX where they met with women from Fuerza Unida, a group formed to oppose the unfair labor practices of Levi Straus. Did you know that jeans formerly made in the US are now being made in Mexico where wages are far lower? Of course hundreds of women in the US are now unemployed as a result. Time to change brands when you buy your next pair of jeans.

The Convergence withheld its absolution from the Pope. Even though he confessed in a recent letter to the possibility of having offended women over the centuries, the confession lacked the sacramentally required firm purpose of amendment and the willingness to engage in restitution. The Convergence suggested that the Pope could withdraw the silencing of Brazilian theologian Ivone Gebara, reinstate fired theologian Carmel McEnroy, and thank Patty Crowley for her work on the Papal Birth Control Commission. No one is holding his or her breath.

Earlier, the Convergence collaborated on Beijing-related activities, including a presence in New York during the preparatory meetings, a meeting with Gertrude Mongella, the general secretary for the UN conference; networking of women and religion on site in China, especially at the NGO meeting in Huairou, and activities at home during the conference.

The Convergence published "Equal is as Equal Does" (written by Mary E. Hunt and Frances Kissling), a response to the Vatican's preparatory document. It was distributed widely and was part of the very successful effort to contain the Vatican and other fundamentalists so as to develop a global consensus on issues.

The Convergence also formulated a statement on welfare reform, all part of our effort to counteract the impression that religious people are on the far right, or even on the near right.

This liturgy celebrates feminist ministry. A feminist Eucharist of liberation, it can be used for women's groups, women-church gatherings, conferences, seminars, international gatherings, and worship services for any denomination. Adapt it to the needs of your group.

Preparation

Invite participants to share a meal together. This could be a pot luck or each person bringing a dish for a set menu.

Invite leaders for each part of the liturgy.

Gather varieties of breads and drinks (check the script for them and add your own), candles, a cloth for the dinner table, and a place setting for each person. This liturgy takes place around the dinner table.

Name the Circle

Welcome to this celebration of our feminist ministries. Let us begin by introducing ourselves, saying our names, and sharing an experience of feminist ministry.

Call to Gather

Today we gather to reclaim feminist ministries for ourselves and for our churches. We come here from many places and many spaces. We come with hopes and doubts, with anger and fear. We live the fullness of our baptism when we break silence and speak aloud our names, when we join hands together and proclaim feminist ministry, when we empower one another as church. Let us proclaim the fullness of our baptism here today as we each in turn speak our names, offer a hand to the next person and name an experience of feminist ministry. An example:

I am Diann, a feminist minister who creates liturgies and counsels the broken-hearted. (I offer my hand to the person on my right.)

Song: "Wings Unfurled" by Colleen Fulmer
Copyright 1989 Colleen Fulmer

You are fashioned in my image.
You are woman, radiant Glory.
Spirit rising, wings unfurled;
you are beauty for our world.

Remember Women Disciples

O Wisdom, Womb of Life, Sophia, Source of Power, we remember today women disciples, named and unnamed, who throughout time have used their ministry to transform the world. We call upon these foresisters to help us discover within ourselves your power and the ways to use it to bring about justice and peace.

Our response to each name is: "We proclaim your feminist ministry as church."

MARY MAGDALENE, first to announce Jesus' resurrection, foundation of Women-

Church, disciple to the disciples.

Response: We proclaim your feminist ministry as church.

JUNIA, woman imprisoned; **PHOEBE**, presider of a local church; **PRISCA**, minister who supported herself; **THECLA** and other women leaders of the early house church movement who were called to a discipleship of equals.

Response:

TERESA OF AVILA and **CATHERINE OF SIENA**, Doctors of our Church, who challenged the corruption of the institutional church during the Renaissance.

Response:

FEMINIST MINISTERS and THEOLOGIANS, AND ALL WOMEN WHO SPEAK OUT AGAINST OPPRESSION in any form.

Response:

Let us speak aloud the names of other feminist ministers who have been called to minister as church. (Add other names)

Response:

Reading: Isaiah 61:1-4

The spirit of Sophia is upon me, because she has anointed me to bring good tidings to those who are afflicted, and has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of God's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of God, that she may be glorified. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

Psalm Response: from Psalm 47

(Pray in unison)

Clap your hands, all you women!
Sing to God with songs of joy!
For Sophia-Spirit reigns over all the earth.
She subdues those who resist us,
putting whole nations in our care.
She chose as our heritage the women who went before us,
honored by God and beloved.
Sophia-Spirit comes to the sound of glad shouts and music!

Praised Be

by Diann L. Neu

Everyone sings her praises!
Her love is sovereign in all the earth.
Sing psalms to celebrate Her gentle reign!
Holiness is the seat of her authority.

Reflect Together

We have proclaimed the ministries of our foresisters, we have heard the words of Isaiah, now we ask ourselves "How do I experience feminist ministry?" Take a few minutes for quiet reflection, then let's share our experiences of feminist ministry. (Sharing with person on right)

Present the Breads

Look around, sisters and brothers. Look at all these powerful people. Just as no single person symbolizes the Discipleship of Equals, no single bread can feed our hunger. We bless many kinds of bread as a sign that the Discipleship of Equals savors the taste and feel of a variety of foods, and savors the variety of women, men and children who make up our community.

(A presenter offers each bread, places it on the table, and blesses it in her/his own words using the script here as a model. Use as many languages as possible for the blessing.)

Sourdough bread rises because into each new loaf we put a small amount of dough kept from the last batch.

Let this bread remind us of our mothers, our grandmothers, our female ancestors, those whose life blood we have in our veins.

Let this sourdough bread nourish feminist ministers to pass on their legacy from generation to generation.

May we keep rising!

Song Refrain (after each bread blessing):

"Feed Our Hungry Souls" by Colleen Fulmer from *Dancing Sophia's Circle*, copyright 1994.

O Wisdom Sophia, the power and splendor of God, feed our hungry souls at your abundant table.

Rye bread is the common bread of the working class in many countries.

Let it symbolize for us all women ministers who are unemployed and seeking jobs.

Let it remind us of women who are discriminated against in wages.

May we be filled with economic power.

Rice cakes are made from a grain that in antiquity was rare and treasured in many places, thus kept for medicinal uses.

Let these rice cakes stand for women and men

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who are ill, especially those living with HIV-AIDS, and those who suffer mental illness.

Let these rice cakes nourish all those who do the work of healing.

May we be strengthened to be healers.

Matzah calls to mind refugees and exiles, those who have been forced to leave their homes and even to flee their homeland.

Let this matzah, so important in Passover celebrations, remind us of our Jewish sisters and brothers who survived the holocaust.

Let this unleavened bread nourish feminist ministers who work with refugees and exiles.

May we have the courage to begin anew.

Tortillas are a staple for many families in Central America, where political violence has raged in recent years.

Let them also symbolize all people who suffer in war.

Let them nourish feminist ministers who are peacemakers.

May we be free to say, Basta! Nunca Mas! No More!

Saltines shall represent the elders, the "salty ones," our own owls and crones.

Let them recall those who have endured and those filled with the wisdom of their long years.

Let them nourish our elder wise feminist ministers.

May we age gracefully.

Corn bread gives us the vitality of our sisters and brothers of many races who work to overcome racism and unjust structures.

Let it recall those who have been enslaved because of their skin color.

Let it nourish feminist ministers who struggle for civil rights.

May we be strengthened to work against racism and unjust structures.

Shortbread brings to mind children.

Let it signify little ones, and those especially concerned with them: mothers and expectant mothers, teachers and midwives.

Let it nourish feminist ministers who are role models for the next generations.

May we know their ministry as church.

Bless Breads

Let us now extend our hands, palms parallel in the chi position, and bless this bread of the Discipleship of Equals.

Song: "Take This" by Marsie Silvestro

Take this all of you, eat this all of you,
And remember when you're broken
and life seems to pour out
I am here, I'm with you.

Present the Drinks

Just as no single bread can feed our hunger, so no single drink can quench our thirst. We bless many kinds of drinks as a sign that the discipleship of equals drinks deeply, takes refreshment in variety and is replenished by women, men and children who make up our community.

(A presenter offers each drink, places it on the table and blesses it in her/his own words using the script here as a model. Use as many languages as possible for the blessing and add more wines and juices!)

Grape juice is the fruit of the vine that quenches the thirst of our children,

Let it be for us a drink that keeps us in solidarity with our sisters and brothers who are freeing themselves from dependence on alcohol.

Let it nourish feminist ministers who work to rehabilitate those on drugs and alcohol.

May we free ourselves from our addictions.

Red wine, vin ordinaire, is full bodied, and takes longest to reach maturity.

Let it remind us of people in Bosnia, Tibet and all war torn countries whose blood runs red in the streets.

Let it nourish feminist ministers who work as missionaries.

May we continue to work for liberation.

Sherry is an appetizer. It is taken before a meal to enhance the flavor of the food.

Let it remind us of the need for enjoyment, of the importance of taking time to prepare well for the necessities of life.

Let it nourish feminist ministers to enjoy their work.

May we know enjoyment in our labors.

Champagne is a festive drink.

Let it remind us to take time for celebration.

Let it nourish feminist ministers to celebrate life.

May we always celebrate freedom.

Apple juice reclaims the story of Eve, who reached for knowledge, ate the apple and discovered that it was good!

Let this apple juice nourish feminist ministers to reach for knowledge and remember that they are holy.

May we choose to break myths and discover wisdom.

Milk, with honey added for sweet measure, symbolizes home and mothers who bore us.

Let it represent the promised land flowing with milk and honey.

Let it nourish feminist ministers to journey to the promised land.

May we nourish the next generations.

Water represents all women who live in every part of the world.

Let it remind us of women's power to give life.

Let it nourish feminist ministers to be life-giving.

May we be filled with life.

Bless Drinks

Let us now extend our hands in liberation and bless these drinks of the Discipleship of Equals.

Song: "Take This" by Marsie Silvestro

Take this all of you, drink this all of you...

Share the Meal

Let us bless the food we are about to eat. Please say after me: Bless us, Sophia/ and these your gifts which we are about to eat from your bounty/ Whether we eat or drink/ or whatever else we do/ let us do all for your honor and glory/ Alleluia. Blessed Be. Let It Be So.

Greet with Peace

We have proclaimed our feminist ministry in the discipleship of equals. We now share with one another the peace that comes from this power, the peace that is given for all women, men and children. It is a healing peace, a loving peace, a contagious peace, a power-filled peace and an empowering peace. Let us share this peace of our lives.

Song: "Dancing Sophia's Circle" by Colleen Fulmer from *Dancing Sophia's Circle*, copyright 1994.

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

Cooking with WATER

by Monique Mariko Maier

Those familiar with the office know it is located over a cafeteria adjacent to a hair salon and a dog grooming parlor. (Mary dreams of one day expanding into the cafeteria which we will call "Bread and Water," or, as Diann favors, "W-I-N-E: Women In Need of Everything").

Yet in this tiny office we connect with hungry women all over the world. The faces and lives I met at WATER continue to be a source of power: subversive nuns not at all apologetic for activities in making justice happen; women who not only think theology but do theology; women who are funny, angry and lovely; women who dare to name themselves and their holy.

I have come to the conclusion that the wise woman who coined the term "she who laughs, lasts" must have been a feminist theologian. While butting heads against the often stubborn institution of the androcentric church, laughter is a welcome release at WATER.

I could spend years at WATER enveloped in the care, warmth and strength of Mary, Diann, Mother Scinto and Cindy. But, like the visiting German and Dutch delegation in July, I came to WATER thirsty and left a little more connected and whole with a lot more things to think about. Having met WATER on my path makes it somewhat easier to face the Patriarchs.

Monique Mariko Maier, now in her senior year at Mt. Holyoke College, interned at WATER during the summer.

WATER Gatherings

WATER is sponsoring the first meeting of Feminist Liberation Theologians, to be held on Friday, November 10, 3-5 PM in conjunction with the Women's Ordination Conference, "Discipleship of Equals: Breaking Bread/Doing Justice." Look for signs at the Marriott Crystal City Gateway Hotel for the room number.

WATER will be part of the Women-Church Convergence meeting during the lunch hour at the Women's Ordination Conference, Saturday, November 11, at "Discipleship of Equals: Breaking Bread/Doing Justice." Look for signs at the hotel and bring your box lunch to the Convergence meeting.

WATER will share the Women-Church Convergence display table at both the WOC gathering and at Call to Action, November 3-5, in Chicago at the Hyatt Regency O'Hare. Stop by and see us. Also, check the bulletin board at Call to Action for the time and place of the Convergence's gathering.

May Sarton: Resting in Peace

by Mary E. Hunt

The New York Times obituary of May Sarton in July moved me to tears. Of course she had to die one day, but why yesterday and not tomorrow? She was as old as my mother who languishes with Alzheimer's, and as young as the fresh flowers someone always sent on her birthday, a holiday, or just because.

Hers was a "big" death for me, a preparation for the passing a few weeks later of the only mentor I ever had, and a foreshadowing of my mother's end which cannot come too soon. Of course May Sarton would never know any of that. We were not intimates, but two-time acquaintances. She was a role model in how to age gracefully as a lesbian woman in a culture that prizes young men. She did it for an audience and a living, albeit a little too self-consciously for some tastes, but why not if it becomes you? In her case it did.

Twenty years ago, she answered my naive letter. I had never written to a writer before. I did not know that people wrote to her, and that she answered. But Mrs. Stevens Hears the Mermaid Singing jolted me from theology to literature, from ill-fitting heterosexuality to glove-like lesbianism that we both wore so easily, from worrying about theories to worrying about life.

Then I started reading everything else she wrote, making a study of her life as well as her work. I could see the influence of her parents, her friends, her mentors on her being. I could appreciate *The Poet and the Donkey* and thrill to *The Birth of a Grandfather*. I knew in the end she would not want to be confined to a nursing home; *As We Are Now* made that clear when the protagonist burned the nursing home to the ground.

May Sarton dined with me and a group of seminary students in Berkeley on one of her many Bay Area visits in the 1970's. We were young lesbian feminists determined to live independent lives as women, to make our way as we chose. The women's movement gave us the encouragement we needed even if the churches we trained to serve thwarted us at most turns. In May Sarton we saw someone doing it with style and we wanted to grow up and do the same.

Our mothers got copies of *Journal of a Solitude* as gifts, and we came out to them with a little more confidence because someone their own age was like us. It sounds like grasping at

straws now, but then it was all we had.

May Sarton's literary work will long be evaluated by post-modern deconstructionist critics who will find it wanting. What will endure, I predict, and I suspect she would not like it because she so loved being a poet, is the life, a life so envied and admired by some, so derided by others, a lesbian's life, all of it. She was poetry.

She loved people by the dozens over her 83 years, some men but mostly women, especially a longtime companion, Judy, for whom her passions grew. Tamas and Bramble, her domestic animals featured in *A Walk in the Woods*, and the birds whose feeders the squirrels liked to rob, were all part of her life. Plants and flowers "dreaming deep" gave her color and life right to the end. Even *After the Stroke* and through long years of debilitating illness she still cared for animals—*The Fur Person* who woke her up most nights—and marvelled at the flowers.

May Sarton described food with a glee outdone only by her contemporary, M.F.K. Fischer. A few times I wondered if a little less champagne and a lot fewer lobster rolls wouldn't have prolonged her life, or at least eased some of her symptoms. Silly of me, when in fact the very things I questioned gave her pleasure and reason to get up in the morning. They were more connected with friends and celebration than with a lavish lifestyle. Slowly it dawned on me that four score and some years later, she had her priorities straight and I have more celebrating to do. Elders teach us that, if we will learn.

Such is the kind of insight May Sarton imparts to readers. On the surface she could appear self-indulgent, but I was never surprised to read about her concern for women who are battered by men, her clear stance against war, the excruciating concern she brought to the social problems of the late 20th century. She could never be called a crusader, but she was conscious, attuned and willing to help, liberal to a fault. That she was a lesbian was never front and center, neither was it in the wings.

There is something about this compleat woman that I admire. All right, I'll be honest, that I aspire to be. She lived life on her terms, and made a living showing the rest of us that it is possible. That is what role models do, and young lesbians need them. Good job, May Sarton, and thank you.



Resources

Bellis, Alice Ogden. **HELPMATES, HARLOTS, AND HEROES: WOMEN'S STORIES IN THE HEBREW BIBLE.** Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994 (281 pages, \$19.99).

A primer for students of feminist biblical scholarship of the many women in the Hebrew Bible whose stories remain misunderstood or ignored. Study questions make it a useful text.

Cherry, Kittredge and Zalmon Sherwood, editors. **EQUAL RITES: LESBIAN AND GAY WORSHIP, CEREMONIES, AND CELEBRATIONS.** Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995 (167 pages, \$14.99).

A collection worth consulting when planning such events. Diann Neu, Kit Cherry, Carter Heyward, and Janie Spahr are among contributors.

Cranford, Brian. **THE LAMBDA DIRECTORY OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY: SOURCES OF SPIRITUAL SUPPORT FOR GAY MEN AND LESBIANS.** Dallas, TX: Pyramid Press, 1994, (13237 Mootfort, Suite 810R, 75240) (58 pages, \$12 includes shipping).

A very useful directory, a springboard for connections, publications and networks.

Dyke, Doris Jean. **CRUCIFIED WOMAN.** Toronto: The United Church Publishing House, 1991 (96 pages, \$13.95).

Images of crucified women evoke a range of conflicting and sometimes surprising emotions which reveal a great deal about patriarchal theology. An eye-opening read.

Fisher, Judi and Janet Wood, editors. **A PLACE AT THE TABLE: WOMEN AT THE LAST SUPPER.** Ridgefield, CT: Morehouse Publishing, 1993 (90 pages, \$24.95); original publisher: The Joint Board of Christian Education, Melbourne, Australia.

Important questions about images which exclude women, and how they can be reconfigured to be inclusive. The art work is worth the price of the book since it involves some great alternatives.

Hagen, June Steffensen, editor. **RATTLING THOSE DRY BONES: WOMEN CHANGING THE CHURCH.** San Diego, CA: LuraMedia, Inc. 1994 (22 pages, \$16.95).

Twenty-two women, including Pamela Darling, Madeleine L'Engle, Toinette Eugene, Marie Fortune, Mary Hunt, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, reflect on how they do what they do and not lose heart in churches whose dry bones creak toward the new century.

Lebans, Gertrude, editor. **GATHERED BY THE RIVER: REFLECTIONS AND ESSAYS OF WOMEN DOING MINISTRY.** Toronto: Artemis Enterprises, RR#2, Box 54, Dundas, Ontario L9H 5E2, Canada, 1994 (192 pages, \$16.96).

A good way to hear the stories of Canadian women ministers who struggle with familiar issues in a creative and integral way.

McNeill, John J. **FREEDOM, GLORIOUS FREEDOM: THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY TO THE FULLNESS OF LIFE FOR GAYS, LESBIANS, AND EVERYBODY ELSE.** Boston: Beacon Press, 1994 (256 pages, \$24).

A wise sage, a good brother, a priest forever, John McNeill shows his spiritual colors in this book, and they are a rainbow.

Russell, Letty M. **CHURCH IN THE ROUND: FEMINIST INTERPRETATION OF THE CHURCH.** Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993 (253 pages, \$14.99).

By rounding out leadership, ecclesiology and spirituality, Letty Russell suggests, churches can respond to feminist insights.

Sands, Kathleen M. **ESCAPE FROM PARADISE: EVIL AND TRAGEDY IN FEMINIST THEOLOGY.** Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994 (212 pages, \$13.95).

Difficult subject matter handled with insight, this book invites discussion on the very way we see the world.

Schussler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. **IN MEMORY OF HER: A FEMINIST THEOLOGICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF CHRISTIAN ORIGINS,** Tenth Anniversary Edition. New York: Crossroad, 1994 (357 pages, \$17.95).

A new introduction to a classic book makes it important to have this edition as well as the original.

Shaw, Anna Howard. **ANNA HOWARD SHAW: THE STORY OF A PIONEER.** Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1994 (338 pages, \$12.95).

A wonderful autobiography of the first Methodist clergywoman who was also a medical doctor and close companion of Susan B. Anthony. Inspiration for generations to come.

Schuler, Margaret, editor. **FREEDOM FROM VIOLENCE: WOMEN'S STRATEGIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD.** New York: Women, Ink. UNIFEM, 1992 (354 pages, \$24).

Information we wish did not need to be shared, but must be shared if eradication is to follow.

Sharma, Arvind and Katherine K. Young. **THE ANNUAL REVIEW OF WOMEN IN WORLD RELIGIONS, VOL. 3.** Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993 (192 pages, \$9.95).

This is a useful forum for anthropological and historical research on women from a wide range of traditions. It fills an important niche and promises to promote crucial comparative conversations.

Sherwin, Susan. **NO LONGER PATIENT: FEMINIST ETHICS AND HEALTH CARE.** Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992 (286 pages, \$18.95).

A pioneering work that lays out new frameworks for feminist medical questions. Vital for the health care debate.

Sibley, Lois, editor. **MORE QUESTIONS OF FAITH: CONTEMPORARY THINKERS RESPOND.** Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1994 (115 pages, \$16).

Snippets from very important thinkers like Kwok Pui-lan, Joan Chittister, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, Renita Weems and Rita Nakashima Brock. An odd format but useful in its own way.

Smith, Richard L. **AIDS, GAYS AND THE AMERICAN CATHOLIC CHURCH.** Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1994 (168 pages, \$14.95).

A gay male perspective on the difficult divide between the hierarchical church and people with AIDS. May the twain meet.

Tamez, Elsa. **THE AMNESTY OF GRACE: JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH FROM A LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE.** Translated by Sharon H. Ringe. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993 (208 pages, \$14.95).

A creative treatment of a troublesome doctrine which will help to reconfigure its content for the next century.



News and Notes

Mary E. Hunt joined other religious leaders at the **International Lesbian Gay Association's 17th Annual World Conference in Rio de Janeiro** in June. This was the first time religion had been explored in depth both as a resource as well as a hinderance to full citizenship for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people. The plenary session was packed with participants eager for this kind of theological technical assistance.

Mary also met with women from the **Sophia and Agar Projects**, feminist and womanist theologians, respectively. **NETMAL** women from San Paulo were in town as Brazilian women prepared for participation in the Beijing meeting.

WATER's e-mail list has topped 130 members on five continents. People read it, we're told, and use it for asking/answering questions. Once in a while we have technical glitches, like the message that repeated itself seemingly endless times (actually 19) and bugged everyone, but that is part of the learning curve.



MS. magazine included WATER in a list of church-change organizations so our phones and computers are humming.

WATER Baby **Cecilia Anne**, who arrived October 9 at 3 a.m. (naturally) is exercising her rights to undivided attention from delighted parents Cindy Lapp and Eric Stoltzfus. Cindy plans to ease back to her post at WATER as her

new responsibilities permit; the rest of us eagerly await our turn to rock and croon.

Coralie Ling, an Australian feminist minister, pastor of the Fitzroy Uniting Church, and D.Min. student at San Francisco Theological Seminary, returned for her second visiting scholar stint. She made considerable progress on her important doctoral dissertation, a study of Australian women's liturgies. Watch for it.

We support **Mary's Pence**, a Catholic women's organization that collects and distributes money for the self-empowerment of women. It is a wonderful way to redirect giving so that women can decide and benefit from it. October 15, the feast of St. Teresa of Avila, is the day designated for this collection, but feel free to donate anytime. Contact Mary's Pence at 9730 South Western Ave., Room 717, Evergreen Park, IL 60642, (708) 499-3771, and put your funds to use for women for a big change.



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