



# water wheel

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

## Editorial

U.S. presidential election years are always momentous, but this one promises to be especially so. Rarely in recent memory have the primaries held so much attention, garnered so much media, generated so much discussion. Democracy is supposed to be like that. But the early heat and light are more from vicious rhetoric and punitive policy proposals than from the wholesome exchange of constructive ideas. Progressive religious people expect more because justice demands it.

Money talks. Negative ads work. Name recognition is the way to win. Half-truths are cheaper than truth itself. Innuendo and dirty tricks are part of the process. It sounds more like a tawdry B-movie than the prelude to a national election. But that is the sad reality today.

Imagine if every progressive religious group put voter registration on its agenda, sponsored discussions on the issues (in a non-partisan way, of course), and drove people to the polls. Many who live outside the U.S. still marvel at our antiquated system of voting on a regular work day. Why not declare a national holiday, or, for heaven's sake, a national emergency? Maybe then participation rates would rise and those who feel the pinch most would have time and wherewithal to exercise their suffrage.

Non-profits like WATER cannot engage in lobbying, and far be it from us to comment on a particular candidate. But we can and do urge all of our U.S. colleagues to get involved in electoral politics as the best insurance against a disaster in November. The ramifications around the world are daunting. As they say in Chicago, vote early and often. Perhaps we need a bumper sticker: "Feminists vote religiously."



## Beauty and the Body

by Mary E. Hunt

One of the earliest feminist publications was the compilation of mimeographed pieces by the Boston Women's Health Collective that later became *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1971). The title carried two explicit meanings--that women's bodies belong to women, and that we are our bodies--and one implicit one, that our bodies are good. A quarter of a century, several editions and various translations later, a central concern for most women is still focused on the bodies we love to hate. Because so much of the input we get about our bodies comes from religion, and because feminists have been so helpful in countering the negative, I offer this reflection as a challenge.

Women's bodies are a patriarchal no-win zone. No one has a clue what the mythical Adam might have looked like, but who can not conjure a clear and enticing picture of Eve? She is her body in the most negative, objectified way possible. In its early days, the U.S. women's movement drew critical attention to the billboards and magazine ads for tobacco and alcohol that used pictures of nude or semi-nude women to sell products. Religious feminists joined the fray and pushed the proverbial envelope to add images of the divine and ethical teachings that demeaned

while, the numbers, while still astonishing, have dropped from 7.2 % to 5.1% among college age women and from 1.1% to 0.4% for college age men. But the distressing news is that what used to be a white, upper middle class, high achievers' syndrome is now a growing problem among women of color as well. For women athletes, especially track and field competitors, it is so serious that most major universities now sponsor educational programs to head off the problem before it begins.

Literature on eating disorders reveals a range of reasons for the problems. Definitive answers remain elusive, but there is agreement that depression is a contributing factor if not the underlying cause. One reason for the large numbers is the media-driven model of what successful, popular women look like, an image that few growing girls can match. The dissonance is depressing since we only get one body. These same media images sell tobacco to young women who are taking up smoking in record numbers despite the plethora of health warnings. Such is one form of gender-driven damage for which no amount of female god/ess imagery or inclusive pronouns is sufficient to overcome. Still, with feminist theologian Carol

### *Women's bodies are a patriarchal no-win zone.*

women to those we wanted outlawed. Changes have occurred, but the issues now are simply more and more subtle. What I used to think of as gender-based oppression now is gender-driven bodily and psychological damage.

Twiggy, the skinny model, and Barbie, the doll which gives so many girls their notions of what a grown up woman's body looks like, are cultural icons. One could argue that they are innocent enough, but eating disorders that plague so many young women prove that icons have staying power.

I was surprised recently when teaching an undergraduate Introduction to Women's Studies class at just how widespread this problem is among college students. Stories of roommates bingeing and purging gave way to statistics. Happily, this year, for the first time in a long

P. Christ, I think that having female images for the divine can only help.

A second, somewhat less pronounced but far more widespread problem is what I think of as body hatred. It is hard to find a woman who loves her body, much less loves herself, fiercely or otherwise, Ntosake Shange. Years ago, in a moment of singular stupidity, I made a negative remark about a woman's body. A friend corrected me immediately, saying, "All women are beautiful." I knew instantly that she was right, I was wrong, and I have never said such a thing since. But then I did not realize what a hard time most women have internalizing that statement, especially when they are invited to draw out its logical consequences: I am a woman. I am beautiful.

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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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## Beauty...(continued from page 1)

Beauty standards differ across the world. Some cultures view small women as ugly, large women as beautiful. Other cultures see smaller as better, big as bad. Still others value certain kinds of hair, certain shapes of eyes, certain ratios of waist to hips, certain size of breasts.

There is good feminist analysis to understand where such standards come from and why they endure. Naomi Wolf's **The Beauty Myth** is a journalistic treatment of the problem; Kathy Davis explores the dilemma of cosmetic surgery in **Reshaping the Female Body**; bell hooks deals with the question of "black beauty" in **Sisters of the Yam**: "Black women's body esteem is strengthened by good nutrition, exercise, and positive thoughts affirming that we deserve to be well—that our bodies are precious" (p. 97). Two things are clear: first, women rarely have a hand in shaping the norms; and second, beauty, not health, rules.

Religions which teach that people are made in the image of the divine seem no more equipped to build women's sense of themselves as beautiful than any other segment of the culture. Perniciously, the same religious-right that claims "family values" for itself is hand in glove with the beauty-makers who consign older women, those who leave aside makeup, hair dyes and wonder-bras, not to mention athletic women whose bodies ripple with health, to the dustbin of "undesirable." Such women are branded unfeminine, butch or worse. Most young women understandably steer clear of the sensible shoes, the comfortable clothing and the natural look that their feminist foremothers

emies, married to the same man for more than forty years, said that this experience was the first time anyone had ever told her she was beautiful. She liked it and even believed it, but it was new for her. What an indictment of her marriage, her society and her church, though I hardly think she is alone in the experience.

A third dimension of this problem, this one positive, is how women with disabilities are reshaping the discourse. In her pioneering work, **The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability**, Nancy L. Eiesland focuses well beyond the questions of beauty to the very foundational notion of what constitutes embodiment. Drawing on the work of Nancy Mairs and Diane DeVries, she shows just how women with disabilities are "symbolically and corporeally constructing wholeness and ordinary physicality" (p. 48). Such theoretical heavy lifting shows just how able these women are to provide all of us with the means necessary to rethink our bodies.

This is not romantic work, but tough, clear analysis of "physical contingency" and "socially constructed barriers." That is, after all, the dynamic we all face, albeit to different degrees, of bodies and genetic histories we were born with and a society we can shape. Nancy Eiesland stresses just how central the body is for political struggles. She stresses that people with disabilities have launched a movement based on "positive self-image and self-help," a winning combination for all of us.

I suggest that it is to women with disabilities to whom those of us temporarily able-bodied can look for some helpful insights and strategies on the body question. With regard to the

## Why is it that beauty and not health standards hold sway?

fought for. They simply perceive them as "too expensive," the price being their futures.

Why is it that beauty and not health standards hold sway? Why do we teach weight control for fashion's sake rather than for longevity and well-being? Why do we discourage women from weight training that will help avoid osteoporosis? Why do we still insist on high heels for dress-up despite persistent back problems?

The same undergraduates who showed such interest in eating disorders were visibly uncomfortable with the notion that they were beautiful. It was as if no one had ever said it to them before. I invited them, as I have invited several groups of women, to intone "All women are beautiful," a kind of mantra, looking around at one another as they chant. It is a powerful experience if only for the discomfort so many feel at what, on the face of it, should be so natural.

In another setting, a woman well into her sev-

need for change, Eiesland puts it succinctly: "A new sociological paradigm began to emerge that shifted focus from problem individuals to the social problem of the exclusion of people with disabilities as a group" (pp. 49-50). This resulted in the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), which continues to reshape the landscape, this time, hopefully, for full inclusion.

One thing we all learn, in addition to the need to change our physical surroundings, is to push the conceptual horizons so that we shape what is beautiful, we name what is natural. This is a task for feminists in religion since we are responsible for molding foundational concepts and inviting belief. What better place to name the presence of the divine and to begin the work of justice than in our bodies, our beautiful bodies.

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

# Global Network of Feminist Theologians and Ministers

Announcement from Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Mary E. Hunt

A global network of women who publicly and with enthusiasm embrace their work as feminist liberation theologians is now under development. We invite your input as this effort unfolds.

The first meeting was held in conjunction with the Women's Ordination Conference Gathering '95 in the Washington, DC area in November. More than 100 people attended. It was a lively time with plenty of small group discussion and a consensus that we need to move forward. Another 40 or so people from around the world responded by mail (e-mail and otherwise), most of them from the United States, but also women from India, New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines, Costa Rica, Japan, England, Sweden and South Africa, among other countries.

From all of this input, we see that we need an **efficient, economical and effective way to link up feminist theologians and ministers in order that all are made aware of the work we do, the backlash we face, and the common ground and actions we can chart in the attempt to strengthen our movement.**

To that end, we need to network on four distinct levels:

- By creating a U.S. and Canadian feminist theological network as a space for feminist theologians to meet, since feminist scholars here connect only within the context of the mainstream academy and/or churches. Ideally, we would do so across religious and ethnic/racial boundary lines.

- By linking already existing networks in the U.S. and Canada across religious and ethnic/racial lines.

- By gathering and sharing information about existing networks around the world and finding ways to encourage further networking on national and continental levels.

- By connecting with feminist "theological" networks and groups from religious traditions other than Christian, since the primary location of this group and of feminist theology in general is Christian.

One of the primary goals would be information sharing: for example, notice of where and when conferences will be held, calls for papers, needs for solidarity and reaction to unjust situations.

Another important goal is support for one another in this work, especially as we seek to frame the issues on our own terms, not respond to how they are framed for us.

We envision periodic gatherings, from conferences to cyberchats, from sessions at professional meetings to small colloquia at which we will deepen our issues without fear of reprisal or the need to defend feminist presuppositions.

We see ourselves as creating a U.S. network which will simultaneously link with other existing networks. By so doing we also hope to encourage other colleagues around the world to set up their own national or continental networks. For example, one colleague from India wrote that she had sent our letter to 20 other people; clearly **there** is a network waiting to be recognized.

Several issues arose at the November meeting for which we ask your input:

- In the U.S. context, the word "feminist" is greatly controverted and often rejected in favor of self-designations such as "womanist," "mujerista," etc. as terms describing the particularity of the work being done by women from the respective racial/ethnic groups. "Feminist" in this construction is seen as Euro-American rather than as an umbrella term. In most other countries this seems not to be the case as **feminist** is used as a political term to characterize women's liberation movements. In this sense, feminist theology has become recognized internationally as a different way of doing theology. A whole body of theory is connected with the term "feminist." However, we are aware of the problems this debate creates and

in no way wish to use "feminist" in an exclusivist way.

In our November discussion we did not come up with a better term. Nor did we resolve the problem of self-designation that would consist of a very long string of names listing differences. Hence, we turn to you for further reflection on the question of "what's in a name" and how we should name the U.S. network.

- This project will be housed at WATER, but since it is new and WATER is small we do need to get serious about funding before we promise more than we can deliver. Your suggestions on funding sources are needed now. Also, if we move to a membership fee for this specific project, what would you see as a reasonable fee for individuals/ for groups/ for existing networks?

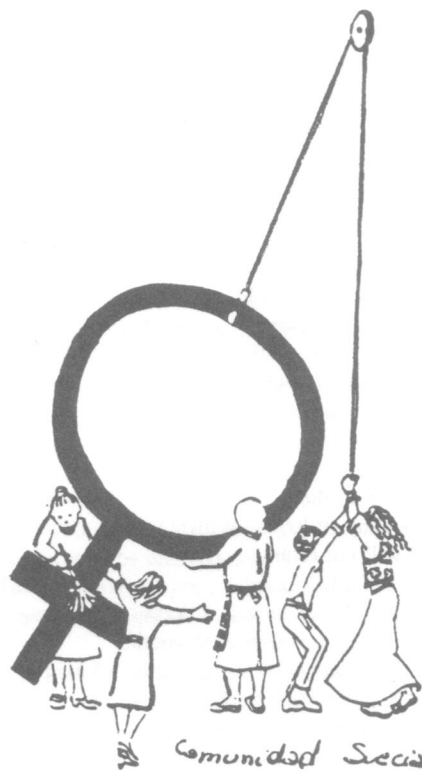
- E-mail turns out to be a wonderful way to communicate for those with the technology. Please indicate if you are on-line or plan to be soon. It eliminates paper, postage and copying; it is fast and can be used to spread the word easily.

- Let us know about your networks with which we should be in touch. Please send us names of contact people and their addresses so we can begin to string together an international list. Also, we welcome your suggestions of publications in which we might put information about such a growing "network of networks." These publications might be of interest to our members as well.

Let this notice also serve as a call for connecting us to additional interested colleagues. Pass the word. The Vatican's allegedly infallible statement against the ordination of Catholic women is a good example of the kind of upping the ante that we predict is ahead of us. We need connection more than ever. Let us know your ideas, and be assured that we appreciate your participation.

## Downfall

When volunteer Jean Bollinger reorganized the WATER Resource Center this winter, she moved more than just books. As she climbed to the top of the step stool to shelve volumes on patriarchal theology, a low rumble emanated from on high. Then Patriarchy came tumbling down! Jean jumped out of the way; WATER baby Cecilia Anne remained safely ensconced under Feminist Theory that day. There are no injuries to report. Books on feminist, womanist and liberation theologies, liturgy, psychology, spirituality, lesbian and gay studies remained securely in place. Patriarchy has now been appropriately circumscribed.



*Women's bodies belong to women. This is a fundamental of feminism. We are our bodies and we only get one for a lifetime. We are learning to accept our embodied selves the way we are, not the way beauty ads and a patriarchal culture want us to be. This is not easy work. It calls us to overcome many myths about womanhood.*

*This liturgy praises our bodies and recognizes that all women's bodies are beautiful. Use it, or parts of it, for personal reflection. Adapt it for a group ritual.*

## Preparation

Ask women to read the texts. Place mirrors on a table in the center of a circle. Provide a loaf of bread and cups of wine and juice.

## Introductions

Welcome to this liturgy, "Praise Our Bodies." We celebrate our bodies. What do you think and feel when you hear the word "body"? (Pause) Let's introduce ourselves by speaking our names and sharing a thought or feeling about our bodies. (Sharing)

## Call to Gather

Our bodies are ourselves. They reveal, literally and truthfully, the stories of our lives. We present ourselves to the world through our bodies or not at all. We experience the presence of God in our bodies or not at all. For we are simply no-bodies without our bodies. Our bodies are sacred, beautiful and wise.

Let us give thanks for our bodies, ourselves, by singing. Let us walk in a circle as we sing, then stand still for the last line of the chant.

**Chant:** "We Bring Who We Are" by Colleen Fulmer, from *Dancing Sophia's Circle*, c. 1994.

I am who I bring from yesterday.  
I am who I am today.  
I am who I am for all the days to come.  
I am a Woman, a glorious creation of praise.

We are who we bring from yesterday.  
We are who we bring today.



We are who we are for all the days to come.  
We are Women--glorious creations of praise.

## Readings

Listen to what women say about our bodies. Let us respond to each reflection by saying, "All women's bodies are beautiful."

**One:** The body is a sacred garment.  
-- Martha Graham, from *Blood Memory*, c. 1991

**Many:** All women's bodies are beautiful.

**Two:** The body has its own way of knowing, a knowing that has little to do with logic, and much to do with truth, little to do with control, and much to do with acceptance, little to do with division and analysis, and much to do with union.

-- Marilyn Sewell, from *Cries of the Spirit*, c. 1991

**Many:** All women's bodies are beautiful.

**Three:** Over the years our bodies become walking autobiographies, telling friends and strangers alike of the minor and major stresses of our lives.

-- Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, c. 1980

**Many:** All women's bodies are beautiful.

**Four:** The rain beats on me, but the rain cannot wash off the beauty of my body.  
-- Yoruba Proverb

**Many:** All women's bodies are beautiful.

**Five:** The bodies of grownups come with stretchmarks and scars, faces that have been lived in, relaxed breasts and bellies, backs that give trouble, and well-worn feet: flesh that is particular, and obviously mortal. They also come with bruises on their heart, wounds they can't forget, and each of them a company of lovers in their soul who will not return and cannot be erased. And yet I think there is a flood of beauty beyond the smoothness of youth; and my heart aches for that grace of longing that flows through bodies no longer straining to be innocent, but yearning for redemption.  
-- Janet Morley, from *Celebrating Women*, c. 1995

# Praise Our

by Diann L. Neu

**Many:** All women's bodies are beautiful.

**Six:** Thru animate eyes  
I divide the seasons  
of time.  
I am aware of what they are.  
I am aware of their potential.  
With my mouth  
I kiss my own chosen creation  
I uniquely,  
lovingly,  
embrace every image  
I have made  
out of the earth's clay.  
With a fiery spirit  
I transform it  
into a body  
to serve  
all the world.

-- Hildegard of Bingen, from *Meditations with Hildegard* translated by Gabriele Uhlein, c. 1983

**Many:** All women's bodies are beautiful.

## Reflection

Take a mirror. (Pause) Look at your self.  
(Pause) Look at your body. (Pause)

**Reading:** from the *Song of Songs 4:1-5*, translated by Marcia Falk, c. 1990

How fine you are, my love, your eyes like doves' behind your veil  
Your hair--as black as goats winding down the slopes  
Your teeth--a flock of sheep rising from the stream  
in twos, each with its twin  
Your lips--like woven threads of crimson silk  
A gleam of pomegranate--  
your forehead through your veil  
Your neck--a tower adorned with shields  
Your breasts--twin fawns in fields of flowers

## Litany of Thanks for Our Bodies

Let us give thanks for our bodies. For this antiphonal blessing, stand and repeat the last line of each verse in the first person.

**One:** Praise to you, Sophia-Spirit, for creating us in your image.

**Many:** Praise to you, Sophia-Spirit, for creating me in your image.

**One:** Praise the Heart. Feel your pulse. Place your hand on your heart. Pay attention to your heart beat. (Pause)

# Bodies



**Reflection:** The heart weighs only half a pound. Its rhythmic contraction pumps the circulation of blood. Its millions of cells work together to beat each second for about four billion heartbeats in a lifetime.

**One:** Praise to you, Sophia-Spirit, for our hearts.

**Many:** Praise to you, Sophia-Spirit, for my heart.

**One:** Praise blood. Stretch and move, bend forward and backward. Pay attention to the circulation of blood throughout your body. (Pause)

**Reflection:** Blood is the fluid that circulates in the heart, arteries, capillaries and veins. It carries nourishment and oxygen to all parts of the body and takes away waste products from all parts of the body.

**One:** Praise to you, Sophia-Spirit, for our blood.

**Many:** Praise to you, Sophia-Spirit, for my blood.

**One:** Praise lungs. Place your hands on your rib cage, take a deep breath, inhale and exhale, expand and contact your lungs. (Pause)

**Reflection:** The lungs, our basic respiratory organ, draw in oxygen and blow out carbon dioxide.

**One:** Praise to you, Sophia-Spirit, for our lungs.

**Many:** Praise to you, Sophia-Spirit, for my lungs.

**One:** Praise the brain. Place one hand on the top of your skull and the other over the back of your skull. Gently massage your head. (Pause)

**Reflection:** The brain constitutes the organ of thought and neural coordination; the center of intelligence, memory and control of muscular movements.

**One:** Praise to you, Sophia-Spirit, for our brains.

**Many:** Praise to you, Sophia-Spirit, for my brain.

**One:** Praise eyes. Open and close your eyes. Look around the room. Look into the eyes of those here. (Pause)

**Reflection:** The eyes are the organs of sight. They mirror our interior wisdom.

**One:** Praise to you, Sophia-Spirit, for our eyes.

**Many:** Praise to you, Sophia-Spirit, for my eyes.

**One:** Praise ears. Place a hand over each ear. Remove them. Listen to the sounds around you. (Pause)

**Reflection:** The ears, organs of hearing and equilibrium, consist of a sound-collecting outer ear separated by a membranous drum from a sound-transmitting middle ear that in turn is separated from a sensory inner ear.

**One:** Praise to you, Sophia-Spirit, for our ears.

**Many:** Praise to you, Sophia-Spirit, for my ears.

**One:** Praise vocal chords. In a whisper, all at the same time, say your name. (Pause) Say it louder. (Pause) And louder. (Pause)

**Reflection:** Vocal chords are either of two pairs of folds of mucous membranes that project into the cavity of the larynx. They give voice to our uniqueness.

**One:** Praise to you, Sophia-Spirit, for our vocal chords.

**Many:** Praise to you, Sophia-Spirit, for my vocal chords.

**One:** Praise bones and muscles. Touch some of your bones and muscles. (Pause)

**Reflection:** Over 200 bones covered with muscle give framework to our bodies.

**One:** Praise to you, Sophia-Spirit, for our bones and muscles.

**Many:** Praise to you, Sophia-Spirit, for my bones and muscles.

**One:** Praise breasts, wombs and ovaries. Touch your breasts and womb, or where they used to be. (Pause)

**Reflection:** Breasts are the tear-shaped external symbol of our womanhood associated with nurturance. The uterus is the center of reproduction. The ovaries release an egg each month and produce female sex hormones.

**One:** Praise to you, Sophia-Spirit, for our breasts, wombs and ovaries.

**Many:** Praise to you, Sophia-Spirit, for my breasts, womb and ovaries.

**One:** Praise female bodies. Recognize the design of your body. (Pause)

**Reflection:** Our bodies are ourselves.

**One:** Praise to you, Sophia-Spirit, for our beautiful bodies.

**Many:** Praise to you, Sophia-Spirit, for my beautiful body.

**Song:** "I Am Enough" by Colleen Fulmer, from *Dancing Sophia's Circle*, c 1994

I am enough, I am enough  
Just as I am, I am enough.  
Just as I am, just as I am,  
I am enough, just as I am.

I am a woman, I am a woman,  
My body's sacred. I am a woman,  
My body's sacred, my body's sacred,  
I am a woman, my body's sacred.

## Reflection

Our bodies are ourselves. They image God, Sophia-Spirit. They are sacred, beautiful and wise. What have you noticed about your body? (Pause) Let us share our feelings and thoughts with one another. (Sharing)

**Chant:** "i found god in myself" by Ntosake Shange, from *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf*

i found god in myself,  
and i found god in myself  
and i loved her fiercely, i loved her fiercely  
i found god in myself

## Blessing of Bread

(One woman takes the bread, saying:)

As it was and is in the beginning,  
at a woman's breast,  
real milk, nourishing food,  
I say, this is your sacrament:

Take. Eat. This is my body  
Which I give for the life of the world.

Let us eat, remembering the bread of life.  
(She breaks the bread and passes it)

## Blessing of Wine and Juice

(One woman takes the fruit of the vine, saying:)

As it was and is every month in a woman's body,  
real flow of blood, life force shed for many,  
I say, this is your sacrament:

Take. Drink. This is my blood  
Which I give for the life of the world.

Let us drink, remembering the blood of life.  
(She pours the drink and passes the cups)

## Greeting

Let us close by acknowledging that we are beautiful. Look around this circle. Notice the women here. Women are beautiful. All shapes, colors and sizes. Let us hug one another saying "You are beautiful."

**Chant:** "We Bring Who We Are" by Colleen Fulmer, from *Dancing Sophia's Circle*, c. 1994

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

## Who's Who at WATER

New faces abound this spring. **Mariana Rivas** from Montevideo, Uruguay is on hand as an energetic intern perfecting her English and learning about the U.S. Her mother, Cristina Grela, coordinator of Catolicas por el Derecho a Decidir in Uruguay, is a longtime collaborator with WATER.

**Audur Eir Vilhjalmsdottir**, the first woman ordained a priest in Iceland, joins countrywoman **Solveig Boasdottir** for a Visiting Scholar stint at WATER. It was obviously predestined that WATER and Iceland would meet...

**Eri Delorier** is a Georgetown University senior majoring in Theology and English who is doing an internship at WATER.

**Deborah Savard** comes from the Life Experiences Activities Program to contribute her skills.

Progress report: **Cecelia Anne Lapp Stoltzfus** graces the office two days a week with her mother, **Cindy Lapp**. She is a healthy, happy baby surrounded by aunts galore. To see her at the computer at four months or to watch her sleep amid the phone calls is to realize that children humanize a work place and some work places can accommodate children, at least until they start unshelving the book cases.

**Margaret Sequeira**, Wesley Seminary student and longtime WATER friend, joined the staff. She keeps the mailing list up to date and ably handles other computer-related needs.

## E-mail Changes

Watch for word on our forthcoming World Wide Web page. It is amazing how quickly these seemingly exotic modes of communication become like dialing the phone.

Meanwhile, our e-mail access is changing:

1. We are now [water@hers.com](mailto:water@hers.com) if you want to post to the whole list.
2. We are now [mary.hunt@hers.com](mailto:mary.hunt@hers.com) if you want to post to us at the office. PLEASE SELECT CAREFULLY since a message to *water* will go to four continents while a message to *mary.hunt* will go to one machine.
3. To subscribe or unsubscribe to the water list: send your message to [majordomo@hers.com](mailto:majordomo@hers.com) with the words "subscribe water" or "unsubscribe water" in the message body. That's it. The machine will do the rest.

Good luck and happy surfing.

## Ivone Gebara Update

The situation of Sr. Ivone Gebara remains precarious. To this remarkable woman, in effect silenced by the Vatican and sent to Belgium to study theology away from her important work in Brazil, WATER sends our support; to those who have insisted on this situation, we send our protest. Her work on eco-feminist theology is a crucial part of the global conversation. Her position on reproductive choice, namely that abortion should be decriminalized in her country, is odious to the Vatican but reasonable to those who understand the suffering of women.

A helpful response from feminist colleagues would be to engage the leadership of her community in some constructive dialogue about the case. Rather than taking a petition approach, we believe short, respectful letters are best in that they would show the leadership the range of people who support her.

One such letter reads: "I write with deep concern over the situation of Sr. Ivone Gebara, a friend and colleague in feminist theology. I am deeply troubled by the Vatican's interference into her life and work, as well as the community's compliance with the Vatican's wishes that resulted in her being forced to leave Brazil for studies in Belgium.

"I take this to be a very serious breach of the commitment to subsidiarity affirmed by the Second Vatican Council, and an egregious violation of a theologian's right to express her views even if they differ from those of the magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church. I urge you to reconsider the order to Ivone to leave Brazil. I respectfully suggest that you wish her well on her return to Brazil, and give thanks for this fine woman and her work among you.

"Her writing is cited widely in many languages, as she is one of a few women who have managed, against great odds, to communicate the faith experiences of Latin American women.

"Her writings in feminist theology, especially her efforts to articulate an eco-feminist position in Latin America, are widely respected. When this kind of work is blocked, the entire community is deprived of insights and analyses that will take us into the next century with creativity and courage."

Letters should be addressed to **Sister Stephane-Marie Boullanger and General Council**, 8, Avenue Daniel Lesueur, 75007 Paris, FRANCE.



Copies should go to:

**Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith**, Cardinal Prefect, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Piazza dell S. Uffizio 11, 00193 Rome, ITALY, fax 69-88-3409

**Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life**, Cardinal Prefect, Eduardo Cardinal Martinez Somalo, Piazza Pio XII 3, 00193 Rome, ITALY fax 69-88-4526

**National Conference of Brazilian Bishops**, Se-Sul Quadra 801 Conjunto, Caixa Postal 13-2067, 70259 Brasilia, DF, BRAZIL fax 55-61-225-4361

**Ivone Gebara**, 133, Winston Churchill Ave. 1180 Brussels, BELGIUM

## Saving Ways

Making the most of our resources is an art form (not to say religion) at WATER. We recycle everything within our purview, from paper scraps and plastic yogurt cups to time, space, money and woman-power.

**WATERwheel** takes shape on the backs of old letters. Phone messages get inscribed on neatly salvaged snips of reprocessed mail. A recent heaven-sent donation of used office equipment meant we could recycle our outgoing chairs to a women's center that welcomed them for its expanding quarters. Volunteers, wonderfully willing and adept, carpenter and paint old boards into new shelves for our burgeoning library of books sent hot off the presses by publishing houses that value our critical assessments.

Given the option, we choose women-owned and operated businesses to serve our program needs—meeting places, retreat centers, sound systems, purveyors of performance art, supplies, materials—thus recycling our resources back again to women, knowing as we do what limited access most have to deep pockets.

Like our grandmothers taught us, we make each penny do the work of three—buying only what is necessary, passing along to other worthy causes, returning to women. We invite you to add your saving ways to ours. Recycle your money to women's organizations that make a difference. And be assured that every cent you give to WATER has only begun its mission of making big transformations out of small change.



## Resources

Agosin, Marjorie. *A CROSS AND A STAR*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1995 (179 pages, \$19.95).

Memories of a Jewish girl in Chile where Nazis settled startle and disconcert. A novel that follows the river of reality; a powerful read.

Cantor, Aviva. *JEWISH WOMEN/JEWISH MEN: THE LEGACY OF PATRIARCHY IN JEWISH LIFE*. San Francisco: Harper-San Francisco, 1995 (548 pages, \$32.50).

A social analysis that concludes that the future for Jews must be a feminist future. A "big" book in every positive way.

Chase, Carole F. *MADELEINE L'ENGLE, SUNCATCHER: SPIRITUAL VISION OF A STORYTELLER*. San Diego: LuraMedia, 1995 (176 pages, \$15.95).

Fans of Madeleine L'Engle will want this critical biography. Reading it made this reviewer want to read L'Engle, finally.

Chesler, Phyllis. *PATRIARCHY: NOTES OF AN EXPERT WITNESS*. Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1994 (180 pages, \$11.95).

A very provocative read about some tough issues in feminist practice by a veteran activist.

Clark, Betsy. *PRAYERS FOR A NEW WORLD ORDER*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1994 (49 pages, \$4.95).

Diplomacy and socio-economic change can use prayer to bring about a new world order. Betsy Clark's are a good start.

Fortune, Marie. *LOVE DOES NO HARM: SEXUAL ETHICS FOR THE REST OF US*. New York: Continuum, 1995 (144 pages, \$16.95).

Finally, a sensible, well thought out, gracefully drawn road map through some of the dicier relational wickets. Essential ethical reflection.

Frye, Marilyn. *WILLFUL VIRGIN: ESSAYS IN FEMINISM*. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1992 (169 pages, \$12.95).

A very good choice for basic feminist theoretical concerns.

Guider, Margaret Eletta. *DAUGHTERS OF RAHAB: PROSTITUTION AND THE CHURCH OF LIBERATION IN BRAZIL*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995 (235 pages, \$16).

A good look at an oft overlooked problem. The conclusion, that class issues will be resolved by Christian churches long before issues of gender, is distressing but persuasive.

Harris, Maria. *JUBILEE TIME: CELEBRATING WOMEN, SPIRIT, AND THE ADVENT OF AGE*. New York: Bantam Books, 1995 (224 pages, \$22.95).

Buy it, give it, treasure it. This is one of those rare books that will appeal to a wide audience, help women deal creatively with aging and set a new standard for self/other-help books.

Heyward, Carter. *STAYING POWER: REFLECTIONS ON GENDER, JUSTICE, AND COMPASSION*. Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1995 (175 pages, \$12.95).

Justice-seekers must be tenacious in the face of injustice. Hard questions are key when answers are at once so obvious and so obscure. This is Carter Heyward's message in a series of essays, sermons and speeches.

Muten, Burleigh, editor. *RETURN OF THE GREAT GODDESS*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1994 (180 pages, \$20).

A lovely book of quotes and images to spark the imagination and warm the soul.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford and Rosemary Skinner Keller. *IN OUR OWN VOICE: FOUR CENTURIES OF AMERICAN WOMEN'S RELIGIOUS WRITING*. San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1995 (542 pages, \$28).

A treasure trove of sources which no feminist library can afford to be without. For reference and reflection, inspiration and information, this is a volume to buy and use.

Schussler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. *BREAD NOT STONE: THE CHALLENGE OF FEMINIST BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION*, 10th anniversary edition. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984, 1995 (223 pages, \$14).

This classic is now available with a new afterword in which Dr. Schussler Fiorenza all too modestly outlines the book's "theoretical accomplishments."

Townes, Emilie M. *IN A BLAZE OF GLORY: WOMANIST SPIRITUALITY AS SOCIAL WITNESS*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995 (160 pages, \$14.95).

Like a good movie, don't miss it. A strong, clear voice for justice rooted in the African American community and connected to the world at large.

Weber, Hans-Ruedi. *THE COURAGE TO LIVE: A BIOGRAPHY OF SUZANNE DE DIETRICH*. Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 1995 (178 pages, \$15.90).

The life of an ecumenical pioneer adds flesh and blood to the growing legacy of women in the field.

Wetherilt, Ann Kirkus. *THAT THEY MAY BE MANY: VOICES OF WOMEN, ECHOES OF GOD*. New York: Continuum, 1994 (180 pages, \$19.95).

An original idea given clear and helpful expression: that "Word" limits, while voices expand.

Winter, Miriam Therese. *THE CHRONICLES OF NOAH AND HER SISTERS: GENESIS AND EXODUS ACCORDING TO WOMEN*. New York: Crossroad, 1995 (151 pages, \$12.95).

Images help to stretch the imagination. This book does that.

*FEMINIST THEOLOGY IN A EUROPEAN CONTEXT*. Annette Esser and Luise Schottroff, editors (Vol. 1/93). Elizabeth Green and Mary Grey, editors (Vol. 2/94). Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House; Mainz: Matthias-Gruenewald-Verlag. Available in the U.S. through Wm.B.Erdmans (800 253-7521) (Vol. 1, 255 pages \$26.50; Vol. 2, 145 pages, \$22.75).

These annuals provide a rich and varied tapestry of European feminist theology, accessible in German, French and English. Theological libraries need these books.

*WOMEN AND THERAPY: A FEMINIST QUARTERLY*. Vol 16, Numbers 2/3 1995. Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Press (227 pages, \$14.95).

This special issue on *WOMEN'S SPIRITUALITY, WOMEN'S LIVES* includes an introduction by Judith Ochshorn and Ellen Cole, as well as essays by Rosemary Radford Ruether, Diann Neu, Toinette Eugene, Barbara Breitman, Mary Hunt, among others. A good textbook for those who want to take women's spirituality seriously.

### For Our Children

Meehan, Bridget Mary and Regina Madonna Oliver. *HEART TALKS WITH MOTHER GOD*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995 (48 pages, \$14.95).

A pioneering effort to make children's faith inclusive from the beginning. Well chosen illustrations and nice stories make it a good start.

# 1996 Spring Programs at WATER

FYI: Here's what's happening at the office.

## Wednesdays at WATER

Many people have asked for a regular evening time at WATER, time for programs, feminist theological discussions, feminist liturgies; time to browse in the Resource Center; time... So we begin Wednesdays at WATER. The office will be open until 9 p.m. each of the following Wednesdays. Programs begin at 7 p.m. \$10 +/-

- Feb. 2 Liturgy: Ash Wednesday
- Feb. 28 Program: Seder Meal Training
- Mar. 13 Liturgy: Celtic Spirituality
- April 10 Open for browsing, volunteer work
- April 17 Liturgy: Women Mystics
- May 1 Discussion: May Sarton's Impact on Religion
- May 8 New Group: Feminist Mothers, Feminist Children (Call re: child care)
- May 15 Liturgy: Daughters and Mothers
- May 22 Discussion: Religion and Violence
- May 29 Open for browsing, volunteer work

- June 5 Discussion: Where, How, Why: Studying Feminist Theology
- June 12 Open for browsing, volunteer work
- June 19 Liturgy: Summer Solstice
- June 26 Open for browsing, volunteer work

\*\*\*\*\*

## A Support Group for Lesbians

Tuesdays, 6:30-8 p.m.

February 13, 20, 27, March 5, 12

Lesbian women benefit from being with other lesbians to focus on topics of common concern. This five-week support group will address, among other topics, being/living out; passion and sexuality; body image; lesbian spirituality; relationship to family, lover(s) and community.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Feminist Spirituality Group

Thursdays, 6:30-8 p.m.

February 15, 22, 29, March 7, 14

Lent is a good time to pay attention to spiritual life. This five-week group for women will address prayer, integrating spirituality/sexual-

ity, inheriting a spiritual legacy, relationships, images of God/Goddess/Sophia, and relating to religious traditions.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Breakfast at WATER

**Tuesday, February 13, 8-9:30 a.m.** - Five new books in feminist theology and spirituality

**Wednesday, March 6, 8-9:30 a.m.** - Celebrate International Women's Day

**Thursday, April 11, 8-9:30 a.m.** - Explore how computers are revolutionizing our ways of being religious

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## WATER Services

Feminist Psychotherapy, Spiritual Direction and Ministry Supervision for individuals, couples and groups; consultation for liturgy planning and life cycle ceremonies; internships and Visiting Scholar opportunities; Resource Center with books, tapes, periodicals to borrow; writing, lectures and workshops on feminist issues in religion.



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WATERwheel Vol. 9, No. 1, Spring 1996

## Celebrating Our Thirteenth Year!

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