

Workbook
for
Purposes +
Principles

1961 — PRESENT

Since 1960, the above section along with several others in the Bylaws, has undergone editorial amendments as the denomination after 1972, responded to growing feminist awareness in our churches and societies. The result is our present Bylaws. (see page 16)

Feminism

Feminism is seen by many in our day as presenting a challenge to theological and social thinking as radical as that of Humanism to traditional Theism a few decades ago, as that of universal theism to historic Christianity at the turn of the century, or as Protestantism to the medieval Catholic synthesis in the 16th century. We are being called upon to consider a quantum shift in our perspective on what it means to be human, female and male. It may not follow from this that older theological questions have been rendered obsolete; it does follow that they must be considered in company with a new component. Without presuming the outcome, one can safely predict that religious thinking will not emerge unchanged.

In 1977, the UUA General Assembly passed the *Women and Religion* resolution which resolved, in part, that the UUA should "examine the relationship between religious and cultural attitudes toward women." In 1980-81, prompted by the work of the (Women and Religion Committee) and the 1980 Convocation on Women and Religion at East Lansing, several Districts and local societies proposed more comprehensive amendments to the UUA Bylaws sections on Purposes and Principles. These not only included further rewording to remove inappropriate gender references, but ideological changes (substituting "center" for "foundation" on the ground that the latter was "hierarchical"), and changes in the statement of our relationship to the Judeo-Christian heritage, particularly to the phrase, "love to God and love to human-kind." (see resource section page 17)

Pluralism Statement

At a meeting of Unitarian Universalist Christian clergy, held on January 26, 1982, in Chestnut Hill, it was the sense of the meeting that the following recommendations be made to the UUA Committee on By-law Revision:

- (1) That the current by-law C.2.2. be eliminated,
- (2) That a statement of purposes of the Association be substituted,
- (3) That this statement of purposes explicitly recognize the pluralistic nature of the Association and describe those purposes for which those member societies formed an Association.

We submit for the consideration of other Unitarian Universalist churches the following suggestion to be passed on to the UUA By-law Revision Committee:

The UUA is a pluralistic association of societies. Within that Association, there are congregations which gather to worship God and serve humankind in the spirit and name of Jesus Christ.

There are also individual members of other societies in the Unitarian Universalist Association who affirm the Christian faith in their lives.

Note: This statement is an open one. It is written in such a way that those societies which do not consider themselves Christian but which still affirm that the UUA is a pluralistic association of societies can add their own understanding of the nature of that pluralism.

Feminism:

A Paper for Discussion

Many of the principles inherent in feminist theology are also basic to Unitarian Universalism. These include 1) trusting individual experience and thought over abstract dogma and creed; 2) continually questioning the STATUS QUO; 3) asserting that PRAXIS must follow reflection if reflection is to have any practical meaning.

The origins of feminist theology may be found in the Fertile Crescent, Egypt, India, China, Greece — wherever female deities were honored. But in America it emerged in the last century with the work of women like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and her *Woman's Bible*. The book was a collective work of a

group of women Biblical scholars seeking to explicate the passages concerning women and those in which women seemed to be systematically excluded.

Ms. Stanton noted that although these matters of Biblical exegesis may seem irrelevant to many, the Bible still continues to be the book most sold and distributed around the world. Thus its impact on human life and world society should not be underestimated. As Unitarian Universalists, we must continue to assert our prophetic stance regarding Biblical interpretation and its import on the human condition. Although we may consider ourselves free of the impact of all that is negative in the Judeo-Christian mythos, we must not forget our responsibility to our more traditional sisters and brothers whose lives are being diminished by those myths.

One example: what are the implications of Genesis 2? Of Adam being made by God and Eve being created out of Adam, a complete reversal of the natural birth process? What are the implications of Eve's being seduced by Satan? What are the social implications of Eve being divinely cursed to have pain in childbearing and to be subservient forevermore to Adam?

Conversely, what would be the social implication if the God of Genesis were She who made Heaven and Earth; then made Eve in Her own image; and then created Adam as Eve's helper? We may say that Genesis is "only a myth," but it is a myth which has dominated Western social consciousness for over 2000 years.

In general, twentieth century feminist theology has evolved as a corrective to what has been perceived by many as essentially anti-feminist theology of the three major Western religious traditions — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Each of these is predicated on the belief in a male god and the practice of taking maleness as normative.

Consequently, the traits normally associated with women and the feminine are considered secondary and inferior to those normally associated with men and the masculine.

Much feminist theology questions traditional male-mono-theism. For if only the male is God and Good, then the female is all that is not God and not Good. Woman's inferior status in society is thus divinely justifi-

Gardner
Edwin
Myer

fied. There was no proposed ERA in Eden.

The emphasis on the male as normative continues throughout the New Testament. Jesus called to "Father" — "ABBA" — not to his mother when he was on the cross and, indeed, all but rejected his earthly mother during his lifetime, preferring instead to get across the message that he was one with his Father in Heaven and quite separate from his mother who was on and of this earth.

Feminist theologians also question the traditional use of male gender language. Unitarian Universalist women sensitive to these concepts maintain that "woman" is not included in "man," that the concept of a Mother God and woman's spirituality is not inherent in the concept of a Father God and male spirituality, and that sisterhood is not included in brotherhood. Other language, such as foundation and disseminate, calls up specifically male and hierarchical images.

Feminism is distinct from humanism. The humanism that arose after the World Wars was a development of Renaissance thought which valued "MAN as the measure of all things." Man, not woman and not woman and man.

Humanism was also, in part, a reaction against the spiritual and transcendent parts of religion. Modern UU feminists, however, are seeking to re-validate woman's experience of the divine. One way of doing this is through the reappropriation of ancient goddess imagery to balance the traditional male god imagery.

Finally, whereas modern traditional religions have set Man over Nature, feminist thought sees God (the Spirit, the Holy, the Goddess) *in* nature, Man is not "the measure of all things," but rather an inseparable part of the fragile, mysterious balance inherent in the Web of Life. Ecological consciousness is central to the feminist critique of traditional theism and humanism.

This ecological consciousness is tied to an emphasis on a non-hierarchical value system. The human species is viewed not as "ruling over" all other species, but rather as one small integral part, functioning within the whole. Saving the environment is, therefore, seen to be as essential as saving a soul. Empathy and intuition are as valued as logic and rationalism.

These comments are meant to be only

suggestive of the radically new feminist approach to theology. Some basic primers in this mode of thinking are listed below.

Hopefully, someone in each society will be the spokesperson for this important approach to theological thought and debate within our Unitarian Universalist movement.

Suggested Reading:

Ed. by Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, *Womanspirit Rising, A Feminist Reader in Religion*, Harper and Row, NY, 1979

Carol P. Christ, *Diving Deep and Surfacing, Woman Writers on Spiritual Quest*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1980

Starhawk, *The Spiritual Dance, A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Goddess*, Harper and Row, NY, 1981

Ed. by Rosemary R. Ruether, *Religion and Sexism*, Simon and Schuster, NY, 1974

Judith Ochshorn, *The Female Experience and the Nature of the Divine*, University Press, Bloomington, MN, 1981

Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1973

Mary Daly, *Gyn/ecology*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1978

Ed. by Charlene Spretnack, *The Politics of Women's Spirituality*, Anchor/Doubleday, Garden City, NY, 1982

Isabel Carter Heyward, *The Redemption of God, A Theology of Mutual Relations*, University of America Press, Washington, DC, 1982

Agnes Smedley, *Daughter of Earth*, Feminist Press, NY, reprint

Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class*, Random House, NY, 1981

Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, several articles, book to be published December 1982: *In Memory of HER*, Crossroads, NY

Dorothy Dinnerstein, *Mermaid and Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise*, Harper and Row, 1976

Pluralism: A Paper for Discussion

The UUA is a pluralistic association of churches and fellowships. That's a fact of our denominational life. One way to describe this pluralism is in theological/religious categories. That is, we can say that the congregations within the UUA, especially in regard to