

**Excerpts from a speech entitled “How Feminist Values May Save the World” delivered by William Schulz on January 10, 1987 at the annual meeting of the Pacific Central District, Unitarian Universalist Association  
Schulz was then President of the UUA from 1985-1993**

What principle, then, is at the heart of a feminist re-creation? The core is what I will call the principle of communion, rather than domination; balance rather than dualism.

What is characteristic of patriarchy is not just that it is derived from the convictions and practices of males but that it almost invariably depicts the world as a place in which one group or entity or concept control or dominate: the rich over the poor and men over women. But those prototypical forms of domination have been extended to a whole host of others: mind over the body; reason over the passions; the spirit over the carnal; God over humanity; the human over the natural; the ordained over the laity; being over becoming; the transcendent over the imminent; the strong over the weak; technology over creation; adults over children.

Where in the world did this notion come from? Well, in large part it came from Western religion and, more specifically, from Western religions teachings about the relationship between man and woman. In the Book of Exodus a wife is listed among her husband possessions, second in importance to his house. St. Jerome believed that a woman's only hope of salvation was in becoming a man. And Martin Luther likened a man's sexual needs to a putrid sore but went on to say that "God made woman to cover the wound."

At the heart of a feminist recreation of the world is a rejection of dualism and domination and, in their place, the recognition of mutuality, communion, balance, independent, love and trust. Or to put it another way: life is always overflowing every rigid category into which we try to squeeze it; everything in the world – morality, physics, health, sex, and philosophy – is far more ambiguous than patriarchy can admit...

At the heart of the feminist re-creation of the world is the replacement of domination with interdependence.

Testimony from women: "One day I was driving home after a class," said the poet Ntozake Shange, "and I saw a huge rainbow over Oakland. I realized that we (black women) could survive if we decide that we have as much right and as much purpose for being here as the air and the mountains do."

A feminist reconstruction of reality, then, calls us not just to an ecological consciousness but to an abhorrence of militarism, the exploitation of labor, the abuse of children, the denial of basic human rights, the scourge of hunger, the obscenity of racism because all of them reflect the pattern of provincialism, and the dance of domination....

Patriarchy conspires to keep us all in fear of one another, separate, competitive. But feminism calls us to reject the root metaphor of terror, to reject the notion that the Stranger is an Enemy, and to recognize that at one time we too were strangers in the land of Egypt. If we remember that, says novelist Cynthia Ozick, then

Those who have no pain can imagine those who suffer. Those at the center can imagine those outside. The strong can imagine what it is to be weak. And we strangers can imagine that the hearts of other strangers are familiar ones.

Feminist values call upon us to embrace the body as a source of pleasure but reject its treatment as a commodity.

Let me turn finally to the religious institution and the faith it embodies. For Unitarian Universalists the feminist reconstruction was first signaled formally by the passage in 1977 of the Women and Religion Resolution which called upon us to put traditional (patriarchal) assumptions in perspective and avoid them in the future. Out of that revolution emerged a continental committee, first chaired by the PCD's own Rosemary Matson, and District organizations, such as your Women and Religion Task Force, which has nurtured, challenged, beckoned, and pushed Unitarian Universalists into an appreciation of the New Age.

All our religious education programs are monitored carefully for sexism and, after much too long a delay, Shirley Ranck's adult education course on feminist theology is now available.

Education courses for children now in preparation will focus on the ways in which patriarchal assumptions have influenced sex-role stereotyping and our families of origin.

The extent to which laity are included in the creation of worship and the degree to which alternative forms of worship which reflect feminist understandings of religion and liturgy are employed is, in my estimation, far from acceptable.

And yet I take heart: there simply is no stopping a powerful idea whose time has come. It may slow and balk and falter but there is no stopping it and if it takes only about 5% of population to introduce a new consciousness, as most social change theory would have it, then clearly, my friend, the die is cast and the struggle will be successful.

If the Holy is first something to be experienced and treasured, then life's blessings are available to every one of us.

This is the basis for the creation of new rituals drawn from the religion of the goddess, from witchcraft, from women's experience of their bodies and from the need for new religious naming and imagery. And it is the basis for the true democratization of the church and empowerment of the laity. This need not for a moment mean the disparagement of clergy or the disavowal of a learned ministry. On the contrary, it implies an even greater reverence for that form of ministry which is committed to a partnership with laity and which knows that mutual respect engenders in both parties more energy, not less; less mistrust, not more.

I believe that the feminist revolution – nonviolent, egalitarian, treasuring the contributions of all, forgiving the shortsightedness of many – I believe that the feminist revolution is, quite literally, irresistible. It will not be resisted. Our call as Unitarian Universalist is to embrace it. For I assure you with all my heart that the gardens of creation cry out for its tending.