

Joseph Priestly District  
March 31, 1984  
Lucile Schuck Longview

CLAIMING RAGE AS PART OF COURAGE

It is a privilege to be here and to share my story of involvement with the Women and Religion resolution . For eight years that involvement has been so total that I have sometimes wondered whether my life is in the Women and Religion resolution or whether the Women and Religion resolution is in my life.

Joseph Priestly District has been involved with that resolution since the time when it was being put on the Tentative Agenda back in 1977 and you have been a model for all of us when it comes to interpretation of the resolution. The selective focusing of the subjects considered at your conferences appeals to many of us in other districts who watch what you are doing and cheer you on from a distance.

In addition to the appeal of your conferences many of us look forward to receiving and to reading Reaching Sideways, the only on-going publication within the denomination that reflects the perspective of those feminists, men as well as women, who are committed to seeking and eradicating the roots of sexism as manifested in our Judeo-Christian heritage.

Interested individuals in this district did some valuable editing of the resolution back in 1977 but, as the years have passed and I have seen the degree to which the meaning and the intent of the resolution have been perverted on the continental level , I have often wished that someone had changed the title. A more specific and descriptive heading might have been:

"Women as Influenced by Religion", or  
"Women and Scriptural Myths", or  
"Critiquing Patriarchal Religion", or  
"Reaching for a New Vision".

Any one of those titles or others equally suggestive might have named the vision of the resolution more clearly although it is doubtful that anyone of us then saw the predictive nature of it or the gigantic task and the transformation the denomination agreed to undertake by adopting it.

When Jean Zoerheide called I agreed to speak today as an "outsider" from my "outsider" point of view and my "outsider" experience. I would attempt to walk a tight wire over Niagara Falls ~~in~~ Jean asked me to and assured me that I could do it.

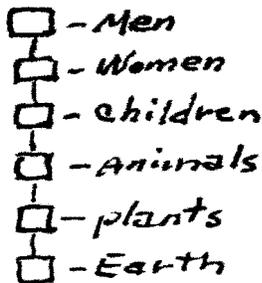
By "outsider;" in this case, I mean outside the institutional hierarchy. Most feminists realize that all women are outsiders in our culture whether we play roles in the institution or not. I speak of "outsiderness" with pride. Women are cultivating outsider knowledge and are bringing into existence a feminist theology which, like liberation theology, reflects the consciousness of the unseen--of the powerless.

I speak as a voice of feminists in the pews who have been endeavoring to bring to our denomination a new awareness, a life-affirming consciousness. These efforts are part of the phenomenal movement to bring about an ideological change that is sweeping through all religious denominations today. Women are bringing new insights into the religious dialogue and new ways in which women and men relate to each other and to the religious institution itself. The leadership of most religious institutions (primarily male), accustomed to having issues of ideology debated only in pulpits by theologically educated professionals, with the people in the pews as the listeners, have given little attention to either the meaning or the potential of this recent occurrence initiated and promoted by feminists in congregations.

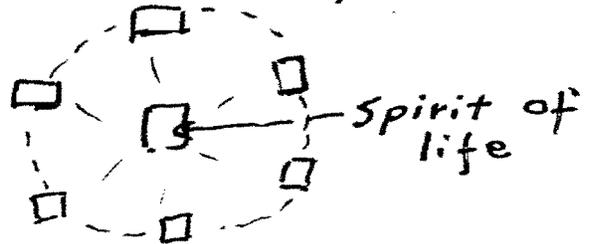
It is the women, one half of humanity, historically having been excluded from shaping religious traditions, who are beginning to make demands for basic changes in understandings, attitudes and practices. These demands fall across the broad spectrum of theological beliefs. Throughout each of the many diverse religious expressions currently within our own Unitarian Universalist community, the basic assumption continues that the male is the norm, that his understanding of reality is true and total and that the female is derivative, dependent and the subordinate other--the "outsider." It is assumed also that no other perspective is available to us.

These assumptions are being challenged. There is a growing awareness among women that hierarchical thinking is not essential. Instead all of creation can be viewed as interrelated. I like to think of the totality of life as being linked rather than ranked.

ranking  God



linking



Women often become aware of the cosmic hierarchical thought pattern in which our minds are encased by sharing our life stories. I have been sharing the story of my life with other women in varying situations for more than a decade. In the process we have been "hearing one another into being" as Mary Daly says. It sounds so simple but it unbelievably empowering.

It is by sharing our experiences, by exploring incidents that by themselves appear inconsequential, that we are discovering factors basic to all women's lives. These shared experiences reveal a recurring theme of our struggle for life and for self-actualization on a planet on which women's experiences are devalued and in which our personhood is that of the subordinate other.

The growing awareness of the commonality of women's self-diminishing experiences within the parameters of patriarchal reality is a major force driving the expanding consciousness that is sweeping the planet like wildfire.

For seven years I have been a member of the Theological Opportunity Program of Harvard Divinity School. This religiously oriented group brings together women from congregations of many faiths for two lecture series a year. The lectures in each series are in response to questions which we, predominantly lay women, have formulated after hours of discussion about our individual and common theological concerns.

That is a switch! Instead of being compliant laity and listening to Professional Theologians tell us what they think we should know we invite the credentialed to speak to underlying assumptions they never thought to question such as "Female Blood Defiles, Male Blood Saves"

In addition to the two lecture series and our extended discussions before identifying our questions an ever increasing number of us meet regularly within the walls of Harvard Divinity School to explore ever more deeply the ways in which the images in the Scriptures as well as practices in our particular churches sanction and promote the subtle conditioning which cause us all, men and women alike, to consider women subordinate to men.

Man, the human male, has been and remains the myth maker. Many women and a few men in all denominations are beginning to see the consequences of this limited and biased, this patriarchal understanding of reality. Questioning assumptions basic to patriarchy is heretical. Friends, I bring good news! Heresy is alive and well!!!

While in sharing the experiences of my life-time I find myself in a familiar landscape I move into little explored territory when I attempt to lift up emotions and claim attributes. I have scarcely begun to get in touch with either rage or courage.

How dare I, then, stand before you claiming rage as part of courage? Well--Jean called!

I couldn't have accepted this task earlier in my life. I am everlastingly grateful to have lived to see this day. Without the feminist perspective and the support of my sisters I would still be believing that I, as a woman, am what my culture including my religion has told me I am--derivative of the norm, dependent on the norm and subordinate to the norm.

And without feminism I would also be denying my anger, my rage, my fury. For most of my 73 years I have tried hard to keep my anger stuffed down, down deep inside, bottled-up. Anger was the cardinal sin. Anger and evil were synonymous.

After all of those years of tight-lipped reactions how does one find the voice of rage?

Anger is being seen in a new light. The emerging feminist ethics names love as one of its base points where love is considered a mode of action in the struggle for justice. Anger is called to provide the energy to engage in that struggle--to provide the energy to do the work of love.

I quote some statements made by Beverly Harrison, a Professor at Union Theological School in her article, "Christian Ethics for Women and Other Strangers":

"Anger is a mode of connectedness to others and it is always a vivid form of caring....anger is a signal that change is called for, that transformation in relation is required....Anger denied subverts community....Anger directly expressed is a mode of taking the other seriously, of caring. Where feeling is evaded, where anger is hidden, or goes unattended, masking itself, there the power of love, the power to act, to deepen relation, atrophies and dies."

What a gift of insight! I have long realized that anger is energizing and that, when anger died down, indifference often follows and relationships cease. I had never made the connection between anger and love until I read Harrison's article. I now claim the power of my anger to do the work of love--to carry me deep into the struggle for justice--justice for the disempowered and for the helpless.

Courage! Women's courage has seldom been profiled. The story of day after day and year after year of isolation and boredom is not the stuff considered interesting to the chronicler or to the reader. However, the courage I now consider goes beyond the courage to live unseen, unheard and unrecorded--to live a life of insignificance, of being "the other." Women have exhibited that kind of courage abundantly for centuries.

The courage I want to high-light is the intellectual bravery, the intestinal fortitude for both women and men to question--to open our eyes and our mind and to observe and internalize how hierarchy and domination are played-out daily and hourly in our lives. It takes spunk to examine the myths of the Scriptures and other religious pronouncements and identify, dig out, and expose the sexist assumptions that are carried piggy-back either explicitly or implicitly on those myths. It takes courage to see, to name and to renounce patriarchal religion and to begin to create a more inclusive and connected conceptualization of reality. Many here today are exhibiting that kind of courage.

It is my claim that not only is rage a part of courage but courage is also a part of rage. In our efforts to move beyond a biased and limited world-view to a cosmic concept that is inclusive and just we must depend on a constant interplay of rage and courage to carry us onward. Each will fuel the other and each will build on the other in a constant feed-back relationship.

It is an empowering dynamic. May we all be blessed with both rage and courage!

That sounds like the end, which it is, although I have yet to begin. When Alice awakens--(all of the Alices everywhere have been asleep long time)--when Alice awakens and we move beyond linear thinking, the end and the beginning, like all else, will be connected.

I am aware that I stand today in the famous Channing Pulpit. Pulpits are doubtless the most obvious symbol of ranking. As I stand here my inner cry is "What about Channing's Sisters in the pews--those of us who have looked up to long gowned males most of our lives?"

I do not claim to be an authority on William Ellery Channing but I list some of the differences in status, perspective, concerns and goals between Channing and myself, hopefully respectful of the differences in point of view that time-165 years-makes.

Status

When Channing spoke in this pulpit on May 5, 1819 he came already claiming high status. He was a professional male, theologically educated, respected and revered. He had access to the media (his sermon was circulated in pamphlet form for half a century).. He was seen as being in charge, able to name reality and determine what was important. He was accompanied on his journey to Baltimore by a contingent of powerful and respected forefathers.

I claim low status and often refer to myself as "outsider-by intention". I represent feminists in the pews, women being the weakest category in church hierarchy. At this moment I am a displaced person standing on high. I am accompanied in spirit by my sisters, ignored and erased throughout patriarchal time as well as an ever increasing number of angry women from most if not all faiths. I claim as my credentials my raised consciousness and my rage-fueled courage and my courage-propelled rage.

Perspective

Channing, while emphasizing that reason must be used to interpret the Scriptures did not exalt reason above revelation. The Scriptures remained divinely ordained.

I question the origin and authenticity of the Scriptures. I believe they are biased and partial, man's effort to control his world.

CONCERN

Channing was concerned with the traditional and orthodox interpretation of the Scriptures as they reveal the nature and destiny of man--of the human male.

I am concerned with the content and the intent of the

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myths of patriarchal Scriptures as well as with their interpretation. Biblical myths reveal an implicit or explicit bias against women and all of nature in relation to the human male. Man stands on the top rung of the hierarchical ladder with God, also male, on the platform above and all the rest of creation ranked on the rungs below.

### Goal

The goal of Channing's Sermon was in part to make clear that those of his persuasion basically disagreed with orthodoxy over the Calvinistic doctrines of original sin, election, and predestination. In this instance Channing was concerned with the nature and destiny of the human male

My goal is to point-up and eradicate the patriarchal world-view fostered, sanctioned and sanctified by the Scriptures resulting in all of creation and particularly women being diminished and violated.

We are all here because of the Women and Religions resolution adopted unanimously by the denomination at the General Assembly in 1977. That resolution was an act of faith. In the Unitarian Universalist Association we are told that we are a denomination "on the cutting edge of society's concerns" and are special because of the power of the laity. We are told that "every member of the church has the privilege and the obligation to direct prophetic criticism at both the church and the society." The resolution, Women and Religion, was criticism directed at our Judeo-Christian heritage.

There are stacks of resolutions that have been adopted since the merger of the Unitarians and the Universalists but this one may have been the first to attempt ideological change, to seek-out and to correct the bias of theological and liturgical perceptions and sexist language.

What a frail vehicle--the resolution! Power of the laity is greatly exaggerated. The impression that the laity are powerful is part of what Mary Daly refers to as the "dynamic of false inclusion". It is part of the dynamic that deludes women and men in congregations into believing that we/significantly more privileged than those in more traditional denominations because we are both visible and powerful.

One hundred and fifty eight years after Channing spoke in this pulpit some of his Sisters--feminists in congregations--called on all of our sisters and our brothers--those in leadership and those among the laity "to scrutinize our own and related traditions as deep-seated causes of patriarchal power." It called on the denomination to undertake the most courageous and essential work of our day--that of seeking new ways of perceiving reality at a time when the old mind (the world view that sanctions hier- and dualistic thinking) has brought us to the brink of self-termination--to a man-made armageddon.

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The UUA elected a president in 1977, the year the resolution was adopted. Two of the candidates made concerted efforts to respond to our lobbying and endorsed the resolution enthusiastically. One posed this question "Can genuinely non-sexist religious experience and practice be discovered and shaped from the histories and materials of patriarchal traditions? Given the radical nature of the question," he continued, "it is crucial that our vote to adopt is understood as something deeper than the correction of inadequacies in theological and liturgical language, or in denominational hiring, appointing, accrediting and fellowshiping."

The deeper meaning of the resolution was not understood on the institutional level. The emphasis, aside from attempts to correct inadequacies in theological and liturgical language, has been on denominational hiring, appointing, accrediting and fellowshiping. There has been minimal, if any, attention given to the role that sexist assumptions and attitudes, implicit in many stories in the Scriptures and in statements by Theologians, play in conditioning men to act out dominating roles and women to accept submissive roles, particularly in the patriarchal family.

After adoption the resolution was taken inside the walls of the superstructure where all resolutions go after they are passed. It was institutionalized from the beginning. It was interpreted from the perspective of those who already see themselves as being in charge, as knowing what is (as Elizabeth Janeway says in her book "The Powers of the Weak") as knowing what is really there and what is important. Their interpretation, however misleading becomes truth for most individuals in the denomination.

From the beginning there was much flurry around so-called "Women's issues" and the resolution became, except for the emphasis on sexist language, a catch-all for actions <sup>which</sup> rightly would have been taken through implementation of numerous previous resolutions - resolutions primarily about equal rights and opportunities for those women attempting to play hierarchy within the denomination or in institutions in the secular society.

What a distortion! What a perversion! I and others point out the significant difference between trying to bring about a new perspective for everyone and trying to raise the status for a few in our outworn way of perceiving, in the old system of ranking.

I am refuted. I try again and again. I write articles, do workshops and write letters to those in charge. I am publicly contradicted, brushed aside, ignored, patronized.

I scrape paint, paper walls, cut shrubbery, climb mountains! Keep the rage inside, remember.

Read Virginia Woolf's "Three Guineas" again and begin looking at the consequences when women start joining men's processions.

It is easier to be a female patriarch than a male feminist. Patriarchy can and often does run without man power. Women play the game of ranking in the public world as well as men. Eliteism and professionalism, like sexism, racism, ageism and nationalism tend to intimidate, to oppress and promote hierarchy.

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In following years I keep bashing my head against the walls of the superstructure. I initiate more resolutions, two endeavoring to turn around the interpretation of the Women and Religion resolution. They are adopted by the General Assembly but get very little attention by those who have long been or have just become the guardians of the superstructure.

Sharon Welch spoke to us at Theological Opportunities Program at Harvard Divinity School on the subject of "Conflict Resolution". She pointed out the futility of the powerless trying to change institutions by the direct approach. "When opponents are unequal in power, she say, "the weak must nibble away at the edges--nibble everywhere."

How and where do we nibble? What do those of us/who wish to look for the root cause of our current system of ranking, who wish to join with others in seeking how patriarchy affects our lives? Our numbers are small and we are scattered around the nation.

You here in the Joseph Priestly District can keep working persistently as you have been doing. I think of you already working on the New Vision with your emphasis on relationships in the family. There are at least three districts where the light shines but you here have the beacon.

Some may have energy to continue to try to redirect the interpretation of the Women and Religion resolution on the Continental level. I have little energy left for that. Too many people have their identity wrapped up in the "carry-all bag" interpretation.

If we wish to continue to build a feminist perspective in the UUA by the resolution process I would prefer to turn to another aspect of patriarchy such as "patriarchy and militarism" with the intent of bringing the feminist perspective into our peace efforts.

In my own case, my energy for changing the existing institution subsides. I cherish my community of sisters and want to envision a way to remain close but I am becoming indifferent to religion as expressed by all patriarchal institutions. If I continue to be a participant in a religious community how do I keep from participating in my own deception?

I want to turn my energy toward bringing about a new epoch, a new consciousness--to be about creating and nurturing a new life-giving vision and not about resuscitating the old death-dealing one.

Feminism is not alone in its work of critiquing patriarchy. With ever increasing tempo we continue to dismantle patriarchy throughout the culture and to show how completely man has erroneously mythed his place in the Universe. The flight to the moon and pictures of that tiny earth, our only home, has forced us into global think and a greater understanding of interrelationships and interdependence. The environmental movement and a deeper understanding of our relation to the totality of life expands our spirituality. The shortage of fossil fuels has pushed us toward the solar age.

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The list of movements that contribute to dismantling patriarchy goes on-holistic health, natural foods, self-healing, environmental organizations, peace movements, deep ecology, transcendental meditation. You can suggest more from your own experience.

We are all on the journey!

We'll do fearless thinking, stop being nice.

We'll change relationships in families from domination and submission to equal respect for all of its members.

We'll be Liliths in place of Eves. We'll be angry, not selfless Marys. We'll be angry sisters who will speak up to our Popes.

We will be change agents without permission. We'll bring in a new age when all is linked rather than ranked and where no one is excluded.

We shall care enough to struggle for justice. No more demeaning of our sisters!

The power of our rage will fuel our courage. We will do the work of love.