

## TO MAKE A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE

The resolution, Women and Religion, adopted unanimously by the General Assembly in 1977, calls on the Unitarian Universalist Association to make a significant difference in the religious perceptions of our time. It calls on religious professionals and laity to bring into focus the basic assumptions that undergird our world view and to see their sexist nature. It calls on us to name that which is so obvious we are blinded to its presence, to name the fact that all religions with a Judeo-Christian heritage have as their mythic basis the assumptions that man is the human being, that male perception is total, that he rightly speaks for all and that he is the keeper of the gate.

For centuries women have waited outside the gate, our being and our experience ignored, socialized to believe that we are somehow among the counted. But a new consciousness is arising. Feminist theologians and women in congregations are beginning to recognize that the patriarchal religious message is not inclusive of women and they are choosing various ways of responding to that understanding. Some are theologizing from a feminist perspective and attempting to broaden the concept of God and to emphasize the liberating message in the teachings of Jesus. Others are reaching into patriarchal times seeking the roots of female identity, among the cultures that worshipped God as a woman. Still others are moving away from patriarchal religion claiming there is no place for women in the conceptual systems of traditional theologies.

There are those of us in UU congregations who are alienated by worship services that ignore our presence while confirming the existence of males sitting beside us and have chosen to take another path. We have faith that UUA professionals and members will work with us to expand our denominational religious thought and practices to make them inclusive of our spirituality. Acting on this faith we initiated and promoted the resolution Women and Religion which might have been more descriptively titled "the religious roots of sexism" or "the religious basis for women's oppression."

The resolution speaks to the nature of relationships between women and men and to the power of the myth, whether recognized or not, in our individual education process. Which of the religious myths commonly assumed among us church people contributes to undemocratic human relationships in which males are dominant and females are submissive? Can we re-myth the infrastructure of our system of belief or must we start anew to develop a faith that will be equally inclusive of women and men? These are some of the questions which confront us as we undertake the implementation of this resolution.

At its heart is a concern for female-male relationships in the family and for the extent to which all of us, especially children, internalize and act on cultural and religious role model stereotypes. It asks all UUs to examine religious myths that sanction the undemocratic male-female relationships that all too often are played out daily in our homes. We look to our church and to our denomination to reach for domestic justice by promoting attitudes and behavior that will contribute toward a sense of equality in self-worth and in dignity for girls and boys and for women and men.

The resolution is unique not only in that it was initiated and promoted by women in congregations but also in calling on the institution, the UUA, with its affiliates and members to question and broaden the basic assumptions on which our system of values rests. We do this in the belief that the quality of our lives will be enriched by the incorporation of women's values and experiences into our religious tradition. It is a call from women in congregations for worship services, whether designed by women or by men, that recognize our presence and build our dignity and self-worth. We are asking that the gate be opened.

Seeking out and putting into historic perspective the sexism that pervades the mythic basis of our religion and exploring to what extent religiously authenticated sexist attitudes influence sex-role stereotypes within our families is no easy task. The undertaking will remain with us to the end of our lives and the lives of our descendents as will the job of avoiding sexist language and assumptions in our day and theirs.

The tasks are there and the UUA, through adopting the resolution, agreed to take them as its own. The responsibility for careful interpretation and for implementation of the resolution rests with each of us but particularly with our ministers, our theologians, and our theological schools for it is they who determine the religious message. We are building the way toward spiritual equality for men and for women, a path which other religious organizations must ultimately follow. We are doing the courageous work in religion today.

- Lucile Schuck,  
Lexington, MA