
ANNA HOWARD SHAW CENTER

NEWSLETTER

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From the Director, Margaret Wiborg

Thinking about women and the church from a global perspective is facilitated in the Shaw Center as the population at the School of Theology continues to become more international, encouraging a re-imagining of our "we."

At the All Women's Fall Retreat, nearly one-third of the participants were international students, with women from Korea, Singapore, and Russia. Third-year M.Div. student Yoo Cha Yi's danced presentation on "Korean Women's Experiences and a Struggle for Humanization" was the starting point for conversation on our differences and similarities - important reflection on our own culture, and on the need for increased understanding of cultures other than our own.

The Shaw Center worship service in Marsh Chapel the following week began appropriately with a reading of Psalm 139 by women moving to the chancel from different directions, acknowledging in English, Slavonic, Spanish, and Korean that our God has searched and known each of us in our differing situations.

Our experience will be further enriched this year by the presence of Irene Tay, Th.D. candidate from Singapore, as the 1992-93 Anna Howard Shaw Scholar.

More than two hundred women and men gathered for Women and the Word last March. It is impossible to recapture the two-day experience in this newsletter. Highlights certainly include the two inclusive, multicultural worship services. We were called to worship with African drums when Bishop Susan Morrison preached. Korean drum-

mers called together and led us out of eucharist with Bishop Barbara Harris preaching. Our time together in ple-

nary session was characterized by genuine dialogue with the leadership. The following article is excerpted from Dr. Diana Eck's initial presentation.



Reimagining the "We" in Three Revolutions

Who are we when we use the word "we"? As our context for thinking about women and the church from a global perspective, I'd like to meditate for a moment on some statistics I found in a recent issue of the Catholic Reporter under the heading "If our world were a village of one thousand people...." In this village of one thousand people, there would be 329 Christians, 174 Muslims, 131 Hindus, 61 Buddhists, 52 Animists, 3 Jews, 34 members of other religions, and 216 without any religion. There would be 564 Asians, 210 Europeans, 86 Africans, 80 South Americans, and 60 North Americans. In this village 60 persons would have half the income, 500 would be hungry, 600 would live in shanty towns, and 700 would be illiterate. This is the global context in which we must position ourselves. In general, the village would be about half women, but among the poor, the hungry, the illiterate, there is no question that women would be disproportionately represented.

I want to take religious revolution as a theme. In this kind of world, old patterns of think-

ing are being slowly turned upside down. Old ways and forms of thinking are beginning to be challenged by different voices: the voices of women, the voices of the oppressed, and the voices of people of living faiths who are neither Jewish nor Christian, but are Muslim, or Hindu, or Buddhist, or participants in quite a number of other religious ways and traditions. These are real revolutions because they are revolutions in patterns of thinking. They are real revolutions not because they are wide, but because they are very deep revolutions. Some revolutions are not real in the sense that they are political revolutions, coups d'état which are finally superficial. There are quite a number of events in the past few years that have gone under the name of revolution. All we really mean is radical change, sudden dramatic change; the people at the top are thrown out and new people replace them, but the structures finally remain the same. When real revolutions happen, structures begin to change. Usually, when the structures remain the same, there is a top in which a few voices are heard and a bottom in which many voices are not heard: that great pyramidal hierarchy of power with which we are all so acquainted in the West. When I speak of revolutionary change, I mean that which has to do not just with the transfer of power, but with the transformation of an entire ethos, an entire world view. In this sense, I believe that all true revolution is religious revolution.

Three revolutions today are in the process of radically transforming who "we" are: who we mean, who we include, when we use the word "we." First there is the revolution of women's voices, reclaiming our own history, affirming our own experience, asserting our creative intellectual powers to interpret our own religious tradition. Second, there is the revolution of the voices of the poor and powerless speaking of liberation, experiencing empowerment and calling us, all of us, to account for the injustice of our world. And third, there is the revolution of the voices of people of faiths other than our own, speaking of their experience of God's grace and power, and calling us to consider the meaning of our religious differences in a world in which all of us are destined to a common future. Audre Lorde reflects, as an African-American woman yearning for real revolution, "I sit here wondering which 'me' will survive all these liberations?" Today we might ask, which "we" will survive all these liberations?

Our religious traditions are just that - they are traditions. They are not establishments, they are not monuments, they are not finished. They are much more like rivers gathering new streams and rivulets with each and every passing day. We do not need to think of religion as something established in the past to which we might or might not decide to adhere. Our traditions are not backward-looking, but are in the process of creating the future. Our religious traditions, our Christian traditions as well, are constantly in motion, not dropped immutable from heaven. The rivers of our traditions have thunderous waterfalls and rapids and we are in the midst of those times today. There are slow evolutions and there are revolutions. And of course, where there are revolutions there are also backlashes.

First, the women's revolution. We are laywomen, ministers, clergy, interpreters of the Word in a way that my own grandmother would never have imagined. The nature of ministry in this century has changed forever, and will continue to change. In the past few years, the nature of episcopacy has changed forever, as witnessed in the ordination of Bishop Barbara Harris. And it will continue to change. The women's revolution is a revolution with which you are familiar - all the currents and streams, all the whirlpools and the eddies and the backwaters. Truly it has come about in our times: in biblical interpretation, in the rediscovering of women's history, and in the articulation of feminist theology. Above all, the issue of inclusive language is revolutionary. It is a new way of thinking as well as a new way of speaking. It is the revolution of becoming visible and audible in our own speech. We struggle with language as we struggle with the question of who we mean when we say "we." How do we speak of our differences? It is a way of thinking as well as a way of speaking, and when we begin to catch ourselves re-speaking our lives, we also begin to rethink the "we."

This religious revolution is not ours as Christian women alone. There are many places where this revolution is taking place in other religious traditions, among our friends and sisters who are Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and so on. There are revolutions happening everywhere. In the Muslim world in Egypt, women gather on their own steam to study the Koran, in Koran study groups in the mosque. At Harvard, a Jordanian woman who is the head of the Islamic Student Association carries

her prayer garments around in her backpack and ducks into the mosque in the basement of Memorial Hall to pray as often as she can during the course of the day. Another Muslim woman undertakes a feminist interpretation of the Koran, convinced that the foundational message of the Koran, justice and human equality, can be liberated to speak anew after fourteen hundred years of being interpreted in the context of patriarchy. There are women in virtually every religious tradition today who are involved, as we are, in the revolution of seizing the ground of our own experience, and our own intellect, and our own ability to look with fresh eyes at our traditions and speak a word of life from them today.

Second, the revolution of the oppressed and the poor. Our religious traditions are not supposed to be the institutions of the rich, the establishment, and the state, although they have often become so. The rivers of today are rolling with the voices of the poor and the oppressed, who have not spoken before. They will have their say in South Africa, Central America, Palestine, not because Karl Marx was right, but because the prophets and the teachers of our own religious traditions call us to justice and to compassion. This village in which half of the people are hungry, and most of them children, in which two-thirds are illiterate, is a village in which we as Christians will be held accountable. The prophets of today are in many ways the poor, the oppressed, the refugees, the untouchables, those who speak a word of truth outside of the houses of privilege and comfort. They are not popular people, and they will be criticized.

I often think of Gandhi, because he was a Hindu by birth and a poor man by adoption. His revolutionary nonviolence is well known, but even more revolutionary was his identification with the poor in everything that he did. He turned daily life into a revolution. In Gandhi's view there was no point in speaking about the oppression of the poor or economic injustice as matters of public policy which we will pursue only in the State House, if we continue to support the status quo by our daily, moral, and economic choices. He did something far more effective: he cleaned his own latrines, emptied his own chamber pots, took on the work of so-called untouchables in his own life. Gandhi addressed one of the most important questions of our time, "What is it that constitutes enough?" Can politicians, economists, and consumers tell us what is

enough? E. F. Schumacher tells us, "There are poor societies that have too little, but where is the rich society that says 'Halt, we have plenty, we have enough'?" Today we have to insist that global priorities must be set not by the interests of the mighty, but by the priorities of the poor. Liberation will come not simply as a proclamation from the gospel of the poor, and Christians cannot idealize the messengers of the poor as those who will preach the gospel of Christ to us in some way. Two-thirds of the people dying from hunger in the world, in Somalia, and Ethiopia, are Muslims. Two-thirds of the people living in refugee camps are Muslims. We have to begin to listen and refine our talk about our political responsibility in relation to the injustice of the world. This is not a problem that Christians, no matter how well organized, no matter how well motivated, no matter how diverse, can address in a meaningful way alone. In our village of a thousand people, there is no such thing as alone.

The final revolution is the revolution of pluralism: interfaith relations between and among peoples of different religious commitments, taking for granted the fact that we encounter one another as people committed to our own faith, not simply seeking some lowest common denominator. This is a revolution that is inextricably linked to the other two, and we need to think of all three of them together. We need to enlarge the "we." The relations that we as Christians have with people of other faiths are absolutely critical to life in the village of one thousand people. How will all of us, Christians and Jews, Muslims and Hindus, Buddhists and Confucians, encounter and engage one another as people of faith? In a world that is experiencing a new wave of religious fundamentalism and chauvinism, the churches are challenged to a new era of creative encounter with people of other faiths. The North American context is one that we especially need to rethink. In the last twenty-five years, with the change in immigration laws, the religious landscape of the United States has changed radically. And the context of ministry, for all of us involved in the church, has changed. Interfaith relations are an essential part of ministry, even right here in Boston. A year ago I had a research seminar that remapped the religious landscape of Boston. For those of us in Boston, the mosque is not only in Cairo or some other part of the world, but in Quincy, in Dorchester, in Sudbury, in Seekonk, and in a dozen other places that are part of the New England

Council of Mosques that includes twenty mosques. The rites of Hindu temple consecration take place not only in India, but in Ashland. The ordination of Buddhist monks takes place not simply in Southeast Asia, but in the Cambodian temple in Lowell or Lynn. The Asian population of Boston has doubled in the last ten years.

It is a new question for many of us, and a revolutionary question for many in our congregations to ask,

"What has God been up to in human history and in other religious traditions?" In Chaim Potok's novel, *A Book of Lights*, a young rabbi is traveling in Japan with a friend who is on short leave from the Korean war. The rabbi is in an Asian culture for the first time and he stands with his Jewish friend at a shrine watching a man with his hands pressed together, very deeply in prayer. The rabbi turns to his friend, "Do you suppose our God is listening?" His friend responds, "Well, I don't know, I never thought of it." And the rabbi says, "If God is not listening, why not? And if God is listening, then what are we all about?" That really is our question, the question of all of us today, "Is God listening, to the prayers of those who are so earnestly and deeply at prayer in ways and traditions not our own?" If not, what kind of God would that be? The kind of God that created heaven and earth and everything in it, but would not be listening to the prayers of this Buddhist man in Japan so clearly in prayer? And if God is listening then that is a revolutionary question for us. What are we all about? We as people of faith. There is a real role for women in reaching out across the borders of our religious traditions and beginning to ask the question, "Who are we in this new world of many faiths?"

We can see these revolutions happening before our eyes, in the very currents of our own time. But revolutions, no matter how incipient, are not without their consequences. The feminist writer Susan Faludi has described backlash: the women's movement, scarcely begun, is proclaimed over, and a postfeminist era is with us, so they say. Or the concern for liberation movements, scarcely begun, is declared *passé* and a new era of consumerism and materialism is upon us. On one hand we see the emergence of quite a new form of pluralism right here in the United States, with Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus taking their place in the religious landscape of the United States. On the other hand, this new pluralism is countered by rising ethnic, racial,

and religious chauvinism and a spate of boldly racist public rhetoric. The world today is cast in a perilous tension between fundamentalism, balkanization, and chauvinism on the one hand, and the global management of transnational economic interests on the other. In that tension I believe that all of us committed to religious traditions, women and men, Muslim and Jew and Christian and Hindu, rich and poor, all of us, must begin to redefine the "we." And it is important which "we" survives all these revolutions.

The preceding article is based on highlights from "Global View: Women in the Church," a presentation given by Dr. Diana Eck at Women and the Word, 1992. Cassettes of the conference are available from the Anna Howard Shaw Center.

Dr. Diana L. Eck is Professor of Comparative Religion and Judaic Studies, Faculty of the Arts and Sciences, at Harvard University. She is also a member of the faculty of Harvard Divinity School and serves as chairperson of the Committee on the Study of Religion at the university.



THE WOMEN'S BIBLE COMMENTARY

This Time, We Said Yes!

by Dr. Katheryn Pfisterer Darr
 Assistant Professor of Hebrew Bible; Boston
 University School of Theology

 I'm sitting in front of my computer with a piece of history in my lap. This morning, my copy of *The Women's Bible Commentary* arrived from Westminster/John Knox Press; and I am savoring the experience of having played a small part in a larger project of immense importance.

In the 1890s, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a prominent theorist of the women's movement, led a small group of woman suffragists in examining every biblical text that referred to women. The result of their labors was *The Women's Bible* (1895-98), the most famous example of nineteenth-century biblical interpretation by women. Although three members of the twenty-person Revising Committee were Universalist ministers, the overwhelming majority were lay women. There were no

formally trained, female biblical scholars on the Committee. Such individuals were, of course, rare; but the fact alone does not explain their absence. Rather, Stanton claimed that she invited "distinguished women ..., Hebrew and Greek scholars, versed in Biblical criticism," to join the project, but...these women declined because they were "afraid that their high reputation and scholarly attainments might be compromised by taking part in an enterprise that for a time may prove very unpopular."¹

Almost one hundred years later, Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish women scholars said yes!, eagerly agreeing to write articles and commentaries for *The Women's Bible Commentary*, the first such reference volume since Stanton and the Revising Committee did their pioneering work. Dr. Carol Newsom, Associate Professor of Old Testament at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, and Dr. Sharon H. Ringe, Professor of New Testament at Wesley Theological Seminary, edited the book and jointly wrote its introductory essay. Ringe also contributed an essay entitled "When Women Interpret the Bible." Other general essays include "Everyday Life: Women in the Period of the Hebrew Bible" by Carol L. Meyers, and "Everyday Life: Women in the Period of the New Testament" by Amy L. Wordelman. Among the many fine contributors to the WBC are Susan Niditch (Genesis), Katherine Doob Sakenfield (Numbers), Jo Ann Hackett (1 and 2 Samuel), Carol A. Newsom (Job), Renita J. Weems (Song of Songs), Gale A. Yee (Hosea), Tamara Cohn Eskenazi (Ezra-Nehemiah), Mary Ann Tolbert (Mark), Jouette M. Bassler (1 and 2 Corinthians), Pheme Perkins (Phillipians, 1 Thessalonians, Philemon), and Gail R. O'Day (1, 2, and 3 John). The commentaries themselves begin with a general discussion of critical issues germane to each book, followed by a narrative summary of its contents, and then a discussion of those texts that are of particular interest to women, either because women are present (or conspicuously absent), or because the texts contained female imagery, or because they deal with issues of particular interest to contemporary women. Dr. Adela Yarbro Collins of the University of Chicago writes of the WBC:

The appearance of *The Women's Bible Commentary* is an important event in the history of women's scholarship and spirituality. The various essays address feminist issues raised by the books of the Bible in a direct, thoughtful and sensitive way.

One of the great strengths of the commentary is that these issues are placed in the appropriate historical and literary contexts. The contributors are outstanding. I recommend it heartily both to students and general readers.

Writing a Commentary for *The Women's Bible Commentary*

I was both delighted, and daunted, by the prospect of writing a commentary on Ezekiel for the WBC. On the one hand, here was an opportunity to share with a wide audience of women and men selected passages from a biblical book whose author was recognized for his literary brilliance already in his own time, but whose work is often neglected today. On the other hand, many Ezekielian texts relevant to such a project were overwhelmingly misogynistic and violent. I thought it important to understand, as best we are able, the presuppositions and convictions that led Ezekiel to speak with such severity, but I also wanted readers to know that Ezekiel's message concerning, for example, physical abuse as a means of restoring a damaged marital relationship (Ezekiel 16 and 23) was most certainly not the final word. "...Ongoing dialogue with Ezekiel's difficult texts is important," I concluded, "not because one affirms their assertions but rather because they compel the reader to confront and think through important questions" (p. 190).

Apart from the unique problems that the book of Ezekiel posed (and each biblical book brought its own challenges), I attempted carefully to give the Ezekielian references to women, their status and experiences, as well as female imagery, their due without permitting my special focus to run riot over interpretation. Just how much does one make of the fact that in Ezekiel 19, we witness the lion cubs' (i.e., princes') demise through the eyes of their lioness mother, for example, or that the phrase "your mother" links the laments in 19:2-9 and 10-14? Can we explain the absence of female imagery in Ezekiel's oracles about Jerusalem's future restoration, given the abundance of such imagery in the book of Isaiah? My goal was to produce a commentary that, given the 6,000 word limit (ouch!), dealt fully and appropriately with the texts I had identified as germane to the task.

From *Woman's Bible* to *Women's Bible Commentary*

In their introductory essay, Newsom and

Ringe discuss their choice of title for the WBC:

The title of this volume pays tribute to Elizabeth Cady Stanton's pioneering work almost a century ago. But whereas she entitled her work the "Woman's Bible," we have chosen the plural, "Women's Bible." The reason for this is our recognition of the diversity among women who read the Bible and study it. There is no single "woman's perspective" but a rich variety of insight that comes from the different ways in which women's experience is shaped by culture, class, ethnicity, religious community, and other aspects of social identity. Indeed, one of the insights of feminism has been the recognition of the extent to which knowledge is perspectival. People see things or are oblivious to them in part because of how they have been formed through their experiences. They ask certain kinds of questions and not others for the same reasons.

Our hope is that, through your reading of *The Women's Bible Commentary*, you will learn to ask new questions and hear fresh answers from the biblical texts you explore in the course of your particular ministry.

1 Quoted by Dorothy C. Bass in "Women's Studies and Biblical Studies: An Historical Perspective," *JSOT* (1982):11.

The Women's Bible Commentary, Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 416 pages, \$19.95 (hardcover).



Fall Retreat: Weave Us Together

In a world embraced by autumn colors and warm breezes, seventeen women from diverse traditions and cultures gathered to weave together a powerful tapestry. Guided by the theme, "Out of Singular Roots," the women shared stories of their own spiritual journeys as a multicolored ball of yarn unwound itself hand-to-hand, connecting each individual in a web of common understanding.

Kinship, commitment, pieces becoming an integrated whole, partnership, growth, wisdom, courage, tradition, discovery, everchanging relationships with God, friendship, and music. These are the threads that brought the women together.

The evening was spent learning about intercultural transition, and witnessing the expression through dance of one woman's journey. The retreat was a time of quiet moments amid hectic routines, new friendships, and new discoveries in our yearning to understand one another.



WOMEN'S STUDY SERIES

The Fall study series entitled "What Do Women Scholars Do and How Do They Do It" is well under way. Attendance has been profitable for both students and community participants.

David Dismas (M.Div.) expresses his thanks in a recent letter:

As a male preparing for priesthood and pastorate in a church where women have yet to be admitted to the ranks of the clergy, I am more aware of inadequacies on my part in the offering of quality pastoral care to the women in my congregation.... The sense of "telling the story" that is such an important part of women's ways of doing theology should be a valued part of our doing theology at the parish level....I have often struggled with finding ways of getting women more involved in the way things are done in the church [the male way we do things]...It seems to me that I should be asking how can women's way of doing things enhance what we do - with the goal being a sharing of both ways for members that come from both ways of doing/feeling/thinking."

Beth Collier (Th. D.) comments:

...that women are involved in scholarly pursuits and perhaps are pursuing them differently from scholarly men have long been drums I have beat....My mind has been stimulated and my spirit troubled by the research that they reported. ...describing aspects of life and worship that have thus far been ignored, considered unimportant or useless for research....The trouble in my spirit comes specifically from Carrie Doehring's work on women's trauma and their adult images of God....I found a raised spectre of a kind of "spiritual abuse" at the "hands" of an amorphous Church, an abuse which has at its root a flawed conception of human-

ity and of God and of the relation of the two, and which includes the practical theology of our worship....the questions we ask, and the conclusions we reach, are valuable for our lives together.

In the spring semester the Shaw Center plans to follow up this series with regular sessions for women to discuss and seek guidance from women faculty and one another on their own scholarly papers.



News of Our Women Faculty

Carrie Doehring's recent work includes: "Developing a Feminist Pastoral Theology," *Journal of Pastoral Care*, (42) 1992 and "The Absent God: When Neglect Follows Sexual Violence," *Journal of Pastoral Care*, (42) 1992.

During the months of January to June 1993 Dana Robert will be a visiting faculty member at the University of Cape Town in South Africa.

Margaret Wiborg spoke in June 1992 on "Women's Liberation from a Historical Perspective," a presentation given to the Korean Ministers School at Mt. Pocono, Pa., sponsored by the Northeastern Jurisdiction Multi-Ethnic Center.

Linda Clark's recent work includes: "In Christ There Is No East or West," reprinted in *What We Say and What We Mean* (Louisville: Women's Ministry Unit, Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., 1991); "Hymn-Singing: the Congregation Making Faith," in *Carriers of Faith: Lessons from Congregational Studies*, eds. C. Dudley, J. Carroll, and J. Wind (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991); "The Hymns of Charles Wesley," in *GIA Quarterly* (2:4, 1991); "A View from the Pew," in *The Hymn* (January 1992); "Views from the Pews," in *Action/Information* (published by the Alban Institute, July 1992); and occasional papers published by Boston University School of Theology including "Report #3: The Choir," "Report #4: Worship--Part I; Worship--Part II," "Report #5: People Planning Worship," and "Report #6: Music in Churches." She performed as accompanist for Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, Newton Presbyterian Church, on May 5, 1991, and for Britten's *Rejoice in the Lamb*, Norwell UCC

Church, in April 1992. Linda has also given the following presentations: "Like Politics, All Religion Is Local," at annual meeting of the North American Academy of Liturgy, Minneapolis, Minn., January 1991; "Worship in Episcopal and United Methodist Churches in New England," NAAL meeting, Minneapolis, Minn., January 1991; "The Views from the Pew: Congregational Studies of 'the Old Hymns'," Hymn Society Meeting, St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minn., July 9, 1991; and "Gender in Preference for Styles of Worship in Episcopal and United Methodist Churches in New England," Episcopal Women's Historical Society Meeting, Minneapolis, Minn., October 1991.

Jennifer Rike's recent work includes: "On Chaos and Connection: Grand Canyon," *Keep the Faith*, Fall 1992.

Imani-Sheila Newsome recently served as a leadership team member and spoke on "A Closer Walk with God," and "The Use of Scripture in the African-American Tradition," at Notre Dame University in Indiana, August 17-21, 1992.



Thank You!

Thank you to summer staff member Donna Bolinger-Gonzalez (M. Div.). Donna leaves the Shaw staff to co-pastor, with her husband Edwin, the Iglesia Metodista Unida San Andreas in Jamaica Plain while she continues her studies. Donna also serves as contracted staff in the Education Department of the National Council of Churches. She is responsible for coordinating the activities of the Ecumenical Young Adult Ministry staff team, serving as liaison between the NCC and Youth Sub-unit of the World Council of Churches. She is part of the global planning committee for an Ecumenical Gathering of Youth and Students to be held in Brazil in July 1993.

Editor's Note:

With this issue, Gretchen Erb, final year M.T.S. student and Shaw staff member, assumes editorial responsibilities. Gretchen, a pastoral psychology major planning to do doctoral work in sociology, served as co-editor for Kairos in 1991-92. We acknowledge, with deep gratitude, the 1991-92 editorial work of June Goudey, former Shaw Scholar. June is completing her doctoral dissertation this year.



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Volume 9, Number 1

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Editor
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Upcoming Events:

March 2-3, 1993: Women and the Word, 1993: Bread for the Journey. Leaders will be: Kwok Pui Lan, Susan Thistlethwaite, and Susan Davies.

April 6, 1993: The Women of the Bonhoeffer Family During the Nazi Era. Renate Bethge, essayist and niece of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. This session, co-sponsored by the Shaw Center, will be moderated by June Goudey, former Shaw Scholar and Minister for Pastoral Counseling, Old South Church in Boston. School of Theology, Room 525, 4 p.m., free.

Boston University's policies provide for equal opportunity and affirmative action in employment and admission to all programs of the University.