

An Invitation to the Church

I.

The United Methodist Church is at a crossroads. We face either the peril of abandoning the Christian faith, thereby becoming unfaithful disciples of Jesus Christ, or embracing the promise of becoming God's instrument in a new awakening of vital Christianity. The causes of the crisis are complex and multiple. However, we believe that the central reason is our abandonment of the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture and asserted in the classic Christian tradition and historic ecumenical creeds. Specifically we have equivocated regarding the person of Jesus Christ and his atoning work as the unique Savior of the world. We have been distracted by false gospels. We have compromised in our mission to declare the true gospel to all people and spread scriptural holiness. For the sake of the kingdom of God, it is now time for action.

II.

The renewal, reform, and healing of our church can come only through the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. We cannot yet see clearly how God will lead us along this path. However, with John Wesley we affirm both the apostolic faith of the universal Church and the Wesleyan distinctives which give form to our faith, as articulated in the doctrinal standards of our own church (viz., the Articles and Confession of Faith, Wesley's *Standard Sermons* and *Explanatory Notes*). These constitute the essential, unchangeable truths of our tradition. We gladly own this anew for ourselves and seek to reclaim it for our whole church.

III.

Under God's judgment and by God's grace we covenant to participate in the Spirit's reconstruction of the church, which has been built upon the foundation of the faith once for all delivered to the saints. We covenant to engage in a revitalized mission which expresses our historic concern for social holiness and fidelity to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. To all United Methodists—regardless of race or gender—who desire to contend for this faith, we extend an invitation to join us in this endeavor.

In order to enact the *Discipline's* call to "doctrinal reinvigoration" and to avoid schism and prevent mass exodus, we intend to form a Confessing Movement within the United Methodist Church. By this we mean people and congregations who exalt the Lordship of Jesus Christ alone, and adhere to the doctrinal standards of our church.

We call upon all pastors, lay persons, and congregations to join with us in this Confessing Movement and to challenge and equip their people as agents of God's kingdom.

We look to the Council of Bishops for doctrinal oversight according to paragraph 514.2 "to guard, transmit, teach, and proclaim, corporately and individually, the apostolic faith as it is expressed in Scripture and Tradition, and, as they are led and endowed by the Spirit, to interpret that faith evangelically and prophetically." In particular, we ask the bishops to affirm their own teaching authority and to declare our church's commitment to Jesus Christ as the only Lord and Savior of the world.

We call upon the seminaries of our church to transmit the historic Christian faith. We call upon the boards and agencies of the church to fulfill their primary role of being servants of the local church.

IV.

The crisis we discern extends beyond our denomination. We witness similar strains and struggles among our sisters and brothers in all the churches of the West. Because we are baptized into the one universal Church, and because the problems we face will best be resolved by utilizing the gifts God gives to the whole community of faith, we rejoice in the stirrings for renewal that we see among other communions. We commit ourselves to praying with them for the coming of the kingdom in our midst.

If you pledge your support to this movement, please sign your name, address, phone number, and your local church. If your Administrative Board / Administrative Council has taken action to support this statement, please indicate and return to:

Dr. John Ed Mathison
Frazer Memorial United Methodist Church
6000 Atlanta Highway
Montgomery, AL 36117

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____

Local Church _____ Clergy Laity Administrative Board / Administrative Council

The following is a list of those who participated in the Atlanta Consultation on the Future of the United Methodist Church and who have signed "An Invitation to the Church."

William J. Abraham

Connie Roland Alt

Gerald H. Anderson

Paul M. Baddour

Rod Barnett

Andrea Bishop

William R. Bouknight III

Barry P. Boulware

Barbara Brokhoff

Elizabeth B. Brown

James B. Buskirk

William R. Cannon *

Ron Cansler

C. Norman Carter

Kevin R. Clancey

Phillip Connolly

J. Stanly Cosby

Bill Couch

Charlotte R. Dodson

Malone Dodson

James R. Downing Jr.

Maxie D. Dunnam

Thomas R. Dyer

Larry L. Eddings

Marion Edwards

Stan England

Stan Field

Scott N. Field

H. Eddie Fox

Elaine Friedrich

Craig Gallaway

Ira Gallaway

June Parker Goldman

Philip R. Granger

Gus Gustafson

Joe Hale

Jeannie Harper

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Chester H. Harris

Carl Harris

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William H. Hinson

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George Hunter

James Jackson

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Scott Jones

Kenneth Kinghorn

R. L. Kirk

Evelyn Laycock

Leicester Longden

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John R. McFarland

David McKeithen

Randell R. Mickler Jr.

Garry Moore

George E. Morris

William W. Morris *

Thomas C. Oden

J. Taylor Phillips

James (Polly) Pool

Wesley Putnam

Jerry Putnam

Edmund W. Robb Jr.

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David A. Seamands

Jon L. Setzer

Donald L. Shell

Charles Sineath

Michael Slaughter

Jim W. Smith

Budd L. Sprague

Paul T. Stallsworth

David M. Stanley

Jean Leu Stanley

Karl K. Stegall

Mack B. Stokes *

Gregory D. Stover

Alveron Vom Steeg

Richard J. Wills Jr.

Edward Wimberly

* Denotes Bishop

have constitutionally established doctrinal standards that are protected against revision by the First and Second Restrictive Rules. Since 1808, the General Conference has had no constitutional authority to "revoke, alter, or change our Articles of Religion; or to establish any new standards or rules of doctrine contrary to our present existing and established standards of doctrine." The four documents that define "Our Doctrinal Standards" (in addition to the General Rules) are clearly set forth in the 1992 Discipline, para. 67: (1) The Articles of Religion, (2) The Confession of Faith, (3) The Standard Sermons of Wesley, and (4) Wesley's Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament.

We envision a doctrinal reinvigoration of our Church, which includes a thorough re-engagement of the Wesleyan devotional tradition, a renewed employment of the means of grace for the sake of holy living, and a new obedience to God in the forming of our lives in covenant communities after the pattern of the mind which was in Christ Jesus.

AN INVITATION. We realize that in the present climate any effort to reclaim our doctrinal heritage will be regarded as an intrusion upon personal faith, which many have come to regard as a purely private matter. We believe that the Christian faith, which has been revealed to us in Christ Jesus, must be personally embraced; yet this same faith can and must once again be explained in clear and decisive terms faithful to the apostolic witness.

*THE STEERING COMMITTEE OF THE
ATLANTA CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE
OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH*

Rev. Dr. John Ed Mathison (Alabama),
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Prof. Thomas C. Oden (New Jersey)
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What is The
**Confessing
Movement**
WITHIN
the United Methodist
Church?



*WHAT IS THE CONFESSING MOVEMENT
WITHIN THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH?*

The Confessing Movement is a witness by United Methodist lay men and women, clergy, and congregations who pledge unequivocal and confident allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ according to "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). The faith of which Jude wrote is the Church's faith, the apostolic faith. Not a human contrivance, this faith centers on Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man; and on His life, death, resurrection, ascension, and promised return as attested in Holy Scripture.

THE CONFESSING MOVEMENT ASSERTS that the Church receives her faith as a gift from God; it is not an ideology we imagine or invent. The Confessing Movement asserts that the Church has an identity grounded in Jesus Christ, not created or projected out of our own desires and experiences. The Confessing Movement asserts that the Church has doctrine that binds the faithful, not to unchanging verbal formulations, but to God's self-revelation in human history that has been witnessed to by Scripture, summarized in confessional statements and standards, and praised in liturgical language that remains faithful to the apostolic witness.

WHAT IS OUR PURPOSE? The Confessing Movement will contend for the apostolic faith within the United Methodist Church. The Confessing Movement will seek to reclaim and reaffirm the Church's ancient

ecumenical faith in Wesleyan terms within United Methodism. The Confessing Movement will work in humility and reverence to clarify the doctrinal center and boundaries of classical Christian teaching.

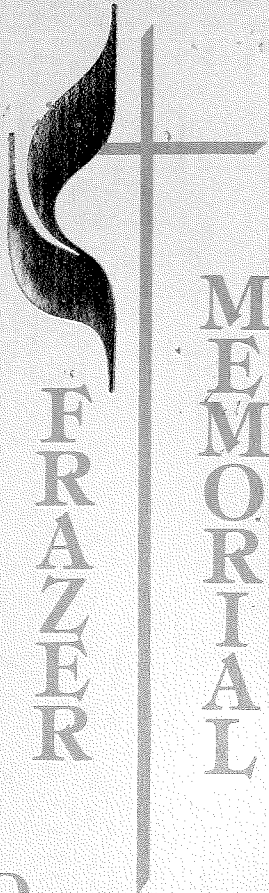
WHY NOW? Throughout the ages there have been times when the integrity of the Gospel has come under turbulent attack. At such times it becomes necessary for believers to attest clearly and confidently to the apostolic faith. We believe that such a time has come for the Church we love and serve. We are now witnessing a host of attempts to alter and diminish the faith.

Amply aware of our own sinfulness, and conscious of our complicity in the past by failing to confront these falsifications more promptly, we call upon lay leaders and pastors to stand up and boldly declare and uphold the faith with which we have been entrusted.

WHO ARE WE? We are a Movement within the United Methodist Church, inseparable from it, not apart from it. All of us intend to stay within it. We rejoice that our Wesleyan theological tradition stands firmly within the richness of classical Christian teaching. We pray for its renewal in each United Methodist congregation and conference. The Confessing Movement is not asking for a new definition of faith, but for a new level of integrity in upholding our historic doctrinal standards in a thoughtful, serious, and principled way. We look to our Council of Bishops to assert their traditional doctrinal teaching authority.

THE PRESENT CRISIS. Those who treat theology as a matter of personal experimentation have in recent years gained a new level of audacity. They have used the umbrellas of pluralism and inclusiveness to support an agenda of theological relativism, which hedges and equivocates on all doctrinal definitions. This in effect invites both laity and clergy to imagine that anything goes in United Methodist theology, and that there are no boundaries whatsoever. Some United Methodists elevate their private experience to the position of judge and arbiter of Christian faith. Others exchange the historic faith for political, therapeutic, sexual, or gender-based ideologies with religious veneers. This abandonment of classical Christianity is occurring in a church that has nearly lost its immune system with regard to false teaching—in a church that appears fearful of, and perhaps unwilling to face, even a minimal level of doctrinal discipline.

IS THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH ALREADY IN PRINCIPLE A CONFESSING COMMUNITY? It has at times been loosely and inexactly asserted that the United Methodist Church is not a confessional body or confessing church. While our church has not required formal written subscription (such as the explicit signing of a verbatim confession), from the beginning Methodists have had a clear and documented tradition of doctrinal standards which one cannot denounce with impunity from our pulpits. The United Methodist Church is already in principle, if not in constant daily practice, a confessing community of faith; because we



UNITED
METHODIST
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John Ed Mathison
Senior Minister

"come grow with us"

May 31, 1994

Dear Friends:

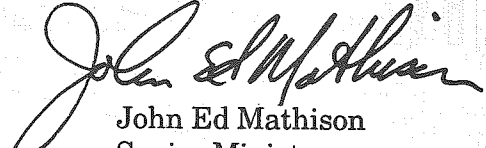
I was one of about 90 people invited by Bishop William R. Cannon, Dr. Tom Oden and Dr. Maxie Dunnam, to a meeting in Atlanta to discuss our responsibility for ministry through the United Methodist Church.

We felt the need to call ourselves to accountability concerning our personal ministry and our commitment to sound Biblical doctrine and practice. From this event came a document which is an invitation to all of us to examine ourselves, our churches, and The United Methodist Church in an effort to be the kind of church God wants for our day.

I was invited to serve as chairman of the continuing committee of the consultation from Atlanta. I am enclosing a copy of that Invitation to the Church, a brief statement about the Confessing Movement, and an opportunity for you to respond to this document.

My desire is to see all United Methodists joining hands to be a witness that is pleasing to Him who called us to serve.

For the Cause of causes,



John Ed Mathison
Senior Minister

JEM/db

SOCIAL QUESTIONS BULLETIN

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Methodist Federation for Social Action

Seeking Global Justice through the United Methodist Church

MFSA Targets the Tobacco Epidemic

Endorses the International Boycott of Philip Morris Products

When asked by a congressional committee whether he'd read a Surgeon General's report linking smoking and disease, the chairman of the Liggett tobacco company said he "never read it" and had "no knowledge" of the subject and no interest in acquiring such knowledge. Further, he justified making as much money as possible off tobacco, saying "I'm a businessman."

Almost daily the headlines document yet again the duplicity, the greed and the rank immorality behind tobacco marketing.

Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders and other tobacco industry critics maintain that the Joe Camel cartoon character, now joined by Josephine Camel (in a perverse nod to gender equality?), are actually designed to appeal to children and youth.

A major wave of protest threatens the profits and image of the tobacco industry. Lawsuits, state legislatures, U.S. regulatory agencies, and citizen action are focusing on these merchants of death. For example, the state of Mississippi is suing 13 cigarette manufacturers for the cost of medical programs for victims of smoking-related illnesses; and Cincinnati will prohibit all outdoor ads for to-

harmful, and seeking to roll back state and local laws, beginning with a California referendum masquerading as a "tobacco control measure."

MFSA finds tobacco marketing to be among the crassest forms of placing profits before people. Therefore we have joined the



campaign against tobacco marketing at home and abroad. This campaign is being orchestrated by INFACT, which has a history of running powerful international corporate accountability campaigns against Nestle's

tougher legislation on tobacco on the state level as in its current campaign in California.

Philip Morris is especially vulnerable because it markets so many common brand names in food, including about 10% of all supermarket shelf brands, as well as such international brands as Toblerone and Suchard.

Your MFSA national board now seeks your participation in this boycott and your promotion of it through church and community channels.

Demands of the boycott are for Philip Morris to

- stop marketing tobacco to children and to young people around the world,
- stop undermining public health efforts on tobacco, and
- pay for the high health care costs of the tobacco epidemic.

Boycott

Philip Morris Products

Kraft

Maxwell House

Oscar Mayer

Post

Thomas Kelly Speaks to the Federation

One of the committees of our MFSA national board was concluding its work with a devotional reading from Thomas Kelly. The committee chair Jim Perdue, from our Iowa chapter, had chosen to read a particular passage because, as he puts it, "the number one issue for social justice advocates is drawing the line so as not to feel one has to do everything."

Here's what Jim read from *A Testament of Devotion*:

"[A concern] is a particularization of my responsibility...in a world too vast and a lifetime too short for me to carry all responsibilities. My cosmic love, or the Divine Lover loving within me, cannot accomplish its full intent, which is universal saviourhood, within the limits of three score years and ten. But the Loving Presence does not burden us equally with all things, but considerably puts upon each of us just a few central tasks, as emphatic responsibilities. For each of us these special undertakings are our share in the joyous burdens of love."

Maybe Jim is right. I, for one, was arrested by this reading. This is a Word, a Word of God for me, I thought.

The reading concluded with Kelly's comment regarding "all the multitude of [other] good things that need doing:"

"Toward them all we feel kindly, but we are dismissed from active service in most of them. And we have an easy mind in the presence of desperately real needs which are not our direct responsibility. We cannot die on every cross nor are we expected to."

Back home after the meeting I turned to Thomas Kelly's *A Testament of Devotion*, which I had previously only glanced at. I finally found the passage Jim had read in a chapter on "The Eternal Now and Social Concern."

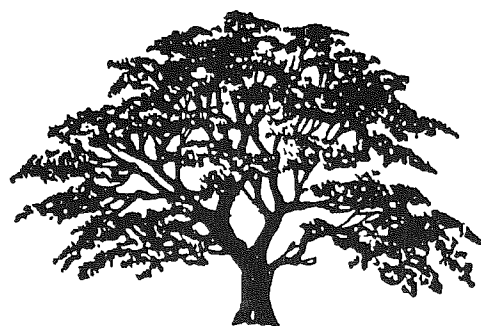
I was awed by the amazing relevance of this short collection of articles and talks by a Quaker philosopher who was felled in untimely fashion by a heart attack in 1941 at age 43. What a rare treasure – a treatment of social concern in the clear light of the Divine.

I had planned in this issue to discuss further the healing of broken institutions. But that can wait. After all, we must know

some measure of healing ourselves if we are to be agents of healing.

Kelly's words cry out for noticing, for allowing them to lead us, and to center us. Hear him further:

"Social concern is the dynamic Life of God at work in the world, made special and emphatic and unique, particularized in each individual or group who is sensitive and tender in the leading-strings of love. A concern is God-initiated, often surprising, always holy, for the Life of God is breaking through into the world. Its execution is in peace



and power and astounding faith and joy, for in unhurried serenity the Eternal is at work in the midst of time, triumphantly bringing all things up unto [Godself]."

Perhaps there is nothing more important for us who stand in the 87-year-old Methodist Federation tradition than to affirm our social concern as "God-initiated," as "the dynamic Life of God at work in the world" among those who are "sensitive and tender in the leading-strings of love." Let it be so.

George Douglas McClain

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Letters

In response to your two recent reflections on spirituality and justice, I highly recommend Kenneth Leech's new book *The Eye of the Storm: Living Spiritually in the Real World*.

Emma Moore-Kochlacs, Reseda CA

I find very objectionable the recent Methodist Federation letter highlighting the Best of Patriarchy. The authors seem to consider negative reactions to the women's Re-Imagining Conference, to be attacks on women. The content of what was said should be open for discussion and criticism. That in itself is not woman-bashing. I personally feel much of what the women advocated is off base and the Federation is off base in the letter it has just sent out.

Arthur M. Crawford, Meadville PA

As a 23-year-old male seminarian, I am greatly concerned that the Good News caucus is trying to use the "Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women" to restrict the participation of my sisters in Christ in theological discourse.

I am disappointed that the *United Methodist Reporter* would participate in this witch-hunt through unfair reporting of the Minneapolis "Re-Imagining" Conference, calling for the UM Women's Division to confess its "error" in having funded attendance of board and staff members. I am frightened that this journal could jeopardize my spiritual freedom, and that of Christians throughout God's church, by taking so rash and sensationalistic a stance as to suggest that Sophia Christology, the revival of a vital and ancient Christian tradition, must be considered a "heresy."

Proverbs 8:22-31 is a woman-centered image of God central to Christian imagination, since it was re-fashioned into the Prologue of John's Gospel (Jn 1:1-18), one of the most beautiful passages in the New(er) Testament.

That modern women can see in John's "Word of God Made Flesh" a reflection of "Lady Wisdom" in Proverbs is a tribute to the evangelist's intent, not prideful heresy as the UMR and the "Good News" caucus want to suggest.

Please continue to speak for my United Methodist sisters....

Chris Buckley, Claremont CA

MFSA in Action

Single-Payer Health Care

MFSA's national board has endorsed the principle of a single-payer approach to health care reform. In a parallel action, the **UM Board of Church and Society** has endorsed the **Single Payer Across the Nation (SPAN)** health-plan drive. SPAN seeks to replace "1500 insurers with a single publicly accountable insurance fund," similar to the Canadian plan. This principle is fundamental to the proposed **American Health Security Act** developed by physician-congressman **Jim McDermott** and endorsed by nearly 100 members of Congress.... Lutheran theologian **Michael Moller** has questioned competition as the best means to provide national health care, noting that the U.S. does not have competing police forces of competing armies.

Northwest Texas MFSA is Born!

There was much rejoicing at our May national board when our first MFSA chapter in Texas was chartered. The **Northwest Texas MFSA** chapter was organized by **Terry Thompson**, a physical education teacher with special interest in Guatemala and Central America. He serves as chapter convenor and representative to the national board. **Helen Releford** is co-convenor and membership secretary/treasurer is **Todd Rasberry**. Congratulations to our newest chapter!

Annual Conference Events

Among the outstanding speakers at MFSA-sponsored events at this year's annual conferences are:

- **Northern Illinois:** Prof. Ted Jennings, originator of a program in Lesbian and Gay Studies at Chicago Theological Seminary, the first of its kind in a mainline seminary.

- **West Virginia:** Iowa ecumenical relief coordinator, **Rev. Jim Perdue**, who is also on our Federation national board.

- **New York:** Prof. Catherine Keller, Drew Theological School, outspoken defender of Sophia theology as intrinsic to Trinitarian faith.

- **New England:** Rev. Christine Elliott, a pastor in Hope RI, speaking on "Spirituality and Social Justice."

- **South Indiana:** state United Mine Workers president **Bill Yackey** (a United Methodist).

Four Ball Awards Presented

The Lee and Mae Ball Awards presented May 14 during the Methodist Federation for Social Action's national assembly in Portland, OR included posthumous recognition to the **Rev. Michael Collins**, a founder of Affirmation and former MFSA board member who died 10 years ago of AIDS. Others honored were **Dorothy** and the **Rev. Alfred Dale** of Bellingham WA, life-long social activists, MFSA leaders, and retired missionaries with the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries; the **Rev. Jeanne Knepper** of Portland, a leading activist in the gay rights-ordination issue; and **Cherie and Gerald Garland** of Ashland OR, activists in Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays.



Cherie and Gerald Garland of Ashland OR were presented with a 1994 MFSA Ball Award for their pioneering role in organizing Southern Oregon Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG).

MFSA/MENUM Delegation to Toronto

At a recent meeting of the MFSA-sponsored **Middle East Network of United Methodists (MENUM)** at Drew Theological School, three persons were designated MFSA representatives to the United Nations meeting of Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine, of which MFSA is a member. The designated delegates, **Shirley Stevens**, Syracuse NY, **Cathy Miller**, Cleveland OH, and **Marilyn Stevens**, Oswego NY will attend the UN meeting in Toronto, Canada, June 30-July 2.... Concern was expressed that Alex Awad and his family still have no assurance of permanent residency, but only of a three-month travel visa. Friendly inquiries to the Israeli Embassy are encouraged as to when Alex may expect to receive a clergy visa.

Responsible Investing

Rev. Roger Lynn of Minneapolis, MFSA national secretary, addressed the UM pension board in March, asking the agency to decline investments in insurance companies that have tobacco holdings, to persuade fast-food franchises to stay smoke-free, and to encourage large drug store chains to stop selling tobacco.

Are You Missing from This Photo?



1994 MFSA Mexico retreat participants

Don't Let it Happen Again!

If you weren't present on our 1994 Mexico retreat, you should consider attending our eighth annual experience, January 5-14, 1995.

You will be treated to unforgettable hospitality by our Benedictine sister friends. You will also be challenged to deepen your understanding of the Mexican reality and of Mexican-American relations in the light of your faith.

The Chiapas uprising in January has created a whole new situation in Mexico. Be a part of it! Send in the coupon now for further details.

Please Send Me Details on MFSA's 1995 Mexico Retreat

Name _____
Address _____
City/State _____ ZIP _____
Phone _____

Return to MFSA, 76 Clinton Ave., Staten Island NY 10301.

"Re-Imagining" Revisited

Critics of the Re-Imagining Conference continue their ideological harassment of women doing theology.

The major casualty — along with the truth — has been Mary Ann Lundy, the highest ranking woman in the Presbyterian Church, who was forced to resign in the wake of millions of dollars of contributions withheld. Lundy had been instrumental in securing a large Presbyterian grant for the conference.

Ted Koppel's NBC-TV "Nightline" devoted its May 24 program to the Re-Imagining Conference. The UMs featured were Hamline University professor Rita Nakashima Brock and MFSAer Patricia Farris, a pastor in Los Angeles.

An Apology

We want to apologize for, and correct, the mistaken impression left in our recent MFSA mailing that implicates the Council of Bishops in "a modern inquisition." The Council has taken no position on the controversy, except to constitute a study committee. While there are individual bishops whose public statements denounce women's theological work, many bishops openly support such theological exploration. Members of the Council of Bishops named to a committee to study wisdom/Sophia include Bishops Kenneth Carder, chair, William Oden, Ann Sherer, Sharon Zimmerman Rader, Neil Irons, Richard Looney, Walter Klaiber, and Woodie White. We are confident that their report will rest on solid historical investigation and help to quash the inquisitorial tendencies.

Discerning the Issue at Stake

The central issue is the right of women and their male supporters to engage in exploratory dialogue and ritual and openness to fresh perspectives from women doing theology. At question is not the eternal validity of everything said or done in Minneapolis; what is at stake, rather, is whether women have a rightful place at the theological table.



Are women's gifts really welcome in the church? Here Leah Porter of Grand Rapids, MI, interprets Mary's words of rejoicing at the 1993 Convocation of UMs in Music, Worship, and Other Arts.

UMNS Photo

It is interesting that this controversy erupts in the 25th anniversary year of the brutal attack on gays at the Stonewall establishment, an event which is recognized as the beginning of the current gay liberation movement. This attack on women doing theology at Re-Imagining may also prove to be an historic, galvanizing moment in the women's theological movement. But in the meantime, however, many are paying a serious price and experi-

encing the suffering of prophetic Christians.

In many ways the repression Protestant women are receiving for their support of the Re-Imagining process is the Protestant parallel to the oppression of Roman Catholic women over the issue of women's ordination. Pope John Paul II stated the other week that there dare be no dialogue in the Catholic church over that issue. In both branches of the church strenuous efforts are underway to keep women on the periphery, "in their place."

Several Suggestions

- There is a beautiful litany on Wisdom on page 112 of the new UM hymnal. Use it in private devotion and occasionally in public worship.
- Read Proverbs 9:1-6 in worship and personal devotion.
- If you don't have it, secure the excellent video of the March 6 press conference where the "A Time of Hope — A Time of Threat" statement was made public. This is an excellent teaching tool. Available for only \$10 postpaid from Rev. Beryl Ingram-Ward, UTS Box 77, 3041 Broadway, New York NY 10027.
- Ask Hal Taussig, co-author of *Wisdom's Feast: Sophia in Study and Celebration* to address your group in person and interpret the biblical basis of Wisdom/Sophia Christology. Contact him at 215/242-0258.
- Pray that God may use this controversy, and use *us* in this controversy, to reform the church that there be "neither male nor female," but a genuine unity in Christ.

SOCIAL QUESTIONS BULLETIN

Methodist Federation for Social Action
76 Clinton Ave., Staten Island NY 10301

In This Issue —

MFSA Targets Tobacco
Thomas Kelly Still Speaks
"Re-Imagining" Revisited
MFSA in Action

Anne Marie Hunter
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"I am setting a plumbline in
the midst of my people"
Amos 7:8

May - June 1994

Pannenberg: "Re-Imagining" shows churches "surrendering faith"

The now-notorious "Re-Imagining" Conference that ignited so much controversy in the Presbyterian and United Methodist churches in the past six months is an example of "neo-paganism" and of ecumenical liturgy and theology run amok, says a leading ecumenical theologian. Professor Wolfhart Pannenberg of Munich, Germany, has called the women's theological conference held in Minneapolis last November a sign that Protestant churches are "surrendering the substance of the Christian faith."

So profound is this surrender to secularism, predicted Dr. Pannenberg, that the only surviving ecclesial communities in the third millennium will be Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant evangelical churches. Furthermore, unless main-line Protestant churches stop "waver[ing]" in their faith and their Christian identity, they will not present a suitable alternative to "the spiritual emptiness of modern life," said the Lutheran theologian who teaches ecumenical and systematic theology at the University of Munich.

Dr. Pannenberg didn't specify the "Re-Imagining" Conference in his speech, but amplified his remarks in a subsequent interview. He said he wasn't present in Minneapolis, but said he read the speeches and liturgy text.

He characterized the worship ceremony as having "enthroned" Sophia as a female goddess, which "is not in line with Christian teaching and is flagrantly opposed to biblical understanding, especially in the Old Testament."

The professor noted that it wasn't inevitable that Anglican and Reform churches would succumb to "the



Professor Pannenberg

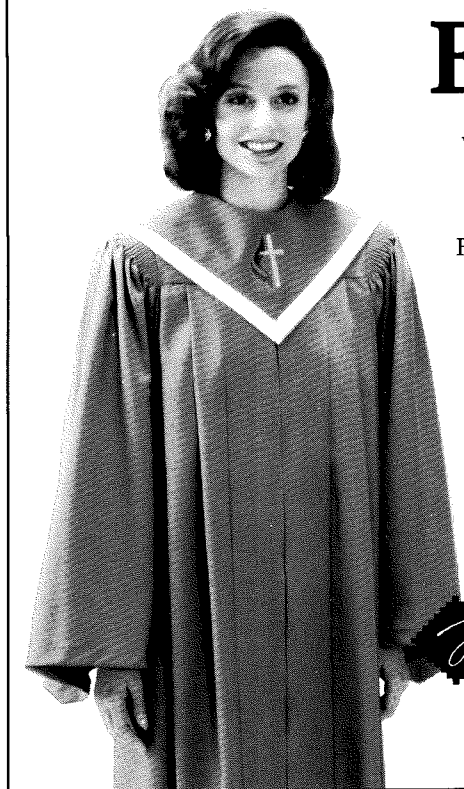
attractions of secularism." He added, however, that "to the degree that they do, they lose their Christian authenticity and become less attractive ecumenical partners for Roman Catholics."

Dr. Pannenberg added that "the greatest obstacle to ecumenism anywhere" is women's ordination. The issue has grown in magnitude, he said, because the Vatican sees it as being linked to radical feminism. Women pastors in Germany as well as Protestant clergywomen in North America have become "spokeswomen for radical feminists, especially for lesbians."

Such a linkage can only discredit women's ordination and do disservice to the future of feminist theology, he said. Radical feminism is "counterproductive to women's best interests in the church," he added.

by Patricia Lefevere. Reprinted with permission of The United Methodist Reporter.

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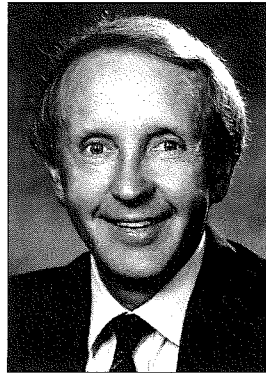
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Atlanta consultation forms steering committee, sends letter of invitation

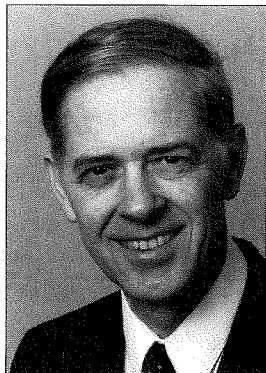
The ad hoc coalition of self-described "traditionalist" and "moderate" and "evangelical" United Methodists which met in Atlanta in April has formed a Steering Committee and named Dr. John Ed Mathison, senior pastor at Frazer Memorial UM Church (Montgomery, Alabama) as chairman. The Steering Committee also sent a letter of invitation to churches and lay leaders across the denomination.



Dr. John Ed Mathison

"We felt the need to call ourselves to accountability concerning our personal ministry and our commitment to sound Biblical doctrine and practice," Mathison said in a cover letter to the mailing about the Atlanta meeting and subsequent action. "From this event came a document which is an invitation to all of us to examine ourselves, our churches, and The United Methodist Church in an effort to be the kind of church God wants for our day."

Included with the "Invitation" document was an expanded statement, "What is the Confessing Movement within the United Methodist Church?" written by a Drafting Committee chaired by Prof. Thomas C. Oden of the Drew Theological School. The statement



Prof. Thomas C. Oden

begins by saying, "The Confessing Movement is a witness by United Methodist lay men and women, clergy, and congregations who pledge unequivocal and confident allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ according to

'the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints' (Jude 3)."

The statement continues, "The Confessing Movement asserts that the Church receives her faith as a gift from God; it is not an ideology we imagine or invent. The Confessing Movement asserts that the Church has an identity grounded in Jesus Christ, not created or projected out of our own desires and experiences. The Confessing Movement asserts that the Church has doctrine

that binds the faithful, not to unchanging verbal formulations, but to God's self-revelation in human history that has been witnessed to by Scripture, summarized in confessional statements and standards, and praised in liturgical language that remains faithful to the apostolic witness."

The Confessing Movement plans to "contend for the apostolic faith within the United Methodist Church." It will seek to "reclaim and reaffirm the Church's ancient ecumenical faith in Wesleyan terms within United Methodism." The Movement makes clear that it "is not asking for a new definition of faith, but for a new level of integrity in upholding our historic doctrinal standards in a thoughtful, serious, and principled way."

The statement further declares: "We envision a doctrinal reinvigoration of our church, which includes a thorough re-engagement of the

Wesleyan devotional tradition, a renewed employment of the means of grace for the sake of holy living, and a new obedience to God in the forming of our lives in covenant communities after the pattern of the mind which was in Christ Jesus."

Included in the mailing is a copy of the document drawn up in Atlanta, "An Invitation to the Church." It includes the names of the almost 90 persons who attended the Atlanta event and have since expressed willingness to join as a signatory to the Atlanta "Invitation" statement.

Members of the Steering Committee, which will continue to direct the activities that began in Atlanta, include in addition to Chairman Mathison, Prof. Thomas C. Oden (Secretary), Bishop William R. Canon, the Rev. Maxie D. Dunnam, the Rev. Andrea Bishop, the Rev. William Hinson, the Rev. Ira Gallaway, Evelyn Laycock, the Rev. Budd L. Sprague, and David M. Stanley.

The Drafting Committee was composed of Oden, Sprague, Prof. William J. Abraham, the Rev. Paul T. Stallsworth, Mark Horst, Leicester R. Longden.

For further information about the Confessing Movement, contact: Dr. John Ed Mathison, Frazer Memorial United Methodist Church, 6000 Atlanta Highway, Montgomery, AL 36117.

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A Quarterly Newsletter of the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual

Editorial

Strides made by women in all religions are noticeable. For example, an outpouring of books this season by and about Buddhist women provides inspiration to all of us. There is now a good volume for young girls contemplating ministry as a vocational option, a book many of us needed growing up. These are the fruits of our collective labor and they help enormously.

Backlash is a measure of success in our circles. So it is interesting to watch the backlash in denominations and in the right-wing press against the wonderful "Re-imagining" conference held in Minneapolis in November 1993. It means some people did something right, and other people are noticing. Of course it also means that heads will roll and jobs will be lost, but results of the collective imagination are simply too powerful to be undone.

Likewise, we are delighted to see an increase in the number of people who use our Resource Center, attend programs, request information and join WATER's mailing list. The more the merrier, of course, including visitors to the office, interns, visiting scholars and people who seek our collaboration. As the Grail women, who are celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of Grailville, have long intoned, "Together, we are a genius."

The real challenge is to find ways to sustain our efforts over the long haul, to growth exponentially in the budget area as we grow in ideas and commitment. Perhaps the best clue comes from the donor who said, "I only wish it could be more because I believe so in what you are doing." We do too, but somehow, together, it is always enough.



Re-Imagining: I Wish You Had Been There

by Mary E. Hunt

Bless Sophia,
Dream the vision,
Share the wisdom
Dwelling deep within.

This beautiful Hawaiian chant resounded countless times in Minneapolis, November 4-7, 1993 during "Re-imagining," an historic conference that future generations will study like Trent and Chalcedon, times when new eras in Christian history open. The gathering was sponsored by a broadly based steering committee as the U.S. expression of the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women. It was organized under the aegis of various ecumenical agencies in the Twin Cities and directed by a talented group of women.

You had to be there to appreciate the complexity, innovation and organization of the event—the art, music, speeches, meals, dance, discussion, exhibits all happening as a well choreo-

were turned away for lack of space, I predict that you will soon feel the positive impact of this marvelous undertaking. Fortunately, the 24 tapes of the sessions are available and highly recommended (\$5/tape or \$60 for all of them; order from: Re-imagining, 122 W. Franklin Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55404). Like the weekend, these materials make a splendid course in the latest insights, dynamics and questions as women re-imagine things theological.

Re-imagining was an inspired theme which virtually every speaker took seriously and attempted to do. This was a conference where the sky was the limit and we were airborne most of the time. Participants sat at assigned tables for the entire weekend, where art supplies (crayons and markers) and ritual props (cups, herbs, egg-shaped noise makers) made full, embodied participation easy.

At day's end one's whole table moved to another spot in the room for a new perspective each day. The move brought participants closer to

*...what did we reimagine and
what difference did it make? Everything.*

graphed whole. A cavernous convention hall was filled to the fire regulations with more than two thousand participants, mostly women but including several dozen men. One third of the participants were ordained clergy. Every state except Nevada was represented, as well as twenty-seven countries, including Australia, New Zealand and Brazil (several of the international guests made WATER the next stop on their U.S. itineraries).

The majority of participants were from main-line Protestant denominations, with 243 Roman Catholics, one Buddhist and various other practitioners all engaged in the collective process of thinking anew about traditional topics.

Even if you were not there, and especially if you were one of hundreds of disappointed who

one of the giant works of art that were being created while we watched. Or, it took us farther from one of the music stages where choirs and musicians kept the room rocking, or, alternately, nearer to the center stage where speakers turned their bodies (and the plexiglass podium which held their notes) 360 degrees during the course of their remarks so that each corner of the room was able to see the speakers' faces. These dynamics were more than gimmicks. They were "re-imagined" ways of being many people in a large setting and giving priority to everyone.

Right-brain activities equalled left brain input for a refreshing change. But the art, movement and singing were facilitated with such
(continued on page 2)

Re-imagining...

(continued from page 2)

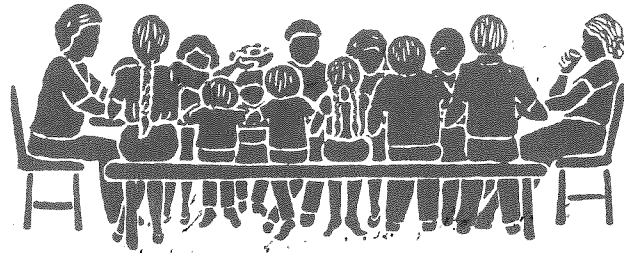
come. There was a sense that one would have to box up her reimagined faith and return to the "faith of our fathers" in order to minister in patriarchy. I got the impression that many women dreaded it, my signal that we need to name, develop and sustain feminist ministry so that the reimagined will become the norm. That will take hard work, but from the looks of "Re-imagining," women are more than up to it.

It is no surprise then that some denominations which gave seed money and whose staff members were visible, notably the Presbyterians and Methodists, are hearing complaints from their conservatives. The conservatives got the message: churches and society are different, and will become even more different because thousands of people combine imagination and commitment to "make all things new," not just in Minneapolis but in myriad efforts all over the world of which this conference was but a sample. If that is worrisome to some, they might try the Hawaiian chant to calm themselves:

Bless Sophia,
Dream the vision,
Share the wisdom
Dwelling deep within.

Then they too can engage in the faithful task of reimagining Christian religious basics, a task which got such a strong push in Minneapolis.

Mary E. Hunt, Ph.D., co-director of WATER, is a feminist liberation theologian and ethicist.



The Church on the Hill

by Mary E. Hunt

Every June more than one hundred people crowd into the Kirkridge Conference Center for a weekend gathering of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Christians. Years of theological training and work in the field have left me mildly (sometimes violently) allergic to church. But "on the hill" every June I can't get enough. Something happens there that does not happen most of the time in church. People who have to explain, defend and literally beg for membership and ordination in mainline churches are church for a change. That fundamental unfairness accounts for my usual allergy, for why it is literally bad for my

people, humbled to be there, learning from each other even when we disagree, and rejoicing in the power of it all. I know I do. Women meet together and men meet together for one session, but most of the weekend is a mixed gathering where we see how different we are by gender, how much the same in hope.

Over the now seventeen years of this annual gathering, however, the highlight is always the Saturday evening fishbowl. A group of participants speak very personally about their lives, talking with one another in a small group while the rest of us gather around them to support and

Life does not get holier than this, as we sit, most with kleenex in hand, and listen to the myriad ways in which fragile human spirits triumph over the pernicious evils of homohatred.

spiritual health to try to be church most other places, and why I long for the church on the hill.

The weekend is more than a nice get-away. It is a chance to meet and hear from a stunning diversity of people, admittedly more white than anyone wishes, but still a range of experiences and perspectives that is awesome. Closeted clergy go to Kirkridge to be themselves; people living with AIDS find a safe place. A lesbian couple pronounced their commitment at the closing liturgy one year; yes, Virginia, some people have met their mates there. But the real virtue of the experience is how it provides some glimpse of what it could be to be church if all were welcome.

Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, evangelical feminist writer, and John McNeill, psychotherapist and author who was ousted from the Jesuits, provide solid, mature, inspirational leadership. I have been privileged to join them for several years, this year along with Bill Smith, a graduate student at Pacific School of Religion, a gutsy poet of a man living with AIDS. Janie Spahr and Coni Staff are on the June 9-12, 1994 schedule, along with John and myself.

Topics range from death to strategies, from truth to faith, from relationships to good sex. I notice that speakers bring our very best to our

gain clarity from their conversation. Life does not get holier than this, as we sit, most with kleenex in hand, and listen to the myriad ways in which fragile human spirits triumph over the pernicious evils of homohatred. The closing eucharist is almost anticlimactic after this sacred sharing, but I would not miss it either since its fullness and authenticity linger with me over the months when I see it elsewhere so partial and profaned by prejudice and deceit.

Year to year a lot of the same people come back, but there are always dozens of new people too who dip into the church on the hill and go away cleansed of self-hatred and invigorated by community love. Some heterosexual people come, also some parents of lesbigay children wanting to be church in this way. A cousin of mine is a regular participant, a talented gay man who works with people with AIDS. We cherish the chance to be together, to catch up on the family gossip and tighten our ties during these middle years when friends and elder relatives slip away. If we did not have Kirkridge, our family would be the poorer, and so would so many other families whether they know it or not. (For information and registration materials contact: Kirkridge, Bangor, PA 18013, 215/588-1793).



Re-imagining...

(continued from page 1)

grace that those of us who do not excel at them (she stated honestly) were made to feel comfortable. We were made to feel right at home, following our floor leader and relying on the energy of the whole to carry us along.

Local women provided an unparalleled level of hospitality, down to the smallest detail, including a ready supply of mittens and scarves for those who braved Minneapolis from warmer climes. The Minnesota flavor ran throughout the event without overwhelming it, making it a local conference at which the whole world was welcome. Imagine it as a model that could be replicated elsewhere.

Concretely, what did we reimagine and what difference did it make? Everything. Here is a sample: Bernice Johnson Reagon, founding director of Sweet Honey in the Rock, sang the hard questions from the perspective of an African American ethnomusicologist, and answered them with creative challenges. Chung Hyun Kyung, Korean theologian, asked "What's God got to do with it?" and invited women to eat the apple of resistance. Delores Williams, Kwok Pui-Lan and Barbara Lundblad re-imagined Jesus brilliantly from their various perspectives at a conference later critiqued by the religious

an exhibit hall that was as educational as it was convenient for holiday shopping. Contemplate art exhibits including representations of Minnesota women who were victims of violence. Conjure up endless caucuses on every imaginable topic, and women with disabilities well integrated into the event. You begin to get the gestalt.

One breakthrough was an action by lesbian women, led by CLOUT (Christian Lesbians Out Together), who signaled the need to end homophobia in church and society. Out and proud lesbian women circled the center stage, and invited the assembly to stand and sing with us. A woman whose hand I held whispered, "I hope my ordination committee does not find out." The personal cost for some women reminded the assembled of how far we have come, but how far we still need to go.

The conference was not without its shortcomings. It was a missed opportunity to do the sustained anti-racism work that groups made up mostly of euro-american women need to do in this country. Another lack was simply the absence of some of the most significant players in the field, theologians who have made women's issues their life's work. Of course economics dictate such choices, but still they were missed. Another problem was the lack of concerted action for local and collective work after the meet-

...the foretaste of what "church" might be like if the skills and talents of women, our theological and ethical priorities were taken seriously, gave hope that even these problems will be tackled in the near future.

right as lacking recognizable Christian content.

Creation, family and sexuality, models of church and ministry, language, the arts and ethics were all reimagined in lively, participatory sessions. The tapes capture the essence and are invaluable for spreading this good news. The same process went on in workshops and over meals, fueled by decades of women's work and fueling decades of efforts to come.

Plenary sessions were actually extended liturgical events with lectures and table discussions interspersed with singing, prayer and sacrament. Every session began with meditation and/or music, hallowing the experience ahead as participants took each other and the act of reimagining seriously. The Hawaiian chant greeted each speaker as a blessing, and I had the sense that each woman literally gave her best because of it.

Imagine thousands of people sitting down to a Minnesota thanksgiving meal, complete with wild rice. Picture denominational dinners and

ing was over. But the accomplishments, especially the foretaste of what "church" might be like if the skills and talents of women, our theological and ethical priorities were taken seriously, gave hope that even these problems will be tackled in the near future.

By the end of the event I could feel both exhilaration and a certain dissonance rising. The exhilaration was obvious--this was a church conference at which justice, mutual empowerment and the holy were the agenda, rather than the mix of piety and infighting over an agenda set by someone else that has become typical. Some women from the Church of the Brethren, empowered by the assembly, announced that after years of wrangling over their patriarchal name, they were renaming themselves "Church of Reconciliation." Let it be so.

However, especially for some ordained women ministers, there was the inevitable and unenviable return to the churches from which they had

(continued on page 3)

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WATER is a feminist educational center, a network of justice-seeking people that began in 1983 as a response to the need for serious theological, ethical and liturgical development for and by women. We work locally, nationally and internationally doing programs, projects, publications, workshops, lectures, retreats, counseling and liturgical planning which have helped thousands of people to be a part of an inclusive church and society.

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Women's Power

serpent covers me, head to foot,
In endless circles--covers me,
That I may live forever, in this
Form or, another? The skin she
Leaves behind glitters with
The question, with the answer,
With the promise:
"Do you remember yourself?"
"I am always a woman."

Song Refrain

"Voices" from **Singing for Our Lives**, by Holly Near, c 1981 Hereford Music, words adapted by Diann Neu for this ritual:

Listen to the power within yourself (2x)
Calling out the messages of the earth and sea.
Telling us what we need to know in order to
be free
Listen to the power within yourself.

2. Relating Intimately

(The reader puts a heart in the center of the circle and proclaims:) A reading on the imperative of intimacy from **Cries of the Spirit** by Marilyn Sewell, c 1991:

Women value human closeness. Though drawing near puts one at some risk, to be sure, it is in the touching of one with another that we become most fully ourselves. And the strong, sure presence of someone else warms the chill of the night... [I]ntimacy may exist between friends or between lovers or within the family, but at its best it includes a radical respect for the other and the willingness to be vulnerable.

Song Refrain

Listen to the power of intimacy...

3. Nurturing the Spirit

(The reader puts a lit candle in the center and proclaims:) A reading from **Beyond God the Father**, by Mary Daly, c 1973:

Why indeed must "God" be a noun? Why not a verb--the most active and dynamic of all? Hasn't the naming of "God" as a noun been an act of murdering that dynamic Verb? And isn't the Verb infinitely more personal than a mere static noun? The anthropomorphic symbols for God may be intended to convey personality, but they fail to convey that God is Be-ing. Women now who are experiencing the shock of nonbeing

and the surge of self-affirmation against this are inclined to perceive transcendence as the Verb in which we participate--live, move, and have our being.

Song Refrain

Listen to the power of the Spirit...

4. Working in Solidarity to Transform Society

(The reader puts the tapestry, such as an arpillera from Chile, or some other symbol from another country, in the center of the circle and proclaims:) A reading from "Working in Solidarity to Transform Society," by Mary E. Hunt, from **WATERwheel**, Summer 1990.

Solidarity work that emerges from justice-seeking friendships is solidarity work with a human face, letting the most deeply affected set the agenda, telling the rest of us how we can be helpful and humane. It is work that includes hugs as well as legislation, watching one another's children grow as well as stopping nuclear war, attending to the environment as well as ending global conflict. Solidarity is just as spiritual as sacrament is political in women-church.

Song Refrain

Listen to the power of solidarity...

Reflect Together

Women are powerful! We are powerful within ourselves, in relating with others, through our spiritual connections, and in our solidarity work.

What is the source of your power? How do you nourish it? And how do you celebrate it? Think about these questions for a moment and then share your reflections so that we can get a glimpse of women's power. *(Sharing.)*

Sing Together

Hawaiian chant from "Re-imagining:"

Bless Sophia,
Dream the vision,
Share the wisdom
Dwelling deep within.

Bless Bread and Drink

Touch this bread and drink. *(The blesser holds them toward all gathered.)*

Blessed are you, Holy Source of Power, for creating powerful women. Feed us this power

of inner connection and outer strength. Through this bread and drink, fill us with energy to encourage ourselves, each other and those we meet to know our power and to use it for justice. Let us receive power by eating and drinking. *(Sharing of bread and drink.)*

Bless Our Power

Let us acknowledge our power. Touch one another and please respond: We are powerful!

Blessed are we when we discover our strength, accept our power, and make choices out of the integrity of our deepest spiritual impulses. **We are powerful!**

Blessed are we when we respect the other and are willing to be vulnerable in an intimate relationship. **We are powerful!**

Blessed are we when we participate in transcendence, nurture our spirits and make known the Holy One. **We are powerful!**

Blessed are we when we engage in solidarity and justice work to transform all oppression. **We are powerful!**

When else are we powerful? Tell us in the form "Blessed are we when..." and we will respond with "We are powerful!"

Send Forth

Filled with power and affirmed in it, let us send one another forth to be powerful. Let us strengthen one another by embracing one another and saying, "You are powerful!" *(Greeting.)*

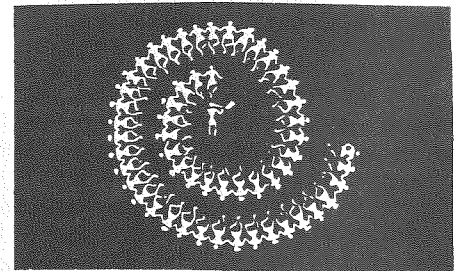
Sing and Dance Together

"Claim Your Power" by Marsie Silvestro:

(Refrain) Woman, let the spirit in your heart
Rise up (rise up) to claim your power (2x).

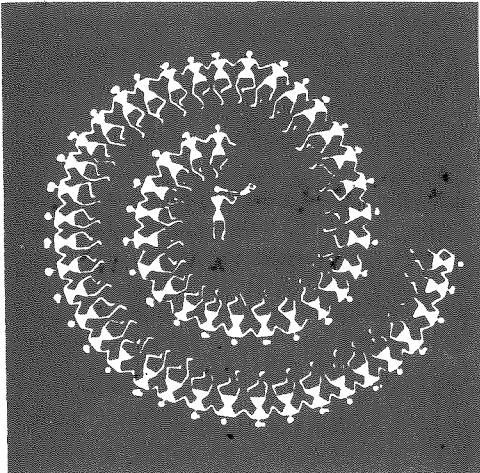
We are women gathered here
Bringing all our gifts we share
The truth has empowered us
We're working for justice
We are... We are women-church.
So... *(Refrain)*

Diann L. Neu, M.Div., STM, is a feminist liturgist and therapist who co-directs WATER.



Celebrating

by Diann L. Neu



Background

Women are growing more powerful within ourselves, and in a society that would wish otherwise. We need to affirm women's power, acknowledge its roots and use it to transform society.

This liturgy celebrates women's power. Use it as a model for your group celebration or for personal reflection. The script you see here is a guide. Invite people who will lead the various parts to use their own words rather than read from a piece of paper.

Preparation

Create a circle of chairs, one for each participant. Place a kaleidoscope and a bowl of smoldering herbs (such as dried sage, cedar, pine) in the center of the circle. Give each of the four readers one of the symbols of power that corresponds to her reading: an egg, a felt or paper heart, a candle and matches, a tapestry of solidarity such as a weaving from another culture or country.

Name the Circle

Welcome to this celebration of women's power. Let us name our circle tonight by focusing women's power, passing a kaleidoscope around, looking into it, speaking our name, and sharing something about what we see as women's power. (Sharing.)

(If there are people in your group who do not see with their eyes, choose a symbol associated with touch that is appropriate such as a rock.)

Call to Gather

Women's power is all of this and more. Look at what we have seen as women's power. Imagine a world filled with women who believe in our power!

Tonight we gather to experience and affirm

our power as women. We gather to acknowledge that our power makes a difference in transforming ourselves, our relationships, our spirituality, and our society.

Let us celebrate women's power! Let us celebrate our power!

Sing Together

"Claim Your Power" from *Crossing the Lines*, by Marsie Silvestro, c 1987 Moonsong Productions:

(Refrain) Woman, let the spirit in your heart
Rise up (rise up) to claim your power (2x).

We are women gathered here
Bringing all our gifts we share
The truth has empowered us
We're working for justice
We are... We are women-church.
So... (Refrain)

We bring the wisdom of the old
While calling on what visions hold
We're making connection from all
earth's directions.
We are... We are women-church.
So... (Refrain)

Exorcise Abusive Power

In order to focus on constructive powers we must let go of abusive powers. The hurts, violations and disempowerment of each woman belong to all women. Women's power has been taken away by a sexist system that denies women's basic rights. From all of these we exorcise all women on this night.

We respond to each abuse of power by saying three times the words: "Be gone! Be gone! Be gone!" while adding a gesture using our arms, legs, bodies, heads to symbolize a casting off of the abusive power.

1. The fears women have of our own natural powers--
Be gone! Be gone! Be gone!
2. Believing women's bodies and souls are dirty, sinful and inferior--
Be gone! Be gone! Be gone!
3. The stereotyping of women that does violence to women, children, and society--
Be gone! Be gone! Be gone!
4. Jealousy and aggression that separate woman from woman, sister from sister--
Be gone! Be gone! Be gone!

5. Structures of racism and apartheid that separate women of various racial groups--
Be gone! Be gone! Be gone!

6. Chains of classism, sexism, heterosexism and ageism that bind women everywhere--
Be gone! Be gone! Be gone!

7. All forms of patriarchy that suffocate women's spirits--
Be gone! Be gone! Be gone!

Cleanse with Herbal Ashes

Let us cleanse this space so that good power can fill it. This smudging bowl is filled with sage and cedar. Sage represents wisdom. Cedar drives away unfriendly spirits. We will pass the bowl around and encircle each other with a cloud of power.

Let us stand. When you receive the bowl, breathe in its healing power. Turn to the person on your left and invite her to breathe in the healing power. Encircle her with healing by passing the smoke down the front of her, across her arms and up her back. Hand her the bowl and invite her to do the same to the woman on her left.

Sing Together

Hawaiian chant from "Re-imagining:"

Bless Sophia,
Dream the vision,
Share the wisdom
Dwelling deep within.

Proclaim Sources of Women's Power

Tonight we proclaim four sources of women's power: ourselves, our relationships, our Spirit, and our work. Listen. Remember. Nurture your spirit. Be empowered.

1. Owning Self

(The reader puts the egg in the center of the circle and proclaims:) A reading from "Song of the Self: The Grandmother" by Alma Luz Villanueva, from *Life Span*, c 1984:

Surrounded by my shields, am I:
Surrounded by my children, am I:
Surrounded by the void, am I:
...Utter darkness I inhabit--
There, I watch creation unfold--
There, I know we begin and end--
Only to begin, again, and again--
Again. In this darkness, I am
Turning, turning toward a birth:
My own--a newborn grandmother
Am I, suckling light. Rainbow

Resources



Adams, Carol J., editor. *ECOFEMINISM AND THE SACRED*. New York: Continuum, 1993 (340 pages, \$24.95).

Cross-cultural and interfaith perspectives on ecofeminism establish it as a resource for justice and peace. This stellar collection is skillfully edited to make it a first rate text.

Angelica, Jade C. *A MORAL EMERGENCY: BREAKING THE CYCLE OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE*. Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1993 (169 pages, \$10.95).

A welcome start on a tough topic. Stories and statistics suggest strategies and evoke urgency.

Brasfield, Alice and Elisabeth Lunz, editors. *VOICES OF EXPERIENCE: LIFESTORIES OF CLERGYWOMEN IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)*. Louisville, KY: Women's Ministry Unit, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (200 pages, \$5.95).

These are wise women worth listening to as they trace the history of ordained women in ministry and hail their accomplishments.

Brereton, Virginia Lieson. *FROM SIN TO SALVATION: STORIES OF WOMEN'S CONVERSIONS, 1800 TO THE PRESENT*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991 (176 pages, \$10.95).

How interesting to see the ways language and commitment work for women from becoming a Christian to coming out as a lesbian.

Buehrig, Marga. *WOMAN INVISIBLE: A PERSONAL ODYSSEY IN CHRISTIAN FEMINISM*. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1993; originally published in German, 1987 (126 pages, \$11.95).

A wise introduction to the field of feminist theology by a well respected practitioner.

Fiorenza, Elisabeth Schussler. *BUT SHE SAID: FEMINIST PRACTICES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992 (272 pages, \$24).

Like *IN MEMORY OF HER*, this is an abso-

lute must for feminist biblical work. Elisabeth sets the pace and style for future work with her creative erudition, proving once again that ideas are essential to the praxis of liberation.

Herd, Gilbert and Andrew Boxer. *CHILDREN OF HORIZONS: HOW GAY AND LESBIAN TEENS ARE LEADING A NEW WAY OUT OF THE CLOSET*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993 (290 pages, \$25).

A new generation adds its style, struggle and savvy to being out in an unfriendly society. There is much to learn from these new experiences, as well as to learn what needs to be taught.

Isherwood, Lisa and Dorothea McEwan. *INTRODUCING FEMINIST THEOLOGY*. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993 (158 pages, \$14.95).

A good guide for the uninitiated to the basic contours of Christian feminist theology, already needs updating to include womanist, mujerista and other efforts that are shaping the conversation. These authors are among the editors of the journal, "Feminist Theology," available from the same press for \$21 per year.

Luczak, Raymond, editor. *EYES OF DESIRE: A DEAF GAY & LESBIAN READER*. Boston: Alyson Publications, 1993 (314 pages, \$9.95).

If coming out as a hearing person is tough, coming out as a deaf person is even tougher. Stories in this important anthology reveal the courage, humor and daring of an important sector of the lesbian/gay/bisexual movement.

McRae-McMahon, Dorothy. *BEING CLERGY, STAYING HUMAN: TAKING OUR STAND IN THE RIVER*. Washington, DC: The Alban Institute, 1992 (73 pages, \$10.95).

Hurrah for common sense. Couple it with well thought through boundaries, and one can have a satisfying and productive ministerial career, and a full personal life.

McGrath, Ellen, Gwendolyn Puryear Keita, Bonnie R. Strickland and Nancy Felipe Russo, editors. *WOMEN AND DEPRESSION: RISK FACTORS AND TREATMENT ISSUES*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1990 (123 pages, \$19.95).

With so many women being treated for depression, this is a useful overview of what it is, who suffers and what to do. Bibliography is especially welcome as helping professionals seek better information.

Mollenkott, Virginia Ramey, editor. *WOMEN OF FAITH IN DIALOGUE*. New York: Crossroad, 1990 (195 pages, \$9.95).

This compact volume should not be missed

when seeking sensible questions and reliable answers on the impact of feminism on many world religions.

Morrison, Eleanor S. *HONORING THE GIFTS OF WISDOM AND AGE: THE CRONING CELEBRATION FOR OLDER WOMEN*. 1993 (40 pages, \$5). Available from Leaven, Inc., P.O. Box 23233, Lansing, MI 48909.

A wonderful resource for planning a croning ceremony. Includes a description of four cronings plus ideas for music, meditations, readings.

O'Connor, Sr. Francis Bernard, C.S.C.. *LIKE BREAD, THEIR VOICES RISE! GLOBAL WOMEN CHALLENGE THE CHURCH*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press (208 pages, \$9.95).

The book, and accompanying video "Crumbs from the Table" (50 minutes, \$29.95), make a persuasive case for the ordination of Catholic women priests. Women in Bangladesh, Brazil, Uganda and the U.S. represent the voices of millions on an idea whose time has more than come. But, will women be able to reshape priesthood enough to want it?

Purvis, Sally B. *THE POWER OF THE CROSS: FOUNDATIONS FOR A CHRISTIAN FEMINIST ETHIC OF COMMUNITY*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993 (128 pages, \$14.95).

Problems with the cross are legion for feminists. Dr. Purvis tries to solve some of them with a well thought out critique of power and a less than persuasive argument for a "cruciform community."

Saracino, Mary. *NO MATTER WHAT*. Minneapolis, MN: Spinsters Ink, 1993 (240 pages, \$9.95).

Mom falls in love with a priest; Dad is an abusive, religious fanatic. The children's feelings and experiences make this novel a compelling read about dysfunctional dynamics and their impact on generations to come.

Roscoe, Will. *THE ZUNI MAN-WOMAN*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991 (302 pages, \$12.95).

Berdaches are persons who combine aspects of both women and men. This story of We'wha, a Zuni berdache, reveals the respect accorded these people in Pueblo culture, with plenty of lessons for other societies. Conclusion: gender bending is not new.

Stortz, Martha Ellen. *PASTORPOWER*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993 (143 pages, \$10.95).

Reflections on the power of powers, a step in the direction of responsible care.

Where WATER Staff Work

In Memory of Her

from Julie F. Parker:

In honor of my beautiful baby girl, **Marisol Grace Parker Crawford**, who is hope for all.

from Linda F. Weber:

In memory of **Erickson Ficklin**, beloved mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, aunt, cousin, woman of love.

from Margee Adams Iddings:

In memory of **John Connelly**, father of **Pat and Alice Connelly**, a devout Catholic father who encouraged his daughter to become a strong lay leader and his son to be a faithful friend of mine.

Our litany of love and thanksgiving for inimitable women, children and men in our lives continues to grow. New names will be published from time to time in **WATERwheel**. What better springtime gift for a loved one than to make a contribution "in memory of her" to WATER's special commemorative fund? Be sure to send a brief expression of your special regard of the one you honor.

Fall and winter are busy times for WATER staff who work as much outside the office as inside. One person who introduced Mary Hunt as a speaker referred to her as "ubiquitous," which is another way of saying, "we're busy."

Mary lectured on feminism and science at the **Parliament of the World's Religions**, a rollicking event held in September 1993 in Chicago, the centenary celebration of a similar event which introduced eastern religions to the U.S. in the last century.

She spoke on women-church and religious anti-violence work at the **Call to Action** meeting in Chicago, and addressed feminist ethics at **Loyola University** through the **BVM Women's Network** in the spirit of Mundelein College.

It was a college season, with Mary also lecturing on religious violence at **Central Michigan University** and at the opening of the academic year at **Immaculate Heart College Center** in Los Angeles. Lesbian, gay and bisexual concerns were the focus of a weekend of lectures for the **Bay Area Lesbian Gay Ecumenical Association** which Mary shared with Irene Monroe.

At the annual **American Academy of Religion**, Mary Hunt finished her term as co-chair of the Women and Religion Section, lectured on the religious right, and responded to the work of Sallie McFague.

Diann Neu continued course work toward a Masters in Social Work, for which she is the clinical social work intern for the **Mautner Project**, a Washington, DC area support network for lesbian women with cancer. She facilitated a weekly bereavement group for women who are surviving the death of their partners, and she counselled women who are living with cancer.

Diann did a workshop for the **Holy Cross Sisters** in Baltimore entitled "Harvesting Women's Gifts for Social Justice." She put her liturgical skills to use working with couples to create a wedding and a commitment ceremony. She created a ritual for the **Women's Ordination Conference** planning meeting for their 1995 conference. She facilitated the work of Presbyterian leaders at the organizing weekend of the **National Presbyterian Lesbian/Bisexual/Gay Movement**.

Diann, along with Chris Coughlan of Dignity and Ethel Dignan of the BVM Network for Women's Issues, is on the newly named coordinating team for the **Women-Church Convergence**. WATER is delighted to be a part of the Convergence, and to see it taking a new lease on its collective life.

These exciting projects, and others too numerous to mention, keep WATER staff well connected with the larger movement of women's spirituality and social change. Is it any wonder that the Alliance is growing?

E-mail Evolution

The advent of e-mail is upon us. Some greet it with disdain, wanting that lacy Valentine or that ugly bill to come via the postperson's pouch. But we at WATER think e-mail is yet another way to communicate efficiently, economically and, above all, speedily with our Alliance colleagues and others.

We are investigating a way to set up an on-line conversation among us, a feminist theology, ethics and ritual board which we could use to distribute information, discuss issues, strengthen our networks. It may be simply a mailing list to which we would send periodic notices. What do you think? If you would be interested in this, perhaps one day even receiving this newsletter on-line instead of on a piece of a tree, let us know, electronically.

You can reach us via Internet: Mary.Hunt@His.Com. Note that one does not choose one's e-mail address, but in this case it stands for Heller Information Services in the Communications section. Thanks to Jessica Weissman, our computer consultant, for steering us in the right direction.

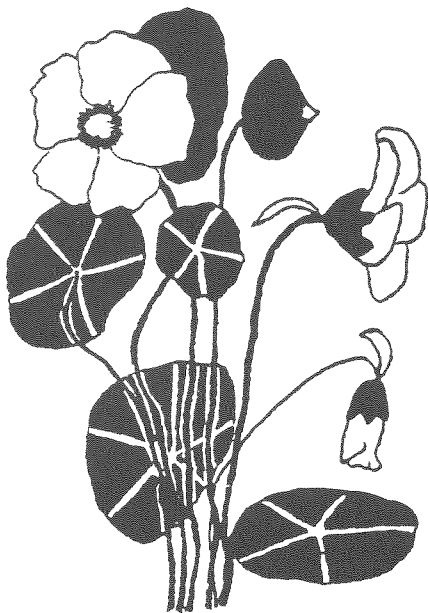
Office Notes

Visiting Scholar **Mary Shanahan**, staff to the Network of Ecumenical Women in Scotland at Dunblane, spent a month in the office researching religious violence and feminist spirituality.

Volunteer **Christine Weber** is a new face at the computer, making sense of the data. Christine lives and works with mentally differently-abled adults when not at WATER.

Caroline Smith is WATER's latest on-the-job trainee from LEAP, a local program for people with disabilities. She is the cheery voice on our phone, a welcome addition to the office staff.

Carol Scinto, conspicuously absent from these pages for a time, is reveling on the beaches of New Zealand with husband Joe where they are on sabbatical. She will be back by popular demand in her capacity as editor by Fall 1994, kiwis in one hand, red pencil in the other.



1994 Spring Programs at WATER

WATER is well known for lectures, workshops, publications and organizing throughout the U.S. and around the world. At home in the Washington DC area we offer you the following programs:

WOMEN-CHURCH LITURGY: This group meets the third Tuesday of the month 7-8:30pm at WATER with Diann Ned for inclusive, feminist rituals. **March 15, April 19, May 17, June 21.**

SEDER MEAL: TOGETHER AT FREEDOM'S TABLE: **March 31,** 6:30pm, Holy Thursday and Sixth Night of Passover, Pot Luck. **Reservations required by Tuesday March 29, 1994.**

WOMEN'S BREAKFAST: This breakfast, the third Thursdays of the month, 8-9:30am, includes a short presentation, support and networking, a healthy meal.

March 17, "Maybe We're Talking About a Different God." Video and discussion of the case of the Rev. Jane Spahr and other clergy.

April 21, "Re-imagining." A report and discussion of the landmark conference November 1993 in Minneapolis in celebration of the Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women.

May 19, A Summer Reading List. We will provide suggestions for ten books to keep you up to date. You bring a title to recommend.

WEDNESDAY READING GROUP: This monthly reading group is great for sermon preparation, class work, personal growth. The group will meet at WATER on the fourth Wednesday of the month, 7-8:30pm.

March 23, Discipleship of Equals by Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza.

April 27, Sisters in the Wilderness by Delores Williams.

May 25, Outercourse by Mary Daly.

SATURDAY SEMINARS: These popular events include a great deal of content in a short time. Registration is limited to 20 people for a day of theological updating and challenging discussion, 9:45am-3pm:

April 16, I Am Not Sure What I Believe Anymore. Mary Hunt will lead a day of input and discussion on the impact of the latest feminist theology on our personal belief systems. What do we believe and how do we act as the ground shifts?

May 7, "Coyote (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics)" And Replace Them With New Feminist Thinking. Mary Hunt will explore the rapidly changing ethical landscape—ecofeminism, models of family and violence—in an effort to reshape religious ethics based on integrity.

FEMINIST MINISTRY SUPERVISION GROUP: Some feminist ministers have requested an interdenominational group in which to focus on issues particular to the needs of women who minister in churches. Issues like spiritual refreshment for ministers, working with special populations, feminist ministry in patriarchal churches, and discussion of particular cases will make this professional support group a source of personal enhancement. The group will be limited to 7-10 women with its initial meeting on Monday, April 11, 4-5:30pm at WATER.



Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual
8035 13th Street, Silver Spring, MD 20910-4803 USA

Address Correction Requested

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**THE
RE-IMAGINING
CONFERENCE:
A REPORT
Information
on a pagan
conference
sponsored
by mainline
denominations**

**Order extra copies
of this report and
distribute them to
the women in your
church. See back
page for ordering
information.**

On November 4-7, 1993, "A Global Theological Conference By Women; for Women and Men" was held in Minneapolis. Information in this report relates to that conference. We suggest that the contents of this report be studied carefully and completely. The reader will find that most of the material relates primarily to two denominations - United Methodist and Presbyterian Church USA. The reason is that individuals from these two denominations were present and they put in print their eyewitness accounts of the conference. However, they were not the only denominations involved in the conference. The conference involved Lutherans (ELCA), Catholics, United Church of Christ members, Baptists, Episcopalians, Mennonites, United Church of Canada members and others (see page 4 for a complete list of participants). To learn if your denomination participated in the conference, we suggest you contact officials in your denomination directly.

We felt that information on this Re-Imagining conference needed to be shared with a wider audience. As the information in this report and the tapes of the conference will clearly show, those present - mostly attending because of their positions in their denominations - worshipped the goddess "Sophia."

At the time this report was prepared, those who were responsible for and attended the conference had not only not rejected the pagan worship, nor apologized for being a part of it, but had even vigorously defended and praised the conference.

We suggest that the way to secure the truth of what happened at the conference is to order the 24 cassette tapes of the presentations at the conference. They can be secured by ordering from Resource Express, 6252 137th Court, Apple Valley, Minnesota 55124, 612-891-3069. The cost is \$60, plus \$5 shipping.

We suggest these tapes be used in your women's groups, Sunday School classes, and other church meetings to inform others about the conference and to foster discussion on the worship of Sophia. We have included in this report some excerpts from the conference.

We also suggest that additional copies of this report be ordered and shared with responsible individuals within your local church. Since this was a meeting for women, we think it especially important that the women in your church have access to this information and the information on the tapes.

There is also available an interview with Dottie Chase of the United Methodist Church and Sue Cyer of the Presbyterian Church USA, both of whom attended the conference. The interview on cassette is approximately 20 minutes long and is available for \$1.50 from AFA.

We suggest that *after* you secure and listen to the tapes, you contact your denominational officials for more information.

Tragically, it was gifts from the local churches and individuals which made possible the funding for this conference. Local churches, and especially the women's groups in those churches, should be informed about where their money goes and what it is used for in

addition to the theological beliefs of those at the highest levels of their denomination. Many local groups have already made a decision to withhold any future funding to their national women's organizations until changes are made.

This information is being provided with the knowledge that we shall be criticized by many denominational officials for doing so. The reaction is often to "attack the messenger" with the hope that it will detract from the message. That is the reason we urge the purchase of the tapes.

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American Tobacco Ritual and they took part in the "Anointing with Red Dots," during which presenter Aruna Gnanadason lashed out against alleged oppression, by Christian missionary teachings in India. Gnanadason, a native Indian feminist, explained that the red dot on her forehead was a form of protest against those who said her forehead was only a place for the sign of the cross. She invited participants to join her in protest by crayoning a red dot on their foreheads as well. Gnanadason said that the red dot represented the "divine in each other."

Regarding the passage from Joel ("I shall pour out my spirit on all humanity"), Lois Wilson, immediate past president of the World Council of Churches, asked, "Surely God didn't mean all humanity; did he mean neo-pagans, did she mean the Wiccans, the Sikhs, the Muslims, the Hindus, the men and the women? Or did she?"

Another presenter, Asian feminist theologian Kwok Pui-Lan, indicated that the humanistic-Confucian tradition emphasizes the propensities in human nature for good, not evil. Barbara Lundblad, a Lutheran pastor, acknowledged: "Some would call our worship of last night verging on heresy.... We did not last night name the name of Jesus. Nor have we done anything in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Laughter and cheers followed her observation.

There were other workshops that dealt with feminist theology, politics, music, and even belly dancing. Feminist theologian Chung Hyun Kyung claimed that the ideal is the "reincarnation of good," explaining that Asian theology totally rejects the idea of sinful man, propagating the understanding that humans are good and become better from the god within. She led participants in an exercise that she called "pranic healing." "When we do pranic healing, we believe that this life-giving energy came from god and it is everywhere, it is in the sun, in the ocean, from the ground and it is from the trees... We ask god's permission to use this life-giving energy for our sisters and brothers in need. If you feel very tired and you don't have any energy to give, what you do is... go to a big tree and ask it to, 'give me some of your life energy.'"

One major seminar was titled

"Jesus," although no orthodox Christian understanding of Jesus was discussed. This seminar, attended by about 500 individuals, began with singing to Sophia and participants were told that the ideal is to re-image Jesus within the feminist understanding.

Presenter Delores S. Williams, a "womanist" theology professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, said, "I don't think we need a theory of atonement at all." Her remark was greeted by applause. "Atonement has to do so much with death," she said. "I don't think we need folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff." Continuing, she said, "We do not need atonement, we just need to listen to the god within.... If Jesus conquered sin, it was in the wilderness and life, not his death (resurrection). The first incarnation of God was not 'some dove on the shoulder,' but in Mary and her body."

Conference leader Rita Nakashima

Brock declared that God is "not transcendence - that orgy of self-alienation beloved of the fathers - but immanence, god working out god's self in everything."

Another feminist theologian who led the "Jesus" seminar was Kwok Pui-Lan. She said the Asian experience can't image any Jesus. She stated, "We cannot allow others to define our sin. What is our sin? Who is this funny God that would sacrifice a lamb. We don't even see a lamb in the Asian experience. The Chinese do not have a word to compare to the Hebrew/Greek word for God." Dr. Pui-Lan indicated that the Chinese do not believe God stands outside creation. The humanist-Confucian tradition emphasizes the propensity for good in humankind, and asserts that people develop moral perfection and sainthood by maturing. The emphasis is on enlightenment.

"The seminaries and the Vatican can keep on defining orthodoxy largely for the passing-on of the traditions through the ordained clergy," conference speaker and feminist theologian Elizabeth Bettenhausen told the Star-Tribune. "But we laity have always crossed our fingers behind our backs when they lay out what orthodoxy is. We know in our daily lives theology has to be much fresher and more flexible than the definitions of orthodoxy can ever be."

For a conference which drew upon the mainline Christian denominations for support, funding, and participants, this event utterly failed to represent the historic Christian faith of these denominations. To the contrary, the Re-imagining conference truly abandoned any form of orthodox Christian theology. As evidence, read the following liturgy of the service of milk and honey dedicated to Sophia:

"Our maker Sophia, we are women in your image: With the hot blood of our wombs we give form to new life. With the courage of our convictions we pour out lifeblood for justice...."

"Sophia, Creator God, Let you milk and honey flow. Sophia, Creator God, Shower us with your love...."

"Our sweet Sophia, we are women in your image; With nectar between our thighs we invite a lover, we birth a child; With our warm body fluids we remind the world of its pleasures and sensations...."

"Our guide, Sophia, we are women in your image. With our moist mouths we kiss away a tear, we smile encouragement. With the honey of wisdom in our mouths, we prophesy a full humanity to all the peoples...."

"We celebrate the sensual life you give us. We celebrate the sweat that pours from us during our labors. We celebrate the fingertips vibrating upon the skin of a love. We celebrate the tongue which licks a wound or wets our lips. We celebrate our bodiliness, our physicality, the sensations of pleasure, our oneness with earth and water."

Presbyterian Church (USA) supports convocation

BY SUSAN CYRE

National staff and committee members from the Presbyterian Church (USA) gathered with leaders of other World Council of Churches denominations in Minneapolis Nov. 4-7 for a feminist convocation called "Re-Imagining 1993." Declaring their allegiance to the goddess "Sophia," participants catapulted their rhetoric well beyond commonplace themes of women's equality. Instead, they heralded a more radical agenda: to promote a new religion with a new god.

Destroying traditional Christian faith, adopting ancient pagan beliefs,

SUSAN CYRE attended the Re-Imagining Conference as a press representative of the Presbyterian Layman, a bimonthly independent newspaper. She is currently a candidate for Minister of the Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Mainline churches sponsor radical feminist conference: pagan worship encouraged, lesbianism praised

Reprinted from the AFA Journal

BY STEVE BEARD

A standing ovation for lesbians. A service of milk and honey to the goddess Sophia. A presentation denying the atonement of Jesus Christ. What is going on here? And why is this conference sponsored by mainline Christian churches?

Billed as "A Global Theological Conference By Women; for Women and Men," this conference would shock many traditional Christians if they were to discover what their mainline denominations supported financially. Convening November 4-7 in Minneapolis, this was "Re-Imagining," an ecumenical gathering associated with the World Council of Churches (WCC) for those of the feminist, "womanist," or lesbian perspective. Most of the speakers voiced condemnation of patriarchy and the exclusion of lesbians and homosexual men in the church.

Of the registrants, the largest representatives were Presbyterians (405) and United Methodists (391). Other well-represented religious bodies included Lutherans (313), Roman Catholics (234), and members of the United Church of Christ (144). There were also Baptists, Episcopalians, Mennonites, as well as members of the United Church of Canada, and the Church of the Brethren.

The largest amount of financial support for the conference was \$66,000 from the Bicentennial Fund of the Presbyterian Church (USA). The funding list included 24 organizations ranging from regional women's organizations and local Catholic and Protestant religious bodies to national entities such as the Division of Congregational Ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the National Ministries of the American Baptist Church, the Board for Homeland Ministries of the United Church of Christ, and the Women's Unit of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

The Women's Division of the United Methodist Church not only was listed as a conference funding source, but also chose to have its staff and directors attend the Re-Imagining conference as a special theological workshop. Many

high-level Presbyterian and United Methodist leaders attended.

"They are exploring the sensual and sexual side of the divine, rooting around in the contemplative and introspective interplay with God," observed reporter Martha Sawyer Allen of the Minneapolis Star-Tribune. Participants gathered around "talking" tables and were asked to scribble out spiritual thoughts with crayons, re-imagine God through emotional images, and sing a song of blessing to Sophia, the goddess of Wisdom.

At one point in the conference, Melanie Morrison, co-founder of Christian Lesbians Out Together (CLOUT), requested time to celebrate "the miracle of being lesbian, out, and Christian." Then she invited all other lesbian, bisexual, and transsexual women to join hands and encircle the stage. Religious News Service (RNS) estimates that "roughly 100 women converged upon the dais, many smiling. One held high the rainbow flag, which has become a symbol for the diversity among lesbians and gay men. Many of the women remaining in the audience rose to their feet and began to applaud." The Rev. Kittredge Cherry, a minister in the predominantly homosexual Metropolitan Community Church, was one of the women holding the rainbow flag. She told RNS that the goal of the demonstration was to help people "re-imagine" the church as the embodiment of justice for everyone, including lesbians and homosexual men.

The lesbian theme was heard repeatedly from major speakers. In a workshop called "Prophetic Voices of Lesbians in the Church," Nadean Bishop, the first "out" lesbian minister called to an American Baptist church, claimed that Mary and Martha in the Bible were lesbian "fore-sisters." She said they were not sisters, but lesbian lovers.

Janie Spahr, a self-avowed lesbian clergywoman in the Presbyterian Church USA who was prevented by that denomination from serving a local church, claimed that her theology is first of all informed by "making love with Coni," her lesbian partner. She then gave this challenge: "Sexuality and spirituality have to come together - and Church, we're going to teach you!"

Judy Westerdorf, a United Methodist clergywoman from Minnesota, told the workshop that the Church "has always

been blessed by gays and lesbians, ... witches, ... shamans." She joked about the term "practicing homosexual," noting that her partner says she's not practicing, she's pretty good.

In a seminar on "Re-Imagining Sexuality-Family," lesbian theologian Mary Hunt said, "I have far more hope in substituting 'friendship' as a metaphor for family.... Imagine sex among friends as the norm, young people learning to make friends rather than to date. Imagine valuing genital sexual interaction in terms of whether and how it fosters friendship and pleasure. Imagine, just imagine. Imagine the many ways friends are together since many of us do not have the time or inclination to go to bed together. But imagine the embodied ways of being together in all of their diversity which would expand their focus of sexuality from our genitals to our whole being, from who does what with whom, to how do they love one another.... Pleasure is our birthright of which we have been robbed in religious patriarchy. It is time to claim it anew with our friends."

THEOLOGICAL SMORGASBORD

The Re-Imagining event presented a smorgasbord of cultural ideas and religions, allowing attendees to pick and choose. "Be speculative," participants were told by conference organizers, "there is no 'answer.' We can't imagine what God is like. Being together in our own images is the ultimate."

Many doctrines essential to orthodox Christianity were repudiated at this conference, often in a spirit of derision. This includes the doctrine of God, the deity of Christ, his atoning death, the sinfulness of humanity, creation, the authority of Scriptures, the church, and the biblical understanding of human sexuality.

The re-imagining of God began in the first session when all repeated the litany: "Most of all, it is time to state clearly and dream wildly about who we are as people of God, and who we intend to be in the future through the power and guidance of the spirit of wisdom whom we name Sophia." This was followed by a chorus often repeated throughout this event: "Now Sophia, dream the vision, share the wisdom dwelling deep within."

Participants were led in a Native

STEVE BEARD

is the executive editor of *Good News*, a magazine for evangelical United Methodists.

This first article is based on the

on-site reports of DOTTIE

CHASE, a United Methodist

laywoman who covered the

event for *Good News*, and

SUSAN CYRE, a Presbyterian

(USA) laywoman who covered

the event for the *Presbyterian*

Layman.

rejecting Jesus' divinity and his atonement on the cross, creating a god(dess) in their own image, and affirming lesbian lovemaking were recurring conference themes.

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DESTROYING THE CHURCH

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To marshal this divine energy force, Chung led the group in an exercise that she labeled "pranic healing." "When we do pranic healing we believe that this life-giving energy came from god and it is everywhere; it is in the sun, in the ocean, it is from the ground and it is from the trees... We ask god's permission to use this life-giving energy for our sisters and brothers in need.... If you feel very tired and you feel you don't have any energy to give, what you do is... you go to a big tree and ask [the] tree, 'give me some of your life energy.'"

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Twenty-four PCUSA national staff members registered for the event. Prominent among them was Mary Ann Lundy, who served on the conference steering committee. Other national church staff members included Barbara Roche, editor of *Horizons* magazine, the official publication of Presbyterian Women; Eunice Poethig, the new director of the Congregational Ministries Divisions; Mary Kuhns, former associate director of the Women's Ministry Unit and now interim personnel director for the General Assembly Council; Rebecca Tollefson, former associate director of the Women's Ministry Unit, who is currently serving as associate for personnel services in the denomination's Call and Referral System; Gladys Strachen,

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*from Re-Imagining Newsletter, Day 4

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**from Re-Imagining Newsletter, Day 4*

to Scripture's revelations.

Jesus' incarnation, his divinity and his atonement on the cross were soundly rejected. Conference leader Rita Nakashima Brock quoted an author who declared, "not transcendence - that orgy of self-alienation beloved of the fathers - but immanence, god working out god's self in every thing." Brock argued that there was nothing particularly unique about Jesus. In fact, she said, in Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15) "she is the incarnation of god to Jesus."

Mollenkott expressed her view of Jesus as "our elder brother, the trail-blazer and constant companion for us... ultimately one among many brothers and sisters in an eternally, equally worthy siblinghood. First born only in the sense that he was the first to show us that it is possible to live in oneness with the divine source while we are here on this planet."

Delores Williams, professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York, told the group, "I don't think we need a theory of atonement at all. I think Jesus came for life and to show us something about life... I don't think we need folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff."

Mollenkott claimed that Jesus' death was the ultimate in child abuse and a model for human child abuse. "As an incest survivor, I can no longer worship in a theological context that depicts God as an abusive parent and Jesus as the obedient, trusting child," she declared. Aruna Gnanadason, director of the sub-unit on Women in the Church and Society of the World Council of Churches, condemned the Church as a patriarchal institution that "centered its faith around the cruel and violent death of Christ on the cross, sanctioning violence against the powerless in society."

Chinese feminist Kwok Pui-Lan - a World Council of Churches leader who was the featured speaker at a meeting of the Presbyterian Church (USA) Theology and Worship Ministry Unit in 1992 and whom Mary Ann Lundy invited to meet with members of her Women's Ministry Unit - told conference participants that the Chinese reject the Christian belief in the depravity of all human beings who can only be reconciled with God through the death and sacrifice of Jesus the Christ. Instead, she pointed to

Confucius, who "emphasized the propensities in human nature for good rather than evil... We Chinese believe there is a genuine possibility for human beings to achieve moral perfection and sainthood," she said.

"We cannot have one savior," argued Kwok. "Just like the Big Mac... prepackaged and shipped all over the world. It won't do. It's imperialistic." When asked a question about the Trinity, Kwok said she favored her culture's religion, which has 722 gods and goddesses, but that if the church wouldn't accept 722, at least three gods are better than one because "monotheism used in the wrong way can be extremely dangerous... If you have one and only one we are even more oppressive," she said.

Chung offered a radical feminist view of salvation, quoting the ancient gnostic gospels, "if you bring out what is within you, what is within you will save you. But if you cannot bring out what is within you, what is within you will destroy you." She justified her use of the gnostic gospels, which were rejected as heresy by the Christian church in the second century, by telling the participants that the canon (the contents of the Bible) was decided by men; and therefore, women are not obliged to accept a book or 'constitution' they had no part in framing.

RE-CREATING CREATION

Conference speakers claimed that biblical revelation, which sets the creator outside of and apart from creation, is the source of human abuse of people and creation. Rejecting the Bible's version of creation, they taught pantheism, in which everything is divine and the divine is in everything.

Feminist Elizabeth Bettenhausen told the group, "We have to re-imagine the doctrine of creation because in so much of the traditional orthodox understanding, creation is understood as determined, eternal, unchanging expression of divine will, and that is downright dangerous for women's lives." She characterized the biblical view of God's creation as "the magic show we see on television... out of thin air there's earth..." Instead, she gave a definition of creation in which women, not God, are the creators: "Women take the nothing which results from destructive injustice, from violence, from accidents, and we wash away the blood and at the table of cre-

ative necessity, we make the strands of life emerge," she said.

Mollenkott told the group, "everything that lives is holy... the one divine presence would be recognized in everybody, by everybody... the monism I'm talking about assumes that god is so all-inclusive that she is involved in every cell of those who are thoughts in her mind and embodiments of her image... Like Jesus, we and the source are one..."

Conference participants worshiped the divine, in each other by marking red dots on their foreheads to signify their divinity, and then bowing to each other in an act of reverence. Presbyterian Church (USA) staff members joined others in singing songs to the goddess "Sophia," the source of their divinity, the creator god who dwells within them and unleashes within them their divine power.

African feminist Mercy Oduyoye, deputy general secretary of the World Council of Churches, reflected the animist belief, saying, "all of us have mothers watching from the spirit world [the] things that happen to us... they are going to make sure that the people that do us injustice, they get it back." The group sang songs speaking of the dead not being under the ground but having a pact with the living: "Listen more often to things than to beings... those who have died have never, never left, the dead are not under the earth, they are in the rustling trees, they are in the groaning woods, they are in the crying grass, they are in the moaning rocks... The dead have a pact with the living."

BIBLICAL SEXUALITY REJECTED

Biblical sexual norms were rejected. Gnanadason taught that the ethics of Scripture was imposed upon women by the church's patriarchal males, dictating to women what is acceptable sexual behavior. She described the resulting plight of woman: "Her soft and tender body was programmed into becoming a baby-making machine... Her womb was colonized and her reproductive rights were taken away from her."

Lesbian Roman Catholic feminist Mary Hunt, co-founder of the radical group "WATER," The Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual, proposed "substituting friendship as a metaphor for family." She explained her new metaphor, saying, "Imagine sex

among friends as the norm, young people learning how to make friends rather than to date. Imagine valuing genital sexual interaction in terms of whether and how it fosters friendship and pleasure... Pleasure is our birthright of which we have been robbed in religious patriarchy. It is time to claim it anew with our friends... Responsible relational sexuality is a human right. I picture friends, not families, basking in the pleasures we deserve because our bodies are holy and our sexuality is part of creation's available riches."

Lesbian Christine Smith, associate professor of preaching and worship at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities and formerly an assistant professor of homiletics at Princeton Theological Seminary, said, "I can no longer believe that spirituality is rooted in any kind of self-denial and deprivation. I no longer... believe that spirituality is about the transcendent other-worldly dimensions of existence. I no longer believe that spirituality is anti-body, anti-sexual or anti-nature."

Francis Wood, author of training and policy materials for the National Council of Churches' Commission on Family Ministry and Human Sexuality, proposed, "We need to acknowledge the sacrality of sexual expression where the hallmark is mutuality... and not the... anatomically correct arrangement."

Presbyterian activist Jane Spahr continued the theme when she spoke in the session, "the Prophetic Voice of Lesbians in the Church." Spahr, who travels across the Presbyterian denomination seeking to overturn its ban on the ordination of persons who practice homosexual behavior, told conferees that her theology is first of all informed by "making love with Coni." She then gave this challenge: "Sexuality and spirituality have to come together, and church, we're going to teach you!"

Lesbian Judy Westerdorf, a Methodist clergywoman, said: "The church has always been blessed by gays and lesbians, witches, shamans, artists..." Referring to the distinction Methodist and Presbyterian denominations make between persons who have homosexual inclinations and persons who practice homosexual behavior, she told the audience that her partner is "not practicing: She's pretty good."

Melanie Morrison, co-convenor of

CLOUT (Christian Lesbians Out Together), told the group that liturgists in her church read from the holy book of Isaiah and then from "a holy book" written by a lesbian author. Earlier in the plenary session Morrison led a demonstration in which she invited all the lesbian, bisexual, and transsexual women to come forward and all others to stand in solidarity. She then led the group in a song affirming their determination to celebrate lesbian sexual relationships.

COMMUNION

The culmination of the weekend was an apparent substitution for the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, a ritual called "milk and honey." Participants remembered women who gave them life and they celebrated their future in which oppression would cease and a new religion would replace the existing patriarchal Christian church. The women recited the litany, "Our maker Sophia, we are women in your image, with the hot blood of our wombs we give form to new life... with nectar between our thighs we invite a lover... with our warm body fluids we remind the world of its pleasures and sensations... with the honey of wisdom in our mouths we prophesy a full humanity to all the peoples."

Editor's note: All quotes were taken from speakers' oral presentations and verified from reporters' notes and official conference tapes. We have used "god" when speakers referred to an exclusively immanent divine presence, while retaining "God" for references to God as both immanent and transcendent, the historic position of orthodox Christianity.

Conference excerpts

The following carefully-documented excerpts are from the official tapes of the 1993 Re-Imagining conference. Each quotation has been double-checked for accuracy so that there is no question as to the content of the speakers listed below. We encourage anyone who would doubt the veracity of these quotations to order official conference tape recordings. For \$60 one can purchase a 24-tape package made by a recording firm retained by conference officials. Tapes may be ordered from ResourceExpress (612-891-3069).

These excerpts were not isolated statements from one or two off-the-wall speakers. They represent conference themes that surfaced repeatedly in speeches, dramatic presentations, demonstrations, rituals, and documents distributed throughout the four-day event.

Thursday, November 4, 1993

Conference liturgy, program book, page 11. [Tape 1-1, Side A.]

Most of all, it is time to state clearly and dream wildly about who we are as a people of God, and who we intend to be in the future through the power and guidance of the spirit of wisdom whom we name Sophia."

Conference song, program book, page 11.

Now, Sophia, dream the vision, share the wisdom dwelling deep within."

Naming the Holy One Ritual

During this liturgical song, conference leaders called God some of the following names—divine ancestor, Mother God, Father God, Elohim, Adoni, Spirit, Ruah, mystery, lover, eternal goodness, alpha and omega, fire of love, loving presence, she who is eternal, she who will be, Sophia, earth mother, spirit woman, she who is, ninjan, cosmic maxim, weaver God, transforming laughter, womb of creation, higher power, ying and yang, unknown God, unnameable God, holy one of blessing.

Tobacco Ritual

CHRISTINE ROY: "Would you please put the tobacco in your hands that you received through the front door. Tobacco is used by many Native Americans for the use of prayer and that's why we're using it tonight. Let us now bow our heads." Prayer in Native American.

Conference liturgy, program book, page 19.

"We invoke Sophia, Divine Wisdom, who chose to play with all the people of the world. Her voice has been silenced too long. Let her speak and bless us throughout these days."

Instructions for crayoning. [Tape 1-1, Side B.]

"So, each of you has your own tool box (crayons)... Pick your favorite color.

Primary Funder

- Bicentennial Fund of the Presbyterian Church (USA)

Organizations

- Church Women United in Greater Minneapolis
- Church Women United in Minnesota
- Commission on the Status and Role of Women—Minnesota Conference United Methodist Church
- Committee on Women and the Church, Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area
- Division of Congregational Ministries, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- International Committee for the Fellowship of the Least Coin
- Minnesota Conference United Methodist Women
- National Ministries, American Baptist Church
- Presbyterian Women, Presbyterian Church (USA)
- Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
- Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet
- The Sisters of the Congregation of St. Agnes
- St. Luke Presbyterian Church
- The Synod of Lakes and Prairies, Presbyterian Church (USA) ACOWAC and Peace and Justice Work Group
- The Sinsinawa Dominicans
- Travel Associates
- The Ecumenical Decade Committee: Churches in Solidarity With Women (U.S.A. committee)
- United Church of Christ, Board for Homeland Ministries
- Wayzata Community Church, Women's Fellowship
- Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Minneapolis Area Synod
- Women's Division of the United Methodist Church
- Women's Studies Program of United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities
- Women's Unit, Presbyterian Church (USA)

DEFINITION

Shaman—a priest or priestess who uses magic for the purpose of curing the sick, divining the hidden, and controlling events.

Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10th Edition

Make a mark, any mark you want on the paper. Now look what everyone else has done at your table. Notice no one else made a mark like yours. Try again. Make another kind of mark maybe with different color... Some of you have this tiny little voice inside that says 'this is silly. You can't do this.' Well, welcome, that's the inner critic."

Friday, November 5, 1993

"Anointing With Red Dot Ritual," Friday plenary. [Tape 2-1, Side A.]

ARUNA GNANADASON is from India, and belongs to the Church of South India. She has been active on the staff of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, as Director of the Sub-unit on Women in the Church and Society.

"The missionary movement came and told us that you cannot have a red dot on the forehead because that's where the sign of the cross was put and Christians were not allowed to use the red dot. As a student it was my sign of protest against the missionary movement. When I was in the student Christian movement, I wore the red dot and I've always worn it. [Applause] It is a very beautiful symbol because when you go into the temple or even when you visit a home, you are normally offered vermilion powder which you take and keep on your forehead as a symbol of having been in the presence of the divine. So very clearly the divine is not only in the temple, the divine is everywhere... I think [the red dot] is a beautiful symbol of how we always are conscious of the divine in each other and we bow to the divine as you have done in the worship yesterday with the Namaste which is a symbol of bowing to the divine in the other person."

"Re-Imagining God" presentation, Friday plenary. [Tape 2-1, Side B.]

RITA NAKASHIMA BROCK, is an associate professor who holds the Endowed Chair in the Humanities at Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Referring to the story of the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15 whose daughter is tormented by demons: "This is the story of a woman with no extraordinary power. The disciples find her persistence obnoxious. And even Jesus is rude to her. She, however, will not be deterred. She has courage and audacity

in the face of their rejection... She gives Jesus a smart retort and wins the argument. I think she is the only person in the Bible to win an argument with Jesus. She gets Jesus to concede because she shifts the focus of the debate away from her own status as outsider and toward Jesus' responsibility for his power. Jesus refuses her because she is outside his people... She turns the tables. The transformative power of love comes from the marginal, from those abused by the powers of domination and injustice who demand responsibility from the powerful. When Jesus is oppressed by the principalities and powers of the world, he reveals the incarnate power of God as he does through much of his life and at his death. But, when Jesus has structural power over another, [he] marginalizes her. Divine power confronts Jesus from those margins. In other words, she is the incarnation of God to Jesus. [Applause]... Jesus acknowledges this revelation when it happens with the words, 'woman what faith you have, be it as you wish' and often with the marginalized he says to them, 'not I have made you whole,' but 'your faith has made you whole' and this is how the transformative power of God is incarnated here and here and here and here. The power of mother-root."

"Remember, incarnation is an activity, God as verb, not a state of being. When we take responsibility we can use our power to love, to nurture, to enable freedom and willfulness of others. Incarnating the love of God. In taking responsibility, we can say the incarnation of God is here and here and here and here working where she is needed, where we are needed. The activity of incarnation is what Audrey Lord called, 'erotic power at work.'"

"Re-Imagining God" presentation, Friday plenary. [Tape 2-2, Side A.]

CHUNG HYUN KYUNG, is assistant professor in theology, Ewha Women's University, Seoul, Korea.

"Therefore, like Tina Turner said, 'what's love got to do with it' and I say, 'what's God got to do with it.' I always ask this question because as Asian-feminist-liberation theologian I always ask this question, 'what's God got to do with this reality of third-worldness, and what's God got to do with reality of Asia,

and what's God got to do with reality of being a woman."

"...when I look at our history of religion, we have more than 5000 years of Shamanism, more than 2000 years of Taoism, and almost 2000 years of Buddhism, and 700 years of Confucianism and only 100 years of Protestantism in Korea. Therefore whenever I go to temples, Buddhist temples, and I look at Buddha, I feel so young. I came from youngest family of whole community. And when I think Buddha died in his 80s and Jesus died when he was 33—maybe [in] my next Christology book Jesus should be called, 'Too young to understand.'" [Laughter]

"I feel like my bowel is Shamanist, my heart is Buddhist, my right brain is Confucianist and my left brain is Christian."

"The Christian church has been very patriarchal. That's why we are here together in order to destroy this patriarchal idolatry of Christianity."

"I want to share three images of God so striking in Asia and how these three images of God transformed my Christianity and my theological understanding of God. The three goddesses I want to share with you are Cali, Quani, and Enna. These are my new Trinity-Cali, Quani, and Enna. Therefore, I claim Cali as the goddess of justice... Cali is usually located in India and Sri Lanka, a Hindu image. Quani is Buddhist image of goddess. Quani is located northeast Asia like China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Sri Lanka. Literal meaning of Quani is 'one who hears the cry...' Quani prays abolition of hell itself... [Tape 2-2, Side B.] Enna means mother and Enna means earth. It is indigenous goddess of Philippines..."

"Then what does it mean to bring in this trinity of goddess in my Christian tradition. How this Quani, Cali and Enna got to do with my Christian theology... What I do after learning about their qualities... is my change of perspective so we call it the fusion of different horizons."

"Re-Imagining Jesus" presentation, Friday, 1 p.m. [Tape 3-1, Side B.]

DELORES S. WILLIAMS is Associate Professor of Theology and Culture at

Union Theological Seminary in New York.

"What this whole reimagining of the work and who Jesus is brings us to a different interpretation of the incarnation.... We have to envision incarnation in a biblical and true way. That is, the Spirit came first to Mary, and the word was made flesh in Mary's body. That is the first incarnation. And Jesus' birth came a man in whom the fullness of the Spirit came as incarnation and then after the death, the incarnated spirit passed on into the church. So there's no way for us to talk about the incarnation of Jesus. It's not about any dove that came and sat on somebody's shoulder and that was the spirit of God. No. Talk about incarnation and spirit of Jesus as it really came into the world. It came through a woman's body."

"The whole business of what we do in womanist theology putting much more emphasis on the spirit than we do on Jesus....The church being not Christocentric but the church as spirit-centered and what that would mean for our worship, what that would mean for the way we understand Jesus."

"I like to say this about incarnation, it was the spirit that mounted Mary [Laughter] and it was the spirit who generated all this and through the spirit we re-image Jesus at our cultural roots and Jesus became our might present help in trouble."

"Re-Imagining Jesus" presentation, Friday, 1 p.m. [Tape 3-2, Side A.]

Kwok Pui-Lan is a writer, lecturer, mother and theologian. Formerly on the faculty of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, she is Associate Professor of Theology at The Episcopal Divinity School at Cambridge, Massachusetts.

"The humanistic-Confucian traditions understand human nature very differently. Both Confucius and [unidentifiable word] emphasized the propensities in human nature for good rather than for evil. We were of course condemned by the missionaries as heretics." [Laughter]

"Now I want to lift up three images emerging from Asia. The first image, Jesus as the sovereign and struggling people of Asia....The next image I want to lift up for all of us, is the broken body

of women who refuse the power and principalities in this world....The broken body of the HIV Thai prostitutes is now God's incarnate among us revealing the power and the principalities....There is, however, a third image. This image is the image of the fig tree....We believe in reincarnation - what ever comes from you it comes back. So, I once imagined Jesus as a fig tree. [Laughter]...Now I am not joking, why? Because without our environmental concerns nothing will help us to save ourselves. If we cannot imagine Jesus as a tree, as a river, as wind and as rain, we are doomed together. If we are forever anthropocentric in our search for the redeemer, we are doomed. So stand up, imagine yourself as a tree, move as a tree."

"Re-Imagining Jesus" presentation, Friday, 1 p.m. [Tape 3-2, Side A.]

Barbara K. Lundblad is currently serving as pastor of Our Saviors Atonement Lutheran Church in New York City.

"...some authority would call our worship of last night verging on heresy....We did not last night name the name of Jesus. Nor have we done anything in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." [laughter and cheers]

"Lutherans have been in the headlines for the first time in many, many years because the word Lutheran and masturbation were in the same sentence [Hoots and laughter]. We were even on Peter Jennings' news hour with pictures of Martin Luther, but not masturbating."

"[Elizabeth Johnson] is inviting us to look at this in a different way and move from the spirit into the life of Jesus and she uses the term, 'Jesus Sophia' to bring together all that wondrous life of the spirit, the creative sense of the spirit hovering over the deep along with the spirit songs of Isaiah, the servant."

[Tape 3-2, Side B.]

"And in that sense I believe we can enter Jesus' maleness with Sophia's wisdom."

She quotes affirmingly from feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson: "In his brief ministry, Jesus appears as the prophet and the child of Sophia sent to announce that God is the God of all in-

clusive love who wills the wholeness and humanity of everyone especially the poor and heavy burdened. Jesus is sent to gather all the outcasts under the wings of their gracious Sophia-God and bring them to shalom. This envoy of Sophia walks her paths of justice and peace and invites others to do likewise. Like her, he delights in being with people, joy inside and a sure way to God are found in his company. In all Jesus compassionate, liberating words and deeds are the works of Sophia, reestablishing the right order of creation. 'Wisdom is justified by her deeds,' Matthew 11.

"I do not need Jesus to be a woman....I need to know that this word is spoken to me in the spirit of Sophia. Trust the stirring in your womb."

"And then when I get there I'm standing there, all my emptiness, trying to throw everything away and I hear a voice that says, 'Barbara' and I say, 'rabboni' which means 'teacher' which means 'Sophia' and then Jesus said, do not hold me, do not hold me, do not hold me in the old categories which no longer touch you, do not, do not put back the stone which has been binding you and so many people and telling you this is a story of death and not life, do not put the stone back, do not hang on to the right answers which came from somebody else, because you fear they will say to you that you are blaspheming and you are a heretic. No, say instead that you are pregnant." [Laughter and cheers.]

"Re-Imagining Jesus" question-answer session. [Tape 3-2, Side B.]

KWOK PUI-LAN: "Very often we universalize Jesus too much. [Dead spot on tape.]...We cannot have one savior. Just like the Big Mac in McDonalds - pre-packaged, shipped all over the world. It won't do. It's imperialistic. So we cannot have a white, middle-class Jesus."

DELORES S. WILLIAMS: "I don't think we need a theory of atonement at all. [Applause] I think Jesus came for life and to show us something about life and living together and what life was all about. Atonement has to do so much to do with death."

"I don't think we need folks hanging

on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff....I don't mean this sentimental gooey stuff. I mean the love that is whipping the thieves out of the temple. Passing that along and I don't see that the cross does that. But now there is a question that we may want to bring in at this point - 'If the life of Jesus is primary and the spirit should take more of our present focus, is the image of the cross still a powerful, workable functional image for the churches and women today?' I don't know if it's a powerful one for the churches or women today, but I think the cross ought to be interpreted for what it was, it was a symbol of evil. I mean it is the murder of this man, of an innocent man, a victim."

CHRISTINE MARIE SMITH is Associate Professor of Preaching and Worship at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities and is United Church of Christ clergy.

"We use the ancient name, 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit' tying us to the church throughout time, it's really one of very few names we have that does that and then I say also, 'it's a three-fold washing, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, known among us as mother, brother, and friend, present to us as wisdom, word and breath of life, amen.'"

KWOK PUI-LAN: "I live in a very inclusive culture you can see that, right now as part of China in that... we have 722 gods and goddesses and I think for your friends it might be too much, so three is better than one at least. Why monotheism used in the wrong way can be extremely dangerous, you understand. We live in a culture with many gods and goddess, we know other people have their own points of devotions and they are equally sacred, and divine for them just like our Jesus, our spirit, our God is very important for us. That is radical inclusivity. In my family, my mother and father, not Christians. Among our brothers, our seven children, we have only four Christians, we live under the same roof, no problem. So at least from that point of view, I see three as more inclusive, diversity in unity. Very important for your consciousness if you have one and only one. We are even more, more oppressive."

"Re-Imagining Creation" presentation, Friday, 1 p.m. [Tape 4-2, Side A.]

ELIZABETH BETTENHAUSEN is coordinator of the Study/Action Program at the Women's Theological Center in Boston, Massachusetts, and a member of the faculty in Feminist Theology and Theory at WTC. She is a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

"Creation out of nothing, is not as women would do it now, a solitary patriarchal creating. How boring. Yahweh all by himself. Although of course he refers to himself in the plural form at one point to remind us probably inadvertently, of the goddess and the earth from which he came."

"We have to re-imagine the doctrine of creation because in so much of the traditional orthodox understanding, creation is understood as determined, eternal, unchanging expression of divine will and that is downright dangerous for women's lives.

"To say, this is the way God created us to be is a preface in church conversations and elsewhere which signals a deep power struggle and that power struggle is often around sexuality, often around race, and often around money. This is the way God created us to be, perfectly heterosexual and monogamous. This is the way God created us to be, perfectly capitalist and rich. This is the way God created us to be white. How often have we heard that kind of theological use of the doctrine of creation - this is non-negotiable because God willed a certain form of coitus." [Laughter]

"We have to create out of homophobia and heterosexism. Now any god can create bliss out of nothing, but try creating it out of homophobia and heterosexism. In this situation the violence which tears the fabric of others lives is the violence which homophobic, heterosexual women have to give up, comfortable though as it is. To walk out on the street and be identified however as heterosexual....Think of how safe your fear of loving women makes you usually feel. And there are kitchens where the rag rug lesbians of the world, the rag rug bisexual women of the world,

are working away in the creation of justice while you and perhaps I sit in the comfort of fear, wrapped in whole cloth not realizing that the moths of justice are eroding us from behind."

"Re-Imagining Creation" question-answer session. [Tape 4-2, Side B.]

Elizabeth Bettenhausen: "How many of you have actually talked to girls under the age of 12 about the specifics of the erotic pleasure of their bodies. Let me see your hands. Okay. Would you talk to those that didn't raise their hands. What is it that they might give up? The comfort of silence, the comfort of ambivalence about our own bodies....You can correlate the constraints on orthodoxy with how people sit in their bodies...."

"Listening With Our Hearts: Prophetic Voices of Lesbians In the Church" presentation, Friday, 3:45 p.m. [There were no tapes made of this session.]

NADEAN BISHOP, first American Baptist called to a church (University Baptist Church, Minneapolis) as an "out" homosexual. She taught Bible as Literature and chaired Women's Studies at Eastern Michigan University.

She spoke on Mary and Martha being lesbian fore-sisters. She claimed that they weren't actual sisters, but lesbian lovers.

MELANIE MORRISON is co-founder of CLOUT (Christian Lesbians Out Together).

"I know in my heart that the cannon is not closed, it is open. I know this because the Bible does not reconcile me with the earth and the Bible does not reconcile me with my sexual self."

JANIE SPAHR, co-founder of CLOUT, serves as Lesbian Evangelist through an agreement between Spectrum Center for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Concerns in Marin County, California, and the Downtown Presbyterian Church of Rochester, New York.

She claimed that her theology is first of all informed by "making love with Coni," her lesbian partner.

"Sexuality and spirituality have to come together and Church, we're going to teach you!!"

Saturday, November 6, 1993
"Re-Imagining Community" presentation, Saturday plenary. [Tape 7-1, Side A.]

CHUNG HYUN KYUNG, is assistant professor in theology, Ewha Women's University, Seoul, Korea.

"When we do 'pranic' healing we believe that this life giving energy came from God and it is everywhere, it is in the sun, it is in the ocean, it is from the ground, and it is from the trees. So, what we do is we pray to God. 'Thank you for giving us life and this continuous permeating energy around us.' And we ask God's permission to use this life-giving energy for our sisters and brothers in need. And we give energy to our sisters and brothers. If you feel very tired and you feel you don't have any energy to give, what you do is you sit in silence, maybe you go to big tree and ask tree, ask permission from tree, 'give me some of your life-energy.' Or you ask the sun to give you some life energy."

"In Asia we bow to each other this way. What you do in this bowing is not just bowing to you. In many Asian religions and in our culture we believe that everyone of us carry with us divine spark within us, it is divine spark, divine life from God. But we are sharing this divine spark, this divinity with God and with all of us. So what we bow to is the divinity in that person. So maybe some of our light become very dim, it almost dies or some of us our light is so bright and so powerful but we know we all have this divine spark and I discover that this is a very Christian message too.

"According to Gnostic gospel there is one great line from Jesus and what Jesus said was very interesting new way of understanding salvation. Jesus said in Gnostic gospel, 'if you bring out what is within you, what is within you will save you. But if you cannot bring out what is within you, what is within you will destroy you. It is what Jesus said, but this Gnostic gospel is considered as heretical gospel. So you see many good people are out in canonization process. So you have to remember what kind of Bible we are using right now. I taught to my friends, many times introduction to Bible class, I said, 'you know too much uncritical reading of Bible is hazardous for your health, especially you are pregnant with these creative ideas so you

better be careful to read Bible because it is a very good and dangerous book.' And I always ask my students, 'If you are a citizen of some nation and all these people say they are the congressmen in your place, but you never voted for them, and one day they got together and they made a constitution and they said you have to follow everything they said in this constitution, would you follow the constitution?' and all my students say! 'Hell, no.' Yes that's right. That's the way the Bible is constituted, you are not there. Most of the people who decided the canon was men, so if you are not represented in that process, you have to really think about this constitution. So, this morning I want to bring out this Asian and Gnostic understanding of salvation. I'm sure as an Asian person, if Gnostic gospel is canonized as gospel, we Asians would not have much problem to receive gospel because we know what is in the light within you and what is divine spark within you."

"Re-Imagining Community" presentation, Saturday plenary. [Tape 7-1, Side B.]

LOIS M. WILSON is currently chancellor at Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, Canada. She is an ordained minister in the United Church of Canada and its former moderator, one of the past presidents of both the World Council of Churches and the Canadian Council of Churches.

"Christianity as practiced in today's world demonstrates more a nightmare than a vision. I think of the image of a sculpture that was hung in a downtown Toronto church some years ago. The woman had out stretched hands in the form of a crucifix, she was naked, vulnerable, and unprotected. That is, no fig leaf covered her genitals or her breasts. She was known as the crucified women. There was shock and reaction, and so when the sculpture had initially been hung on Easter Sunday at the front of the church, by evening it had to be removed to the rear of the church. That action signaled to me that many in the religious community are unable to recognize the way in which women are being crucified daily in our communities." [Applause]

[Tape 7-2, Side A.]

"Finally, can we re-imagine Chris-

tians paying more attention to the great commandment than the great commission. You may remember the great commandment is to love which is to affirm the other's identity and diversity and I think the churches have fundamentally denied diversity and that's why we've lost much of our prophetic power. 'I shall pour out my spirit on all humanity' says this reimagining passage. Surely God didn't mean all humanity, did he mean neo-pagans, did she mean the wiccans, the sikhs, the Muslims, the Hindus, the men and the women? Or did she? 'Your sons and your daughters shall prophecy, your young people shall see visions, your old people dream dreams, even on slaves, men and women, shall I pour my spirit.' We're scared of saying it, for fear of being disloyal to Jesus, or being too inclusive. And we're afraid of letting the Holy Spirit come to do her work, of breaking icons and sweeping our defenses and dearly loved ideologies away."

Lesbian Demonstration, Saturday plenary session. [Tape 7-2, Side B.]

MELANIE MORRISON is the co-founder of CLOUT (Christian Lesbians Out Together).

My name is Melanie Morrison and I am co-convenor of the CLOUT Council. CLOUT stands for Christian Lesbians Out Together. [Applause] We are an ecumenical movement celebrating the miracle of being lesbian, out, and Christian.

"We are keenly, painfully aware that the world is not safe for lesbian women and often the least safe place is the church. We call upon all of you - whatever your sexual orientation - not to leave this holy place without wrestling with these questions. What does it mean for us to be in solidarity with lesbian, bisexual, and transsexual women in this decade? And how can we together re-imagine our churches so that every woman may claim her voice, her gifts, her loves, her wholeness?"

"Acknowledging that my white skin may put me in a place where there is less at stake in coming out, we invite at this time every lesbian, bisexual, and transsexual woman who is willing and able to come forward, quickly, and encircling this podium facing out as a circle. [Sustained applause]

"We want to acknowledge all of you

who are standing in solidarity-lesbian, bisexual, an transsexual women also who are at your tables who cannot yet come forward and we offer our presence and this song, 'Keep on Moving Forward,' on behalf of all of us who have known silence in visibility or oppression from whatever source."

"Re-Imagining Sexuality - Family" presentation, (scheduled for Friday but was held instead on Saturday, 1 p.m.). [Tape 9-1, Side A.]

SUSAN THISTLETHWAITE is professor of theology at Chicago Theological Seminary and an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ.

"I would like for those able to stand, to stand.... Now what I would like you to do is put your hand on your diaphragm. One of the things we need to say and mean it about sexuality is NO!.... What I want from you is to feel your diaphragm with your breath and then say no!.... Now we have something else we need to learn. I want you to imagine something about sexuality that you would like to say yes to. Take a second, bring something to mind, we're going to do the same thing and we're going to say yes!"

"Re-Imagining Sexuality - Family" presentation, Saturday, 1 p.m. [Tape 9-1, Side A.]

MARY HUNT is co-founder and co-director of the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual (WATER) in Silver Spring, M.D. She is Roman Catholic.

"My topic this afternoon is re-imagining sexuality and family and other necessary fantasies.... I begin my look at re-imagining sexuality and the family and other necessary fantasies from a lesbian, feminist, Euro-American, middle-class, upper-educated starting point.... But it is at this conference that I speak especially as a lesbian because I think we need to be very specific about the fact that issues related to sexuality and family have been covert ways of dealing in churches with issues related to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-gender people.... First there are lots of us [lesbians] here as we are always present and especially in leadership in churches and church-related circles. Lets start with the obvious, lots of us. Secondly we come to this gathering delighted, with our ancestors within us, as was suggested. From gen-

eration to generation, lesbian women have been part of every movement for social change. And especially in the vanguard of church related movements. And so, I honor my lesbian ancestors this afternoon. Thirdly, we are here not in anyone's imagination but in flesh and blood, with specific claims on churches which have been and continue to treat us badly. I think this is important, we are not here in anyone's imagination, we are here fully embodied in flesh and in the church. Fourth as my beloved, evangelical, lesbian, feminist sister Virginia Ramey Mollenkott says, 'grace is a lesbian.' I never thought I'd learn something so central to my own theological position from an evangelical but Virginia has taught me this. And let grace's numbers increase as all of us talk together this afternoon about family and sexuality."

"My tradition has been shaped and my experience has been reshaped in light of being a happy sexual lesbian.... Sexual expression on my part is a human right."

"...when we look at the issues which have preoccupied the churches in the last several decades, the list with almost ecumenical consensus, remarkably is headed by what we call the big four: inclusive language, women's ordination, reproductive choice and homosexuality.... Frankly I think this is embarrassing, given the fact that we live in a violent culture, talk about fiddling while Rome burns!"

[Tape 9-1, Side B.]

"...lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people have not fared any better in church circles in recent decades.... I do not need to rehearse here the unspeakable treatment of lesbian and bisexual women in mainline churches in this country.... To be an out lesbian in Christian church circles is to live threatened with spiritual if not physical death. It is to live threatened with public censure at every turn.... To separate out those who are practicing, self-avowed, self-affirming homosexuals, it works for me, from those who are celibate by mandate, those who lie to get by, and or those who live with ecclesial fostered self hatred.... We call for the end to a 'don't ask, don't tell' way of being.

Where did the military learn it if not from the churches?"

"...I think that developing a sense not of 'my' children but... of 'our' children will be far more difficult than reshaping family under any circumstances. Yet I think it is the more important goal, so that we break down individualism and the notion of property when it comes to persons, and begin to share and take responsibility for one another and for the earth because we are connected far beyond our blood ties. This is why I have far more hope in substituting 'friendship' as a metaphor for family. I consider friendship and I have written extensively about this in Fierce Tenderness, the normative human relationship available to everyone, at least potentially and being descriptive without categorizing or prioritizing in a proscribed basis the way in which we want to relate as friends to the whole of creation - to animals, to people, and to the earth."

"Imagine sex among friends as the norm, young people learning to make friends rather than to date. Imagine valuing genital sexual interaction in terms of whether and how it fosters friendship and pleasure. Imagine, just imagine. Imagine the many ways friends are together since not all of us have the time or inclination to go to bed together. But imagine the embodied ways of being together in all of their diversity, which would expand the focus of sexuality from our genitals to our whole being. From who does what with whom to how do they love one another.... Pleasure is our birthright of which we have been robbed in religious patriarchy. It is time to claim it anew with our friends."

"Preoccupation with eternal truth has given way in our time to survival concerns as the defining line for theological reflection and in my imagination we will all shed the excess baggage of patriarchy and assume the interwoven stance of a people doing justice or we will die trying. This [is] what it means to me to be religious. Whether it is Christian or not is frankly, darling, something about which I no longer give a pope."

"My second fantasy focuses on responsible relational sexuality which I imagine as a human right for everyone.

Responsible relational sexuality as a human right. I picture friends, not families, but friends basking in the pleasures we deserve because our bodies are holy and our sexuality is part of creation's available riches. Take just a moment to use your imagination and speak aloud two or three or four or six or ten of your pleasures. And listen to what they sound like.... Jacuzzis, orgasms, cuddling, food, jogging, add yours...there is no pleasure for me unless there is pleasure for all."

"Re-Imagining Sexuality – Family" presentation, Saturday, 1 p.m. [Tape 9-2, Side A.]

FRANCES E. WOOD is a writer and educator on topics of religion and justice, with particular emphasis on women, sexual assault and domestic violence, and the role of religious communities within society.

"...the idolatry of maleness is a particular sin that we need to repent from.... We have burned incense at the altar of the dominant paradigm.... Our structures reflect that the sacred is synonymous with the masculine and the profane is synonymous with the feminine and it doesn't matter how many platitudes are mouthed on Mother's Day or women's day, the evidence is when you look at the pulpit, the evidence is when you look at the deacons' board, the evidence is who gets the final say and why."

"Re-Imagining Language – Word" presentation, Saturday, 1 p.m. [Tape 8-1, Side B.]

JOHANNA W. H. BOS is professor of Old Testament at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. She is a Presbyterian Church (USA) minister.

"Today we are aware of the pit of patriarchy and most of us have been engaged in the struggle for re-imagining a different community in the church. We have known for a while of the pit of patriarchy. We have known that patriarchy distorts all relations in the created world and its institutions between human beings and God, among human beings themselves and between humans and the rest of creation."

"Sisters and brothers, we have come to the center of the power, not just to have a piece of the pie. Not just to point out that we belong here too. We are not

here to join the great pissing contest. We have come here in cognizance of the cries of the most vulnerable among us, to empower them and to let their voices take on a sound of their own.... We are not here so much to jump on the feminist band wagon but to upset the patriarchy apple cart."

"Re-Imagining Church as Worshiping Community" presentation, Saturday, 1 p.m. [Tape 11-1, Side B.]

VIRGINIA RAMEY MOLLENKOTT is professor of English at William Paterson College of New Jersey.

"In brief, my experience as an outsider has taught me to envision a depatriarchalized post-colonizing and genuinely inclusive, mutually empowering, community of women and men.... I accept Eliz Schussler Fiorenza's definition of patriarchy, 'a societal system of domination and exploitation that is structured by hetero-sexism, racism, nationalism and classism.'"

"The worship model would look more like Latin American base communities than like high steeple churches, would look more like feminist or womanist 12-step meetings than a star-studded lecture series.... This church would worship God herself, with the gynocentric pronouns balancing off the androcentric term 'God.' Just oppose it to 'goddess' and you understand very quickly, the word is in and of itself androcentric. Or of course we might find some other set of inclusive set of terms but we would avoid the androcentric language and the dominant submission theology that legitimates patriarchy with all of its violence. As an incest survivor, I can no longer worship in a theological context that depicts God as an abusive parent and Jesus as the obedient trusting child."

"'Sin' would be described as wrong relationship, as a collective system of coercion that is leading human kind toward self-destruction. 'Salvation' would mean turning away from the constricted attitudes of the world's fear-driven consensus – fear and guilt driven consensus."

"Instead we would seek together to enter into our Christ-nature by realizing that just like Jesus every blessed one of us remains at our core or essence exactly

as we were created, the express image of God's person. To release and empower that essence would be the goal of worship. I often vision this worship community as an inter-religious community, and I know the term 'Christ' has proved to be acceptable to people from many other religious traditions as long as we also respect such terms as the Buddha-nature or simply the new nature."

"...this worshiping community would rejoice in the fact that everything that lives is holy. And therefore naturally would have strong ecological concerns. This community would no doubt be labeled monistic and it would be monistic in the sense of worshiping God as above all and through all and in us all. The radical source of that quotation is Ephesians 4:6. But this monistic community would also be pluralistic in the sense of being a heterogeneous* polyglot arena of competing mutually moderating discourse. The one divine presence would be recognized in everybody by everybody and a great deal of discussion would no doubt center on working out the supposed conflicts between identity and difference, spiritual oneness and apparent bodily separation, respect of self and respect for others and for the community as a whole."

"Like Jesus, we and the source are one, yet we are not identical with our source in the sense of loosing all of our identifying characteristics. Our basic union with God and with each other in duality but not dualism could provide us with the courage to confront one another in the struggles that are inevitable to intimacy. In this worshiping community many of us would understand Jesus to be our elder brother, the trail blazer and constant companion for us who are here in time and space but ultimately one among many brothers and sisters in an eternally, equally worthy siblinghood. Firstborn only in the sense that he was the first to show us that it is possible to live in oneness with the divine source while we are here on this planet. I hope none of us would subscribe to the androcentric idolatry that sees Jesus' maleness as central to the incarnation of God's presence in the world. We might be more inclined instead to focus on the pregnant Mary as our image of the incarnation – God with

us, representing in the pregnant Mary all the powerless, the hungry, all the despised women whose bodies God does not overlook but rather dwells within."

"An important part of that would be showing honor to every world religion not just to Christianity. So, 'missionary efforts' would target only those people who seem to have no sense of the holy, no experience of an incandescent wonder. There would be dialogue and interaction with people from different religious traditions and there would be mutual modification of the kind that Dr. Chung was discussing, but there would be no more imperialistic attempts to 'make others such as I.'"

[Tape 11-2, Side A.]

"Learning to be honest about differences of opinion among members of the re-imagined church would be absolutely essential. Here in 1993 society is observing the spectacle of national churches threatening and sometimes taking legal action against individual congregations within their own communion. Amazing? Now why? Because these congregations respect the integrity of lesbian, bisexual, and gay people. These congregations recognize that when the Bible is interpreted contextually as every book deserves to be interpreted, there is no bar to the ordination of qualified gay and lesbian and bisexual people. [Applause] Now I ask you why isn't it possible for general assemblies of national churches to admit to the world that their membership is in conflict about homosexuality and therefore that they will not legislate but will continue to seek consensus and in the meantime will leave practical decisions to the local congregations. [Shouts and applause] Instead the world sees general conferences passing legislation that says things like, 'homosexuality is incompatible with Christianity' when they know full well that a substantial minority of their own members believe no such thing. So a re-imagined community of worship would either have to be fairly decentralized or capable of living with differences of perspective or both."

"Re-Imagining Ethics-Work-Ministry" presentation, Saturday, 1 p.m. [Tape 10-1, Side A.]

ARUNA GNANADASON: "What I was planning to do was in fact a love song,

because most of classical Indian dancing are love songs to God where a woman invites her friend to call her divine lover to her midst as she prepares her body, scents her body, perfumes her hair and makes ready for her divine lover. We have lost so much of that in Western Christianity which came to us that I wish we could reclaim some of that and I wanted to share that with you but I gave it up!"

[Tape 10-1, Side B.]

"It is a new theological vision of women emerging in every region of the world that is symbolic of this presence of the feminine spirit. And I believe she is here with us. The call is for the reconstruction of some central theological symbols, for example the image of God and the significance of the cross. In a global context where violence and the use of force have become the norm, the violence that the cross symbolizes and the patriarchal image of an almighty invincible Father God needs to be challenged and reconstructed."

"Re-Imagining Ethics – Work-Ministry" presentation, Saturday, 1 p.m. [Tape 10-2, Side B.]

BEVERLY WILDUNG HARRISON is the Carolyn Williams Beard Professor of Christian Ethics at Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

"...you should understand what is going on and why the sexuality issues are so dangerous and obfuscating—they are leading us into a moral sewer and I am enjoying, I'm sorry, as somebody said the other day, I'm enjoying seeing the Roman hierarchy deal with becoming the pedophile capital of the world. And I am enjoying a lot of the other issues around sexuality, but be very careful, women, because the real victims of this – the ethnic cleansing, the leadership cleansing – will be aimed not at those who are the chief offenders but at the liberal clergy who are offenders, male, and gay men and lesbians, and that is already certifiable, and is what is going on in the churches. So I say, a moral sewer. And if we don't start breaking the silence about this stuff! I went to Princeton Seminary, where the president of that institution is determined to see the Presbyterian Church remain 'til death's door a moral sewer, and I said these things and everyone in the room

stood up, wept. I was hugged and blessed and someone said, 'God, to hear someone tell the truth about this church is almost more than we can bear.' Well folks, we're going to have to make more trouble before we have less."

"Building Healing Bridges: Lesbians and Churches Acting Together," Saturday, 3:45 p.m. [There were no tapes made of this session.]

JUDY WESTERDORF, United Methodist minister in Minnesota.

She claimed that the "Church has always been blessed by gays and lesbians, witches, shamans, artists...." and joked about the term "practicing homosexual," announcing that her partner says she's not practicing, but that she's pretty good.

**Sunday, November 7, 1993
Blessing over Milk and Honey. [Program book, page 32, 33.]**

"Our maker Sophia, we are women in your image: With the hot blood of our wombs we give form to new life. With the courage of our convictions we pour out lifeblood for justice."...

"Our mother Sophia, we are women in your image: With the milk of our breasts we suckle the children; With the knowledge of our hearts we feed humanity."...

"Our sweet Sophia, we are women in your image: With nectar between our thighs we invite a lover, we birth a child. With our warm body fluids we remind the world of its pleasures and sensations."...

"Our guide, Sophia, we are women in your image. With our moist mouths we kiss away a tear, we smile encouragement. With the honey of wisdom in our mouths, we prophesy a full humanity to all the peoples."...

"We celebrate the sensual life you give us. We celebrate the sweat that pours from us during our labors. We celebrate the fingertips vibrating upon the skin of a love. We celebrate the tongue which licks a wound or wets our lips. We celebrate our bodiliness, our physicality, the sensations of pleasure, our oneness with earth and water."

The Sunday Ritual. [Tape 12-2, Side A.]

CHRISTINE MARIE SMITH: "In 1987, I stood in a conference of gathered

United Methodist clergymen. On a platform, not unlike this one. I was one of five voices that read several anonymous statements written by lesbian clergy women in attendance at the conference and their feelings of being silenced, oppressed, afraid. I read those statements anonymously, as well. This day I stand before you having come a very, very long way since then. This day I share this sermon with you as a United Church of Christ pastor and lesbian clergymen. [Applause, banging, cheers] Thank you.

I wish I could stand before you this day and tell you how inspiring I think this story of the Canaanite woman is. Her strong presence, her persistent faith, her shameless audacity. I'd like to be able to feel the full weight of joy as I experience this ancient story retold, celebrating her daughter's healing; smugly as a woman rejoicing in the truth that this woman seems to expand Jesus ministry, his self understanding, and world view as none other seems to. Completely and thoroughly awed by the clarity of her mission. But as much as I can appreciate and celebrate this woman I cannot celebrate this story. It's too filled with inequity, with dismissal, with demeaning power, with dehumanization

for me to be able to feel any real comfort or ease with it. It's so much easier to speak about her bold voice than to sense the silent rejection of both Jesus and the disciples. It is so much more comforting to recognize her quick and persuasive insight than to feel this woman's kneeling. It is so much more uplifting and empowering to respect the faith of this woman to bring about the healing of her own daughter than to acknowledge that this woman ultimately had to beg. I've always found this story angering and offensive. The silencing of women's voices is oppressive, the dismissing of women's lived experience is dehumanizing. Forcing women to beg for the resources, power, healing, care they need in order to sustain life for themselves and their children is always an act of violence." [applause]

Editor's note: We have struggled with the capitalization of the word "God" throughout these excerpts and have elected to capitalize all references to the word "God," even though some references are clearly not referring to the God of the Old and New Testaments.

Mainline denial: how our churches are responding

BY SUSAN CYRE

As the content of last November's Re-Imagining Conference continues to be made known, members of congregations in mainline denominations are responding with horror. Not only has this been the reaction within the United Methodist Church but it also has become a common occurrence within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the American Baptist Church, the United Church of Christ, and the Presbyterian Church (USA). In some cases, congregations have notified their denominational leadership that they are withholding funds until the denomination adequately responds to the charges of heresy and paganism.

In the Presbyterian Church (USA), Executive Director James Brown defended his staff's participation at the conference and the use of \$66,000 of denominational monies used to support the conference by saying, "Those I've talked with saw this as not a place where orthodoxy is being put to the test, but a place where...folks bring in speakers who are stimulating, [and] they agree with part of what they say or they disagree..."

Mainline denominational executives are justifying their participation in the conference with three explanations. Each of these needs to be addressed.

1. We attended Re-Imagining because this was an ecumenical event. Of course, there may have been things said that not everyone would agree with. That is to be expected.

Joyce Sohl, deputy general secretary of the Women's Division of the UM Church, followed this line of rationale by declaring, "In line with the ecumenical stance of the denomination, the Women's Division sponsors attendance at many ecumenical events."

The traditional understanding of ecumenical gatherings, however, demands that those present affirm their own faith but refrain from denigrating the beliefs of others. Also, ecumenical gatherings have historically been respectful and faithful to the parameters of orthodox Christian beliefs, as set forth in historic creeds and confessions. At the Re-Imagining Conference, however, not one of the 34 major speakers represented orthodox Christian faith as ex-

pressed in the classical creeds or confessions. Rather than being ecumenically grounded in the Christian faith, this meeting was interreligious, with its major emphasis being nonchristian belief.

The speakers attacked the Christian Church and orthodox Christian doctrine as the source of oppression of women, racism, classism, violence in our cities, abuse of children, abusive rejection of gay and lesbian sexuality, and pollution of the environment.

Asian feminist Chung Hyun Kyung said, "[The] Christian Church has been very patriarchal. That's why we are here together to destroy this patriarchal idolatry of Christianity." Lois Wilson, the immediate past president of the World Council of Churches, said, "Christianity as practiced in today's world demonstrates more of a nightmare than a vision." Aruna Gnanadason, staff member of the World Council of Churches, said that the church "centered its faith around the cruel and violent death of Christ on the cross, sanctioning violence against the powerless in society." Radical feminist Virginia Mollenkott told the group, "I can no longer worship in a theological context that depicts God as an abusive parent and Jesus as the obedient trusting child. This violent theology encourages the violence of our streets and our nations."

Chinese feminist Kwok Pui-Lan told the group, "We cannot have one savior - just like the Big Mac in McDonalds, pre-packaged, shipped all over the world. It won't do. It's imperialistic." She offered China's 722 gods and goddesses as an example of "radical inclusivity." With reference to the Trinity she said, "I see three as more inclusive, diversity in unity.... If you have one and only one we are even more oppressive."

2. This was a theological smorgasbord. Women in attendance were free to agree or disagree with the content of the conference.

"Because it was an event that was ecumenical and global," said Annie Wu King, a Presbyterian Church (USA) executive, "there were expressions of ways of doing things that were different, but I tried to be open."

Unfortunately, the Re-Imagining Conference was not an academic lecture format in which attendees were invited to critically evaluate the speakers' position. Instead, this conference had a wor-

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Presbyterian Church (USA).

ship format in which attendees gave their assent to the content by their participation in the songs, dances, litanies, demonstrations, and rituals.

Any dissent or disagreement by attendees was defined as "listening to an inner critic" or being unwilling to grow. During the first evening, participants were told that "2000 men and women [are] pushing out boundaries of our lives, our traditions, and our understandings of the divine, and community, and the church, and creation...we invite you to enter the process of music and art, dance and the spoken word, even if it feels funny or awkward or strange to us at times. We are midwives of the new life that will be born from our work."

The group was then led in "scribbling." They were told, "Some of you have a tiny little voice inside that says, 'this is silly. You can't do this.' Well, welcome, that's the inner critic." They were instructed to write the words that kept them from enjoying the experience on a piece of paper and then to tear it up and throw it on the floor. "Tear out those words that aren't useful. Tell them they can't be part of you. Banish them."

When Chung Hyun Kyung led the conference through New Age pranic healing techniques, she labeled the reluctance that anyone might have felt as their unwillingness to "stretch themselves."

She told the group that when they are tired they should "go up to a big tree and ask the tree 'give me some of your life-energy.' Or ask the sun to give you some life-energy. Then you spread this life-giving energy to your brothers and sisters in hurt and pain." She explained, "I want to practice with you this energy sharing.... If you feel goose bumps you don't have to do it. But, you know, it's wonderful sometimes to stretch yourself so you grow more than you think you can."

When a United Methodist Women's director was concerned that the activities were not consistent with her faith and refused to participate, she was quickly informed by a table facilitator that the conference leadership wanted everyone to participate.

3. References to Sophia were consistent with the Old Testament use of wisdom.

Two members of the Re-Imagining Conference steering committee have

defended the references to Sophia. Jeanne Audrey Powers, an executive at the UM Church's Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, simply defined Sophia as "the encountering of divine wisdom." She also declared her disappointment that some feminist scholars who have "begun to find feminine elements in the godhead and who are seeking to remain within the church are sometimes condemned as radicals for trying to find elements in Scripture and tradition that they can relate to as women."

Mary Ann Lundy, a high-level Presbyterian Church (USA) executive, defended the references to Sophia by saying they were to "invoke God's blessing of wisdom on the speaker." She continued, "For me, the whole thing about goddess worship is really ridiculous because part of what the conference did was raise up many of the biblical images."

The god that was celebrated at the Re-Imagining Conference was not the Christian God. It was not simply using a new name for the biblical God of the Old and New Testaments. The religion promoted at the conference was pantheism and monism in which a universal divine energy permeates all matter thus making the material world, including human beings, sacred and divine.

Conference speaker and dance leader Carla DeSola told the group to "feel your being, this being is sacred like the earth.... When we really move in an integrated way of body and soul together we know who we are on a deeper level; and knowing who we are, we can garner that power and energy into our prayer. It becomes the full expression because we are in touch with our deep self and we release the spirit into the world. We become like Sophia, a tree of life for the healing of ourselves and the nations."

The conference participants were led by Aruna Gnanadason in putting red dots on their foreheads, supposedly representing the divine within each of them. They then bowed to each other to this divinity.

Virginia Mollenkott explained this pantheism or monism saying, "everything that lives is holy.... The monism I'm talking about assumes that god is so all-inclusive that she is involved in every cell of those who are thoughts in her mind

and embodiments of her image.... Like Jesus, we and the source are one.... We would understand Jesus to be our elder brother, the trailblazer and constant companion for us who are here in time and space; but ultimately one among many brothers and sisters in an eternally, equally worthy siblinghood. First-born only in the sense that he was the first to show us that it is possible to live in oneness with the divine source while we are here on this planet."

Rita Nakashima Brock told the group that they must reject a transcendent personal god and instead view god as a verb. The women become the incarnation of god as "[we] use our power to love, to nurture, to enable freedom and willfulness of others."

Explaining this new religion, Kwok Pui-Lan said, "If we cannot imagine Jesus as a tree, as a river, as wind, and as rain, we are doomed together. If we are forever anthropocentric in our search for the redeemer we are doomed." She then directed the group to stand and "imagine yourself a tree, move as a tree."

In the new religion where the material world is divine and sacred, all sexual acts become sacred. Radical feminist Mary Hunt said during one seminar that it was time to substitute "friendship as a metaphor for family." She said, "imagine sex among friends as the norm...pleasure is our birthright of which we have been robbed in religious patriarchy. Responsible relational sexuality is a human right. I picture friends, not families, basking in the pleasure we deserve because our bodies are holy and our sexuality is part of creation's available riches."

One wonders how any of this can be construed to be consistent with the Old Testament use of wisdom.

At the closing milk and honey ritual, complete with a pseudo-sexual responsive reading, the group invoked the goddess by referring to her as: "Our maker Sophia," "Our mother Sophia," "Our sweet Sophia," "Sophia, Creator God," and "Our guide, Sophia." Are these the terms we would use simply to encounter divine wisdom?

Through their participation and funding of the Re-Imagining Conference, staff and elected leadership of mainline denominations have supported a gathering which turned away from Jesus Christ and worshiped a false

THE RE-IMAGINING CONFERENCE: A REPORT

god. As leadership, as shepherds having responsibility for the flock, they have violated and jeopardized the trust of their denominational membership and have led the world outside our denominations to question our fidelity to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. If our denominations are to remain faithful to Jesus Christ, our grassroots membership must insist that our leadership repudiate the heresies promoted at the conference and reaffirm the lordship of Jesus Christ.

UM Women's Division responds Fact Sheet Concerning the "Re-Imagining" Conference and the Women's Division of the UM Board of Global Ministries

Both recent fund raising letters of Good News and RENEW/Evangelical Coalition of United Methodist Women and the January-February 1994 issue of *Good News* magazine attack the Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries for participation and "support" of the Re-Imagining Conference. A December 15th letter addressed to members of the Council of Bishops says the event was "supported officially" and suggests that the Women's Division had "full knowledge of what the contents would be" and states that if this is true, "the Council of Bishops must consider how to call the Women's Division to accountability."

Staff and directors who attended this event are all mature women able to make discriminating theological judgments. They are aware that presence at an ecumenical event does not indicate approval of everything that happens. *Good News* and *RENEW* had their own representatives present.

The Women's Division is committed to ecumenical dialogue and freedom to discuss a wide range of theological ideas among Christians of different backgrounds. Attendance at ecumenical events includes the risk of encountering ideas that are not in harmony with United Methodist positions. For example, the expressions of some participants concerning homosexuality differs from our official United Methodist position. Hearing does not mean agreement. The Women's Division operates within the framework of the United Methodist Discipline and its theological statement.

Now to some questions and answers.

Who sponsored the event and why were Women's Division staff and directors present?

The Re-Imagining Conference was sponsored by the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Minnesota Councils of Churches, November 4-7, 1993, to mark the midway point in the "Ecumenical Decade - Churches in Solidarity with Women." It was held in Minneapolis.

The United Methodist Church has been supporting participation in "Decade" events for several years. A 1988 United Methodist General Conference resolution called upon all United Methodists to "participate fully in the Ecumenical Decade - Churches in Solidarity with Women" (1988-98). In 1993 the United Methodist Council of Bishops strongly recommended activities on the implementation of the Decade's goals in every annual conference.

Women's Division directors were informed about the event and those who wished to attend had their expenses paid. Conference vice presidents were offered the opportunity to apply for a limited number of scholarships to the conference.

Did the Women's Division sponsor the conference?

No. It did not sponsor the event and it was not represented in the planning. Its only funding was expenses of attendees.

Did the Women's Division have "full knowledge of the contents" in advance?

No.

Was the event the theological training for the quadrennium?

No.

Why did the Women's Division sponsor attendance?

In line with the ecumenical stance of the denomination, the Women's Division sponsors attendance at many ecumenical events. Our church, as indicated above, has promoted the issues relevant to Decade. The 1988 General Conference passed a resolution supporting the Decade.

How many persons attended at Women's Division expense?

Thirty-six directors (there are 65) chose to attend this conference. Nine

staff members attended. There were 11 United Methodist Women conference vice presidents who attended because of their responsibilities for ecumenical and women's concerns.

In response to a request from the Minnesota Conference United Methodist Women, \$2,500 was granted for Minnesota scholarships. The remainder of the nearly 400 United Methodists paid their own expenses.

What does the Women's Division think of the theology articulated by speakers at this conference?

The Women's Division subscribes to the theological concepts of The United Methodist Church as outlined in the Discipline. We are placed within the tradition and practice of The United Methodist Church and operate within that framework. We believe in freedom of religion and the rights of individuals to articulate differing beliefs.

Does The United Methodist Church or the Women's Division "officially" participate?

The Women's Division and the United Methodist Church have supported the decade but neither were official sponsors or funders of this regional conference.

What was the reaction of those who attended?

The reactions varied. Some thought it was challenging while not agreeing with all aspects. Some were disturbed by some of the ideas advanced. All are mature Christians rooted in the Wesleyan tradition and are acquainted with the doctrines and positions of the United Methodist Church. They understood that they were attending an ecumenical event where a variety of opinions would be expressed.

Joyce D. Sobl, Deputy General Secretary, Women's Division

Women's Division response leaves questions unanswered

• Without "full knowledge" of the conference, how does the Women's Division justify sending 58 people at church expense and encouraging the participation of nearly 400 others?

• If the Women's Division did not have "full knowledge," what knowledge

did they have about the conference theme and activities?

• Given that attendees were discerning enough to judge the credibility of the conference, how does this justify sending them?

• Since the Women's Division is "rooted in the Wesleyan tradition and are acquainted with the doctrines and positions of the United Methodist Church," isn't there a responsibility to repudiate doctrines that conflict with those standards (substitution of Sophia for Jesus Christ, debunking of the Atonement, promotion of homosexuality, etc.)?

• Will the Women's Division continue to support radical feminist theology, lesbianism and Sophia worship?

Good News magazine responds to Women's Division

BY FAYE SHORT &

JAMES V. HEIDINGER II

JAMES V. HEIDINGER II
is the Editor of *Good News*
Magazine.

FAYE SHORT

FAYE SHORT
is the Director of the Evangelical
Coalition for United Methodist
Women (ECUMW).

We have read the official response from the Women's Division concerning the Re-Imagining Conference. Unfortunately, it provides no satisfactory explanations about United Methodist participation in an event so far removed from Christian teaching and tradition. We are troubled, as well, by the absence of any expression of regret or even second thoughts about participation in an event which made a mockery of Christian doctrine and morality.

In fact, we find the Women's Division official response to be evasive, misleading, and ultimately unresponsive to the theological crisis now facing the UM Church.

What we are asking the leadership of the Women's Division to do is simple - to repudiate the false gospel promoted at the Re-Imagining Conference and to apologize to United Methodist Women for this misuse of their tithes and offerings. This, they have thus far refused to do.

The Women's Division's response refuses to address the numerous offensive, heretical, and derisive attacks upon historic Christianity. In noting that the staff and directors who attended were "all mature women able to make discriminating theological judgments," the statement neatly avoids any comment about the conference's repeated denials of historic Christian doctrine. The com-

ment that "The Women's Division is committed to ecumenical dialogue and freedom to discuss a wide range of theological ideas" explains nothing. To say such offensive presentations were acceptable because this was "ecumenical dialogue" is a spurious attempt at justification and only gives "ecumenical dialogue" a bad name. The character of Re-Imagining was not that of dialogue, but rather of indoctrination in a feminist/womanist/lesbian agenda.

A few points need to be further addressed.

• In justifying the presence of staff and directors, the statement notes that those who attended were "aware that presence at an ecumenical event does not indicate approval of everything that happens. Good News and RENEW had their own representatives present." That statement implies that the Good News and RENEW representative attended simply to participate. We believed that the content of the Re-Imagining event might be highly controversial and thus deserving of careful coverage. Therefore, Dottie Chase attended as a press representative of Good News and RENEW. However, Mrs. Chase and several other mainline press representatives (Presbyterian, Lutheran, etc.) indicated they would have left in protest after the first two hours had they not been there as press observers.

• The official response also cites *Good News'* December 15 letter to the members of the Council of Bishops, which states that the event was "supported officially" by the Women's Division. And most certainly it was. The Women's Division took official action at its March 1993 meeting to be involved. At that spring meeting, the Women's Division's Section of Mission and Membership Development put forward a report which "rescinded the decision to have the staff and director theology workshop on May 14, 1993," and "approved that in place of a Women's Division - sponsored theology workshop, directors and staff attend (as schedules allow) the Re-Imagining conference on the Ecumenical Decade - Churches in Solidarity with Women in Minneapolis, MN, November 4-7, 1993." (This is found on page 3 of the section's "Report and Recommendations.") This action indicates that the Women's Division did "officially support" the Re-Imagining event.

• The statement also cites Good News' letter to the bishops which, it says, suggests that the Women's Division had "full knowledge of what the contents would be." For the record, the letter stated "One must wonder whether their [the Women's Division] participation was done with full knowledge of what the content would be." Since the Women's Division selected Re-Imagining as its major theological training event for the quadrennium, it is difficult to believe this was done unknowingly. When the Women's Division took the action at its spring meeting to participate in Re-Imagining, a part of the rationale for doing so included the statement that "The Re-Imagining workshop has drawn an excellent list of women theologians." The list of presenters had been published and must have been recognized by enough Women's Division staff for them to feel comfortable "rescinding" their own training event and making "Re-Imagining" their officially endorsed theological training event.

• The Women's Division statement denies that the Re-Imagining Conference was the theological training event for the quadrennium. Yet according to Exhibit II from the spring meeting of the Women's Division, entitled "Women's Division Staff and Director Retreat, 1994," the Women's Division "quadrennial pattern of retreats and theology workshops for staff and directors is: Year 1: Theology Workshop; Year 2: Spoken Retreat; Year 3: Silent Retreat; and Year 4: Individual Retreat." This document indicates "Re-Imagining" was the theological training event of the quadrennium for the Women's Division, an event set for Year 1 of the quadrennium, or 1993.

• While so many across the church are responding with shock and disgust at reports about the Re-Imagining Conference, the Women's Division appears unconcerned and unresponsive to the theological crisis reflected in the presentations at the Minnesota gathering. The citing of General Conference action urging participation in the "Ecumenical Decade" as well as encouragement from the Council of Bishops is a weak attempt to transfer elsewhere the responsibility the Women's Division should accept for its participation. Is this really the kind of event that encourages spiritual or theological growth?

• The sad truth is that the Women's Division encouraged – and funded – participation in an event which applauded heresy and celebrated blasphemy. The Women's Division has acknowledged financial support of thirty-six directors (of 65 total), nine staff members, and eleven UMW conference vice presidents who attended. The Women's Division also gave \$2,500 in response to a request from the Minnesota Conference United Methodist Women for scholarships. Page 66 of the program book was entitled "Thanks to Our Funders." Listed among the funding organizations on that page was the Women's Division of the United Methodist Church.

• The Women's Division response states that "presence at an ecumenical event does not indicate approval of everything that happens" and restates the Women's Division commitment to ecumenical dialogue and freedom to discuss a wide range of theological ideas among Christians of different backgrounds. These are noble but irrelevant points. The question is: will the Women's Division repudiate the unacceptable moral and theological substance of this conference?

We are left wondering why none of the United Methodist Women who attended "Re-Imagining" identified by the statement as "mature women able to make discriminating theological judgments" have not spoken out to denounce the heresy of Sophia and the rejection of so much of our Wesleyan theological heritage.

If the Women's Division sees the feminist/womanist/lesbian emphasis as the cutting edge for tomorrow's United Methodist Women, that is clearly unacceptable for the majority of UM women in our local churches. We ask the question once again about the matter of accountability. If the Women's Division is a part of the United Methodist Church, which it undoubtedly is, then the Council of Bishops must have the same responsibility of theological oversight of the women's unit as it does the entire UM Church, according to Par. 514.2 of the Book of Discipline. The UM Church awaits and desperately needs some expression of episcopal oversight concerning the Re-Imagining Conference.

Sunday with Sophia

BY KATHERINE KERSTEN

According to Re-Imagining Conference participants, critics have got it all wrong. The gathering was not theologically aberrant, they insist, nor did goddess worship take place there. Many women protest that the prayers they offered to Sophia were holy and honorable and were merely intended to revere the female aspect of the Christian God.

I was present at "Re-Imagining," and I cannot understand how women who attended the conference can make such claims. These women, I suspect, were misled by their leaders' perfunctory attempts to link Sophia – as "spirit of Re-Imagining" – with Christian Scripture and tradition. Indeed, Re-Imagining organizers devoted all of five paragraphs in their daily conference newsletter to what should have been a critical issue – Sophia's ostensible Christian roots.

Re-Imagining was, in fact, an exercise in theological sleight of hand. Biblical Wisdom is an abstract attribute of Christianity's triune God – like justice, love or mercy. But when conference leaders pulled this Wisdom out of their theological black hat, they produced "Sophia," a personified Wisdom conjured up out of thin air and worshiped for her own sake. The Re-Imagining newsletter offered this rationale for the transformation: "While one could legitimately use either term, use of the name 'Sophia' rather than the more abstract, 'Wisdom' reminds us that the Scriptures portray this Wisdom as a someone who walks, talks, plays, cries, eats, creates, and loves." Presto, changeo! One goddess coming up!

Whatever they chose to call her, at Re-Imagining Sophia occupied the place that Christian churches have reserved for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Leaders welcomed participants in her name, and urged them to "dream wildly" about "who we intend to be...through the power and guidance of the spirit of wisdom whom we name Sophia." As each speaker took the podium, she received a chanted blessing from the entire assembly: "Bless Sophia, dream the vision, share the wisdom dwelling deep within." Sophia's voice, the program declared, "has been silenced too long. Let her speak and bless us throughout these days."

Sophia was in her full glory at

Sunday's grand finale: a communal "blessing of milk and honey" reminiscent of the Eucharist meal of bread and wine. As the "gifts" were blessed, leaders intoned a lengthy prayer: "Our maker Sophia, we are women...in your image...Sophia, Creator God, let your milk and honey flow...shower us with your love...Our mother Sophia...Our sweet Sophia...Our guide, Sophia...we celebrate your life-giving energy...we celebrate the sensual life you give us...We celebrate our bodiliness, our physicality, the sensations of pleasure, our oneness with earth and water."

One wonders where the women were who deny that Sophia was worshiped as a goddess during these goings-on. One wonders, too, about the women who claim that they felt no pressure to join in the festivities. The Re-Imagining organizers clearly intended to exert such pressure. Throughout the conference, 50 monitors stood guard around the room, admonishing and exhorting attendees whose participation seemed less than heartfelt. Though participants had initially been told that joining in was voluntary, the conference newsletter advised that hanging back in Sophia-worship would not be tolerated: "[P]articipation is intended for ALL in the gathering – rituals are not spectator events...We thank you all for your full, active, conscious participation. May Sophia continue to bless your pilgrimage."

As I watched 2000 United Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, and Presbyterian women clink glasses filled with milk and honey, I was struck by a paradox. These women flocked happily to Sophia's altar, yet few seemed to have a clear idea of who she was, or to exhibit curiosity about how she might be associated with the creeds and confessions of their home churches. Even speakers such as the Rev. Barbara Lundblad, pastor of Our Savior's Atonement Lutheran Church in New York City, seemed to raise few eyebrows. Lundblad declared that she "did not need Jesus" as long as she had Sophia. To cheers, she noted that "we have done nothing in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." She suggested that Jesus "appear[ed] as the child...and the envoy of Sophia....In all [his] compassionate, liberating words and deeds are the works of Sophia."

KATHERINE KERSTEN

attorney, attended Re-Imagining as a press representative of *Religion and Democracy* and the *Lutheran Commentator*. She is a member of the board of directors of the Institute on Religion and Democracy and Lutherans for Religious and Political Freedom.

BISHOP EARL G. HUNT
is president of the Foundation for Evangelism, which raises money to fund evangelism professorships at United Methodist seminaries.

When I asked participants, "Who is Sophia?", they seemed surprised and uncertain how to respond. One woman volunteered that "Sophia is the divine energy in women being unlocked by the goddess rituals." Another said, "She is the god who has been ignored too long – she is liberating the energy of all women for the good of the community." One man told me that Sophia "is the incarnation of wisdom in the women I have known." But one young woman's response seemed particularly illuminating: "Sophia is the wisdom within me."

This woman helped me understand why the excitement at Re-Imagining seemed so infectious, and why those caught up in it seemed loathe to question its source. The Re-Imagining participants were happily engaged in that most modern of enterprises: worshipping themselves, right down to the "bodily fluids" that figure so prominently in their prayers. They wanted to believe the conference program's heady words: "Sophia is the place in you where the entire universe resides." They wanted what human beings have always craved – a goddess we can find by simply looking in the mirror.

Clearly, as the deity of "Re-Imagining," Sophia is the answer to the prayers of a multi-cultural, therapeutic world. She is "tolerant" – she does not judge, nor does she recognize any sin but the corporate transgressions of racism, sexism, and classism. Sophia has only one commandment – "Freely bless your own experience."

At first blush, it seems strange that those who contemptuously reject Christianity's most fundamental tenets should persist in calling themselves Christians, and wish to locate pow-wows such as Re-Imagining within Christian history. In fact, their behavior is easy to understand. Those who claim to be re-imagining Christianity get headlines about a "second reformation." They get endowed chairs at seminaries, money, power, legitimacy, and a captive audience that must be the envy of the self-declared followers of Wicca. "Sophia" serves "reformers" of this ilk as an invaluable *tabula rasa*. Their adherents' ignorance of Sophia – far from being an obstacle – is essential to their project of fashioning a new religion while retaining tenuous and self-interested links to the Christian faith.

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Bishop Hunt addresses Sophia

Recent efforts by some Christians to fuse worship of "Sophia" with Christianity is nothing more than an "attempt to reconstitute the godhead," a heresy that "stagger[s] the religious mind," said UMBishop Earl G. Hunt at the January meeting of the Congress on Evangelism.

"No comparable heresy has appeared in the church in the last 15 centuries," observed the retired bishop from Lake Junaluska, North Carolina.

"When the church seems to be losing its struggle with powers and principalities, weird things begin to happen," he told the convention of more than 1,000 lay people and clergy.

Bishop Hunt called the current interest in Sophia "a weird prostitution of the Eastern Orthodox idea of Saint Sophia" and said that "this is material which must be eradicated from Christian thinking now." He called upon his fellow bishops to deal with the heresy "forthrightly and firmly."

In a list of steps that could be taken to renew the denomination, Hunt said that the church must be "cleansed of heresies old and new."

He warned that "one of the danger signs is that church leaders, in effect, have declared ours to be a post-heresy age" in which almost anything can be construed as "Christian."

Hunt said emergence of such trends signals a need for a "deep and sweeping change, a radical transformation" across the denomination.

Adapted from United Methodist News Service

Wrestling with Re-Imagining

BY JAMES V. HEIDINGER II

November's Re-Imagining Conference in Minneapolis provides a painful glimpse into the theological malaise in America's mainline denominations. These churches used to be referred to as "mainstream" Protestant. This controversy, however, reminds me of the question asked by Riley Case in a *Good News* article a few years ago, "Has the mainstream become a back-yard trickle?"

Of course, the Re-Imagining event did not represent "mainstream" Protestantism or mainstream United Methodism for that matter. In fact, thousands are incensed at reports about Re-Imagining and will not be placated by

smooth public relations efforts that gloss over or ignore the serious issues involved. Let me clarify what some of those issues are:

First, what was wrong with the Re-Imagining event? The conference, attended by some 2,200 participants (391 of whom were United Methodists), included: 1. prayers to and worship focused on the goddess "Sophia;" 2. derision and denial of essential Christian doctrinal tenets (Incarnation, atonement, original sin, etc.); and 3. the public celebration of lesbianism. Rather than affirming the great themes of the Christian faith, speakers attacked the Church and its doctrines as the source of oppression of women, racism, classism, and infinitum.

Second, what was the nature of UM participation? The Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries took action at its spring meeting last March to cancel its own "staff and director theology workshop" and "approved" in its place involvement of staff and directors in the Re-Imagining event. The Women's Division has acknowledged its full financial support of 36 directors, 9 staff members, and 11 UMW conference vice presidents, plus a grant of \$2,500 in response to a request from the Minnesota Conference UMW for scholarships. This involvement clearly represents "official support" on behalf of the Women's Division.

In addition, the Re-Imagining program book listed several other United Methodists related to the conference. Named were Bishops Forrest C. Stith (New York) and Sharon Brown Christopher (Minnesota). Also involved as program leaders were Kathi Austin Mahle, a UM clergywoman who was co-chair of the Re-Imagining steering committee, and Jeanne Audrey Powers, associate general secretary of the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, who also served on the steering committee. Ms. Mahle and Ms. Powers would no doubt have been involved in the planning of the event. All this represents significant UM involvement in both planning and participation.

Third, didn't the Women's Division "Fact Sheet" and "video letter" adequately explain its involvement in the conference? Quite simply, no. Neither the "Fact Sheet" nor the video provided substantive or satisfactory answers. Try-

ing to calm the storm, the Women's Division has asked innocently, "Do UM Women have the ability to evaluate information they hear when presented with new, diverse views?" But what were these "new, diverse views?" They were not subtle nuances or fresh insights about biblical truth. They were radical departures from historic Christian doctrine and teaching.

At "Re-Imagining," Sophia was center stage. The entire gathering prayed to her, blessed every speaker in her name, and joined in the highly-offensive "Milk and Honey" service on the final day. One clergywoman who attended told a conference edition of *The United Methodist Reporter*: "This was the first time I had encountered Sophia worship or praying in the name of Sophia or invoking the spirit of Sophia."

What distresses many of us is that after three months, the Women's Division has expressed no regret or reservations whatsoever about the offensive content of the conference. Some of their comments have even seemed intentionally evasive.

This controversy reflects the theological crisis already present within United Methodism. We don't all need to walk in theological lock-step. But we do need to walk within the guard-rails of classical Christianity—respectful of that which has always, everywhere, and by all Christians been believed about God.

By now, all UM bishops have transcripts of enough of the questionable content of Re-Imagining to know there were serious substantive problems with it. The Good News board took action at its January meeting to ask the Council of Bishops to address this theological crisis. The Council should assure anxious United Methodists, in no uncertain terms, that the substance of the Re-Imagining conference was, indeed, unacceptable in terms of our UM theological tradition. The church needs a clear response from its episcopal leaders.

Re-Imagining family, liberty and ecumenism

BY DIANE KNIPPERS

The controversial Re-Imagining Conference, held last November in Minneapolis, and endorsed by the UM Women's Division, was supposed to be

a theological conference. The problems with the theology offered there have been well-documented in *Good News* and other publications. But speakers at the conference—and Women's Division leaders later trying to defend their participation—have also sparked serious questions over their teachings on the family, their understanding of religious liberty, and the quest for Christian unity.

First of all, anyone who looks objectively at our own society will admit that our frayed and fractured families are a central and growing social problem. Speakers at the Minneapolis conference sought to re-imagine the family, advocating, among other things, that "sex among friends" be considered normal and appropriate, that sexual pleasure is a "human right," and that fidelity is a kind of idolatry.

This is exactly the wrong message for our desperately needy society. Rather than re-imagine the family, our churches must work to rebuild and renew family life—including the virtues of lifelong faithfulness to one's partner in marriage and a sacrificial commitment to one's family.

Secondly, there is religious liberty. In defending its involvement in the Re-Imagining Conference, the Women's Division published a fact sheet which implied that Division critics somehow were questioning religious freedom.

This is spurious and false. No one has denied the right of American citizens to organize this conference, nor called for any government action to prohibit such conferences. But those of us who criticize the conference have strongly objected to support offered by Christian churches to the blatantly non-Christian teachings. We believe genuine religious freedom must include the right of religious groups to define themselves and exclude those who do not share essential elements of their faith.

Perhaps worst of all, the Division's use of the "red herring" comment about religious liberty is an affront to Christian men and women who even today risk their lives by living and proclaiming the gospel in societies which do indeed deny religious freedom. For their sake, we must not tolerate in our own churches the denigration of the very faith for which they suffer.

Finally, participation in the Re-Imagining Conference has been defended as

involvement in an ecumenical event. Such a claim demeans the urgent quest for Christian unity. Ecumenism is not syncretism, of which the Re-Imagining Conference was a particularly clear example. The Re-Imagining Conference offered teachings that are contrary to the truth affirmed by the first ecumenical councils of the Church—truth to which the Church has been faithful in the intervening centuries.

What was proclaimed in Minneapolis was indeed another gospel, another faith. The way of true ecumenism is to lift high the cross of Christ, not to denigrate it. And even dialogue with those of other faiths calls not only for respectful listening, but also for a bold, loving witness to the Gospel we have received. There was no such witness coming out of the Re-Imagining Conference.

The women who gathered in Minneapolis set out to re-imagine god. Christians worship the one true God, who first imagined us, who created us in his image, and who revealed himself to us, ultimately by sending his Son, Jesus. From the first, women have joyfully worshiped and followed this Jesus. Martha became one of the first Christian theologians when she confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. Mary Magdalene and other women were the first to testify to his resurrection. And women today, including those who are a part of RENEW, worship him still.

Sophia worship is theologically ignorant

BY MACK B. STOKES

Bishop (retired) United Methodist Church, Atlanta, Georgia. The following is a letter to the editor of Good News magazine.

I have been fighting against heresies of different varieties all my life. Now comes news about the Re-Imagining Conference in Minneapolis which was reported in the January/February issue. What is to be said about the use of Sophia in services of Christian worship? The following:

It is theologically ignorant, however embellished with references to the Book of Proverbs and to Gnosticism.

It is ontologically superstitious. (Ontology has to do with what is ultimately real, the doctrine of God, etc.)

It is cosmologically mythological.

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(Cosmology pertains to the doctrine of the creation and sustenance of the physical universe.)

It is Christologically blasphemous. (Christology has to do with the doctrine of Jesus Christ as Son of God and his atoning and redeeming grace.)

It is ecclesiastically irresponsible. (Ecclesiology pertains to the doctrine of the Church.)

In view of the ancient introduction of the Sophia myth to explain the natural evils and imperfections in the universe, it is ethically repulsive.

It is religiously sterile. The attempt to start what amounts to a new religion, with Sophia as a basic ingredient, is infinitely pathetic.

And it is obviously contrary to the doctrines of the biblical revelation and hence to the doctrines of The United Methodist Church.

The cult of Sophia—a theological assessment

BY WILLIAM R. CANNON

WILLIAM R. CANNON is a retired bishop of the United Methodist Church, former dean of Candler School of Theology, former chairman of the executive committee of the World Methodist Council, and author of 14 books.

The cult of Sophia is the strangest phenomenon to arise in the church in this generation. In many ways it is reminiscent of the "God is Dead" movement of 30 or more years ago. There is, however, one major difference between the two. The "God is Dead" movement was confined to the works of less than half a dozen religious philosophers and was limited to academic circles. It never got off college and university campuses. It had no influence whatsoever in the life of the church or society in general. It was short-lived, lasting little more than a year, so that one might say it was dead almost as soon as it was born. In contrast, the cult of Sophia is more general in its manner of expression, appealing to the popular rather than to the academic mind. It is not limited to literary and oral exposition but is accompanied by rites and ceremonies, bringing with it an agenda for worship, a program for action, and its own ministry and mission. Its purpose is to enhance the value of women in society, and its manner of doing this is to project feminism onto ultimate reality or to enshrine womanhood as such in the very nature of the Godhead itself.

The Sophia cult gained attention through *Wisdom's Feast: Sophia in Study and Celebration*, a book written

by two United Methodist ministers and a Roman Catholic in 1988. It provides liturgies and services of worship to Sophia. One such service was conducted in the chapel of the Theology School of Drew University, as a substitute—so we have read in news reports—of Holy Communion. It would appear, therefore, that the present day Sophia cult is prominently promulgated by some pastors of the United Methodist Church.

It is further assumed that they got their justification for the worship of Sophia from a series of ancient gnostic manuscripts discovered in upper Egypt in 1945. We have known of Gnosticism long before this discovery was ever made through the writings of the Fathers of the Church, as early as the Second Century, when Gnosticism was declared a heresy and its adherents were expelled from the Church. These manuscripts provide no new information, though one of them may well be the writings of Valentinus, the most important of the gnostics.

The promulgators of present-day Sophia worship claim that they are using Sophia as just another name for God, and they do this in order to show that there is a female side to God and that God must no longer be referred to by male names and images alone. From a historical point of view, the name Sophia is a very unfortunate choice. Ancient Gnosticism did not depict wisdom in either the Greek or the Hebrew meaning of the word, or as we understand wisdom today. Sophia was a clever, mischievous, misguided, and misplaced entity at the very end of the chain of emanations. She produced the demiurge, who at her behest, created a world so evil that God had to send help in the form of another emanation named Jesus to rescue us from it and return us through knowledge (gnosis) to an ordered existence.

The whole gnostic system was a tapestry of speculation, fantasy, and mythology, with no basis in fact and history. And the same seems to be true of present-day Sophia worship. Those who promote it offer their own thoughts and theories as truth and, as did the gnostics of old, substitute their beliefs for the New Testament account of the nature of Christianity.

In contrast to all other religions which advance teachings or the

thoughts and opinions of their founders, Christianity rests on the mighty acts of God in history. It is a religion of fact which antedates and creates faith. It begins with a babe in a manger in Bethlehem, focuses on a teacher and performer of miracles in Galilee, points to an old rugged cross, and a man dying on it, and culminates with an empty tomb in a garden outside Jerusalem and a Savior risen from the dead. Christianity rests on history, not ideology.

It is pitiable that a group of feminist enthusiasts within the church find that the only way they can advance the cause of women in this "Ecumenical Decade—Churches in Solidarity with Women" is to modify the doctrine of God to the degree that the feminine principle is made a part of the Godhead. If they only thought through carefully the teachings of Christianity, they would realize that this is unnecessary, even redundant. There is more than enough in the Bible that affirms the importance of women and gives them their opportunity of leadership and creativity in society alongside and equal to that of men. In the Old Testament there are Miriam, Deborah, Naomi, Ruth, and Queen Esther, who serve as role models along with David, Solomon, and the prophets. In the New Testament there are Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, Mary and Martha, Mary Magdalene, Lydia, and Priscilla, all of whom either played an important role in the earthly ministry of Jesus or else joined and supported the apostle Paul in the formation of the Church. Except for our divine Lord himself, there is no person in the Bible more significant than the Virgin Mary. It was through her, a woman, that the incarnation took place. It was Mary, a woman, who was the mother of the Incarnate God. Mary said of herself in the Magnificat, "All generations will call me blessed, for the mighty one has done great things for me" (Luke 1:48-49). It is not possible to conceive a position more noble than that of the Virgin Mary—a woman—mother of Christ.

There is not a single instance to be found in the Bible where the name Sophia is used as a female name for God. To be sure, Wisdom is personified by the use of the feminine gender in chapters 7-10 of the Book of Proverbs, but this is purely a literary device used to enhance the value of wisdom and its importance

in the conduct of life. Never is wisdom in those passages equated with God. On the contrary, wisdom is equated with us. Our marriage to wisdom and her marriage to us is essential to our success and happiness in life.

Since this Sophia cult appears to offer a service to Sophia as a substitute for Holy Communion, in which milk and honey take the place of bread and wine, this act contradicts history. When God became human in Jesus of Nazareth, he took the form of a man, not a woman. No matter how one feels or how intensely one wishes it might have been otherwise, it is impossible to alter history. Historically speaking, we cannot transpose the principle work of Jesus on to someone else. We cannot change Jesus of Nazareth into Sophia.

When any person or group of persons, male or female, exalts its own interests and values above everything else, especially to the extent of trying to alter the concept of reality to suit its own aims — then that person or group of persons collapses into idolatry, worshipping self and class rather than God. They are described correctly by the pre-Socratic philosopher who said, "If horses and oxen had hands, they would make God in their own image." This is precisely what the adherents of Sophia have done. These extreme feminists have made for themselves an idol and they call that idol God. Without knowing it, they are worshipping themselves.

Christianity rests on God's own disclosure to us. It cannot tolerate our projection of ourselves on to God. We are bound, body and soul, to the teachings of the Bible. One dares not add to or subtract anything from those teachings. St. Augustine deals succinctly with this matter when he writes: "If you believe what you like, and reject what you dislike in the Gospel, it is not the gospel you believe, but yourselves."

Theology should start with God, not women's lives

BY SALLY NELSON

As a woman, I suppose I ought to have felt affirmed by news of feminists coming together to deify their own femaleness. But my hormones just didn't come through for me, and I was only saddened and disgusted.

The people who gathered at the Re-

Imagining Conference desired to concoct a "theology" dependent on "women's daily experiences." This is indeed an innovation, for how can the starting point of theology (literally, "talk about God") ever be anything but God? The proper talk about God begins with God — what God has done, proclaimed, and promised — not with humanity or what it thinks it has experienced of the divine.

But it is inevitably the human desire to place ourselves at the center of conversation. We want to talk about God purely on our own terms, make God into just one more thing that must revolve around our own demands. Thus, we imagine that we are speaking of God when we are only talking endlessly about ourselves. The theological scene has become cluttered with customized theologies: liberation theology, black theology, feminist theology, etc. Such "theology" always produces a god of its own, one that closely resembles whoever is doing the talking.

And so it came about that the participants of the Re-Imagining Conference decided to worship "Sophia, the biblical goddess of creation." In seminary I learned that sophia is simply a Greek word meaning "wisdom." In other words, these people have produced the first cult devoted to the worship of a noun. Idolatry is an absurd thing, after all — as Isaiah showed when he spoke of the faithless Israelites burning half of a block of wood in their kitchen stoves, and making the rest into an idol before which they fell down in worship and adoration.

In a similar way, both absurd and self-glorifying, the conference participants prayed to Sophia in a litany of praise to their own bodily fluids ("the hot blood of our wombs," "nectar between our thighs," "our moist mouths," and on and on, ad nauseam). Is the explicitly sexual nature of the prayer to their idol an acknowledgment that idolatry is, as declared by the prophets, an act of adultery?

But these people (and others who want Christ's Church to accept similar absurdities and abominations) claim to be prophets themselves. They hope to grasp for themselves an office that is laid only upon those called and ordained by God, not to mention the fact that this office came to an end when John the

Baptist pointed to Christ as God's chosen Messiah. They claim, further, to be undertaking "the second Reformation." The true Reformers undertook their task only with fear and trembling, knowing the gospel to be the timeless and priceless treasure of the Church. They saw themselves not as rebels, radicals, or innovators, but as preservers and protectors; and they knew that the price of carelessness with such a treasure is faithlessness before God, the betrayal of Christ and Christ's Church. Such care for the gospel and such humility seem to be universally lacking in all those who put themselves forward as modern-day reformers.

In the very midst of their idolatry the conference participants still resist being known as heretics or pagans. A heretic is one who distorts the gospel. A pagan is one who casts it aside in favor of an idol. Sadly, these people have done both, and it is time for the Church to discipline those who still claim to be its own. It is time for pastors, bishops, presbyters, church councils, and religious orders to call to repentance those who worship false gods, and to remove from the clergy rosters and membership rolls those who refuse to repent.

There is a line between Christianity and paganism. When people choose to cross that line it is right and proper for the Church to recognize that fact.

Get set for the spin

Reprinted from the *Presbyterian Layman*

When Rev. James Brown, executive director of the General Assembly Council, learned that the *Presbyterian Layman* had alerted church leaders across the country to some pagan practices among his associates he called in a Louisville public relations firm. Presbyterians should prepare themselves for some spin.

SPIN: All we did was attend a conference.

FACTS: Presbyterian staffers did more than attend the conference. They planned it, paid for it with denominational dollars, and actively participated in it. When pagan rituals were observed, Presbyterian staffers joined in. When pagan litanies were chanted, Presbyterian staffers voiced the words. When

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platform speakers denounced the Church's faith and ethics, Presbyterian staffers applauded and, in some cases, hooted and cheered. Our reporters saw no counter demonstrations, heard no vocal objections, witnessed no walk-outs. There was no evidence that any Presbyterian staff member attending the conference took offense when the lordship of Jesus Christ was denied and his name was taken in vain.

SPIN: How could we have known that controversial statements would be made at the conference?

FACTS: (1) Mary Ann Lundy, James Brown's closest staff associate, knew. She was a member of the conference planning committee that invited the speakers whom we have quoted, and she signed off on the \$66,000 Bicentennial Fund grant that was used to underwrite speakers' travel, hotel and related expenses. (2) Barbara Roche, editor of Horizons, the official publication of Presbyterian Women, knew. Roche's public comments on numerous occasions during the years in which we have reported on her activities reveal her knowledge and approbation of ideologies espoused by platform speakers. (3) Johanna Bos, a professor at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and a speaker at the conference, knew. Bos is an ardent supporter of the radical feminist/homosexual agenda, a close personal friend of Mary Ann Lundy and an enthusiastic devotee of lesbian activist Jane Spahr. Nothing said by platform speakers at this conference would have surprised Bos. (4) Staffers and members of the former Women's Ministry Unit knew. For years they have kept in close communication with World Council of Churches leaders, who were invited to address this conference. Several of the speakers have published their views, and their books have been promoted at the bookstore in Presbyterian headquarters. Conference speaker Kwok Pui Lan visited Louisville as a guest of the Theology and Worship and Women's Ministry units in 1992. Conference speaker Chung Hyun Kyung was the source of a litany used by Presbyterian Center feminists in their meetings as far back as 1991. Clearly, the heresies voiced by speakers in Minneapolis would have been no surprise to Louisville insiders. They had heard it all before.

SPIN: It is unfair to take a few quotes out of context and smear the entire conference with them.

FACTS: Quotations that appear on our pages were not isolated statements from one or two off-the-wall speakers. They represent conference themes that surfaced repeatedly in speeches, dramatic presentations, demonstrations, rituals and documents distributed throughout the four-day event.

SPIN: What's the big deal over one conference that would have faded into oblivion had *The Layman* not made such a fuss about it?

FACTS: (1) *The Layman* has learned that at the time of the conference, denominational officials were planning to initiate a series of followup events promoting conference themes throughout the church. Those plans, in addition to the fact that the former Women's Ministry Unit leaders requested \$175,000 from the Bicentennial Fund for the conference and its followup, indicate that staffers at Presbyterian headquarters considered this conference a very big deal. (2) Louisville Seminary has received a gift from an anonymous donor to establish a center on campus that will promote "reimagining" ideologies. Professor Johanna Bos is involved in the implementation of that effort. (3) Read paragraphs five and six on page four of this *Presbyterian Layman* and note the location in James Brown's bureaucracy of each conference registrant. Although the old Women's Ministry Unit no longer exists, its staff members were carefully and — in our opinion — intentionally distributed throughout the restructured organization. There is almost no place in the national church bureaucracy where they have not secured a pressure point from the "call system," which facilitates ministerial movements among our congregations, to youth work, ecumenical affairs, women's work, and curriculum development.

And it should not slip by the denomination's notice that a prominent member of the transition team to whom James Brown assigned the task of choosing staffers for his new organization was Mary Ann Lundy. So during the spring of 1993, while moderates across the Presbyterian Church (USA) were celebrating the demise of a trouble-making office called the Women's Ministry Unit, James

Brown and former Women's Ministry Unit Director Mary Ann Lundy were busily moving many of its occupants into almost every niche of their new organization. Once Lundy had completed this assignment, Brown gave her a post near the top of his pyramid, and he stuck to his guns, even when 41 percent of the General Assembly Council voted not to confirm the appointment.

SPIN: We didn't worship the goddess Sophia. We just pointed to an attribute of God that is biblical (found in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament).

FACT: Conference participants prayed this prayer: "Our maker Sophia, we are women in your image..." The Old Testament employs the feminine gender when it refers to wisdom, as it does with most of the virtues, but jumping to the conclusion that Scripture supports prayers to goddesses constitutes an amazing leap. Whatever became of the first commandment?

SPIN: "We live in a broad church... We're not tightly packed into a fundamentalist model." (James Brown, quoted in the *Presbyterian Outlook*)

FACT: For deacons, elders and ministers to honor their ordination vows to be faithful to the Gospel as it has been interpreted by our confessions, does not justify being labeled fundamentalist."

SPIN: The Lay Committee is "attempting to take our agenda away from us by imposing another agenda." (James Brown, quoted in the *Presbyterian Outlook*).

FACT: The agenda of the Church is to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. When leaders of the denomination insist on pursuing another agenda, they violate not only their own integrity, but the integrity of the Church as well.

SPIN: "We live in a broad church... We're not tightly packed into a fundamentalist model." (James Brown: You can't believe anything you read in the *Layman*. You know that publication distorts the truth.)

FACTS: This is not the first-time such allegations have been leveled against the *Layman*. Our editors exercise great care to guarantee the accuracy of what we print. Even if the Gospel did

not compel it, liability considerations would.

In the case at hand we encourage anyone who would doubt the veracity of our report to order official conference tape recordings. For \$60 one can purchase a 24-tape package made not by the *Layman* but by an outside recording firm retained by conference officials. Tapes may be ordered from Resource Express (612-891-3069)

There you have it. So if a presbytery or synod executive, a respected cleric who travels international junkets financed by the General Assembly budget, an official church publication, or possibly even your own church newsletter, feeds you a version of the above-mentioned lines orchestrated by a public relations firm in Louisville, Kentucky, we thought you might want a few facts to bolster your response.

Re-Imagining Q & A

Several questions are being asked frequently by United Methodists who are concerned about the UM involvement in the Re-Imagining conference. We reaffirm the accuracy of Good News' reporting and wish to make sure the record is straight about what happened.

Q. The Women's Division's response says *Good News* and *RENEW* had their own representatives attending the conference. Is that true?

A. Only Dottie Chase attended, and she as a press representative of *Good News* and *RENEW/ECUMW*. We believed the content of the Re-Imagining event might be highly controversial and thus deserving careful coverage. However, Mrs. Chase and several other mainline press representatives (Presbyterian, Lutheran, etc.) indicated they would have left in protest after the first two hours had they not been there as press observers. The Women's Division response seems intentionally misleading in implying Good News had persons attending for any other reasons.

Q. Did the Women's Division fund the Re-Imagining event?

A. Yes, the Women's Division has acknowledged financial support of thirty-six directors (of 65 total), nine staff members, and eleven UMW conference vice presidents who attended. The

Women's Division also gave \$2,500 in response to a request from the Minnesota Conference United Methodist Women for scholarships. Page 66 of the program book was entitled "Thanks to Our Funders." Listed among the funding organizations on that page was the Women's Division of the United Methodist Church.

Q. Was the Women's Division an official sponsor of "Re-Imagining?"

A. The Women's Division took official action at its March 1993 meeting to be involved. At that spring meeting, the Women's Division's Section of Mission and Membership Development put forward a report which "rescinded the decision to have the staff and director theology workshop on May 14, 1993," and "approved that in place of a Women's Division-sponsored theology workshop, directors and staff attend (as schedules allow) the Re-Imagining conference on the Ecumenical Decade/Churches in Solidarity with Women in Minneapolis, MN, November 4-7, 1993." (This is found on page 3 of the section's "Report and Recommendations.") This action indicates that the Women's Division did "officially support" the Re-Imagining event.

Q. Was the event the theological training event for the quadrennium?

A. The Women's Division's Fact Sheet answers simply, "No." Good News disagrees. We cite Exhibit II from the spring meeting of the Women's Division, entitled "Women's Division Staff and Director Retreat, 1994." This document says: "The Women's Division quadrennial pattern of retreats and theology workshops for staff and directors is: Year 1: Theology Workshop; Year 2: Spoken Retreat; Year 3: Silent Retreat; and Year 4: Individual Retreat." This document indicates Re-Imagining was the theological training event of the quadrennium for the Women's Division, an event set for year 1 of the quadrennium, or 1993.

Q. Did the Women's Division know what the content of the speakers would be?

A. When the Women's Division took the action at its spring meeting to participate in "Re-Imagining," a part of the rationale for doing so included the state-

ment that "The 'Re-Imagining' workshop has drawn an excellent list of women theologians." The list of presenters had been published and must have been recognized by enough Women's Division staff for them to feel comfortable "rescinding" their own training event and making Re-Imagining their officially endorsed theological training event. We believe the "excellent list of women theologians" represented many speakers who were well known to the Women's Division.

Q. Have any Women's Division leaders denied the accuracy of any statements attributed to conference speakers.

A. Not as of February 1, 1994. Nor do we expect them to because the statements we have reported are accurate. We have checked our report with transcriptions and tapes of the presentations. We know what the speakers said.

Q. Has the Women's Division expressed any points of disagreement with the heretical substance of the presenters at "Re-Imagining?"

A. Not as of this date. The Women's Division news release only affirmed that the women who attended this event were "all mature women able to make discriminating theological judgments." It also said that "presence at an ecumenical event does not indicate approval of everything that happens." It also stated the Women's Division is committed to ecumenical dialogue and freedom to discuss a wide range of theological ideas among Christians of different backgrounds. These are noble but irrelevant points. The question is: will the Women's Division repudiate the unacceptable moral and theological substance of this conference?

Q. Has the Women's Division expressed any regret, reservations, or second thoughts about having participated in this November conference?

A. As of this date we have seen none.

Resources

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Sophia is feminine aspect of God the Father

I am writing in response to the lead article in the *United Methodist Review* (Jan. 28, 1994) titled: "'Sophia' worship rocks United Methodists." I want to take issue with the report written by Diane Huie Balay and the criticisms of the recent RE-IMAGINING Conference held in Minneapolis last November.

I attended the conference at my own expense and found it to be a soul-stretching experience. In my time at the conference, it was never indicated that our worship of 'Sophia' was a resurrection of the ancient debate over Gnosticism. In fact, much of what the UMR reports doesn't sound at all like the conference I attended.

At the RE-IMAGINING Conference, prayer to Sophia God was holy and honorable. I never understood that we were worshipping a goddess. Background information was provided every attendee as to the scriptural basis for Sophia. As the feminine aspect of God the Father, Sophia was valued as Wisdom... and was not seen in an idolatrous or heretical sense. Activities, liturgies, yes, even the entire flow of the plenary sessions helped participants include and express the body... the bodily sensations and experiences of the soul in safe and truly holy ways. (So much of our traditional and current theology ignores or denies the body.)

From the RE-IMAGINING Conference



Donella Siktberg
The Rev.
Donella Siktberg is
pastor of Wesley
UMC, East Windsor,
Conn.

The more feminine aspects of artistic expression... dancing, singing, drawing, etc. offered me a needed balance to all the "head work" of theologizing and administering in my local church. I would like to suggest that if what went on at this conference was ..."blasphemous and heretical..." then we ought to consider St. Teresa of Avila a real heretic for the visions she experienced, the voice of God she heard talking to her constantly, and the behaviors which resulted from this activity.

No one at this conference said I must abandon my traditional understandings of God, or Christ as Savior and Lord. No one urged me to reconstruct my beliefs about the Trinity, and to replace Jesus with a female. But

many sought, as did I, a way to experience the faith as a woman in ministry today. Many spoke of oppression, particularly our Roman Catholic sisters. One United Methodist pastor recounted her experience of harassment at the hands of her parishioners, because she is a woman in ministry. This yet, in 1993! Come now... I thought that kind of treatment ended when Anna Howard Shaw exposed her experience in her autobiography written in 1915! Not so... and we were at the RE-IMAGINING Conference, seeking the Spirit in each other so that we might be freed up enough to share our guts. We were "re-imagining" what it might be like to be heard!

So, from my own personal experience it is clear that I will not denounce what took place at this meeting, as the *Good News* magazine would like me to do.

Rather, I would affirm the pushing out of the boundaries. I would affirm our lesbian sisters who found an audience to hear them at this conference.

I would affirm the challenge I experienced of, for once, setting aside the male-dominated notions of my Christian faith, and of allowing the female aspect of Sophia (Wisdom) to enrich and more deeply inform my head and heart knowledge of God.

3'94

Bishop challenges group to name 'Sophia' worshipers

United Methodist News Service
WILMORE, Ky.—United Methodist Bishop William Lewis (Dakotas Area) has offered to pay \$100 to the unofficial name of each United Methodist who "worships a goddess named 'Sophia.'"

The bishop's tongue-in-cheek offer is included in a letter to the editor in the July-August issue of *Good News*, a magazine published by the caucus, whose formal name is the Forum for Scriptural Christianity Inc.

Bishop Lewis' letter implied that gifts to *Good News* may have risen in conjunction with its criticism of "RE-Imagining," a November ecumenical women's conference in which the image of "Sophia" was invoked.

Good News Editor Steve Beard told United Methodist News Service that donations are "only slightly ahead of budget projections."

Well Springs

A Journal for United Methodist Clergywomen