

# WOMEN AND RELIGION

*A Resolution on the relationship between religion and sexism,  
by the Unitarian Universalist Association*

*With an Introduction by*

*UUA Minister for Women and Religion Leslie Arden Westbrook*



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## WOMEN AND RELIGION

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WHEREAS, a principle of the Unitarian Universalist Association is to “affirm, defend, and promote the supreme worth and dignity of every human personality, and the use of the democratic method in human relationships”; and

WHEREAS, great strides have been taken to affirm this principle within our denomination; and

WHEREAS, some models of human relationships arising from religious myths, historical materials, and other teachings still create and perpetuate attitudes that cause women everywhere to be overlooked and undervalued; and

WHEREAS, children, youth and adults internalize and act on these cultural models, thereby tending to limit their sense of self-worth and dignity;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: That the 1977 General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association calls upon all Unitarian Universalists to examine carefully their own religious beliefs and the extent to which these beliefs influence sex-role stereotypes within their own families; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the General Assembly urges the Board of Trustees of the Unitarian Universalist Association to encourage the Unitarian Universalist Association administrative officers and staff, the religious leaders within societies, the Unitarian Universalist theological schools, the directors of related organizations, and the planners of seminars and conferences, to make every effort to: (a) put traditional assumptions and language in perspective, and (b) avoid sexist assumptions and language in the future.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the General Assembly urges the President of the Unitarian Universalist Association to send copies of this resolution to other denominations examining sexism inherent in religious literature and institutions and to the International Association of Liberal Religious Women and the IARF (International Association for Religious Freedom); and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the General Assembly requests the Unitarian Universalist Association (a) to join with those who are encouraging others in the society to examine the relationship between religious and cultural attitudes toward women, and (b) to send a representative and resource materials to associations appropriate to furthering the above goals; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the General Assembly requests the President of the UUA to report annually on progress in implementing this resolution.

The above resolution was passed unanimously.

*Ithaca, NY 1977*

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## INTRODUCTION

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The 1977 General Assembly WOMEN AND RELIGION Resolution asks all Unitarian Universalists to look at the ways our religious beliefs cause us to undervalue and overlook women. It asks us to look at the relationship between our religion and sexism. It asks us both to look at our interpersonal behavior in our families, friendships and work, and to examine the programs and policies of the religious institution of which we are a part, in order to determine the degree that sexist attitudes shape our lives together. It asks us, as Unitarian Universalists, to 'clean house.'

The WOMEN AND RELIGION Resolution is radical, in the original sense of the word, for it is designed to help us 'remove the root of a disease,' i.e. sexism. It asks us simultaneously to remember the root cause of our being together as religious liberals: 'to affirm, defend and promote the supreme worth and dignity of every human personality, and the use of the democratic method in human relationships.' It asks us to return to our Religious Dream.

Grassroots in its evolution, the resolution was conceived by a small working group of UU women in Lexington, Massachusetts, submitted as a resolution to the 1977 General Assembly by 548 members of 57 active member societies, and promoted vigorously by the UU Women's Federation. Now, the UUA is sponsoring a three year effort to implement it. Because of the resolution's importance, this work is sponsored directly by the Office of the President.

The late President Paul N. Carnes took an important step toward providing the leadership so necessary if we are to begin to challenge sexism within our denomination when he said that the resolution "recognizes that the elimination of sexism is both an *individual* and an *institutional*, a *spiritual* as well as *socio-economic*, problem. . . [and that it] . . . recognizes the relationship between power structures and language and mythology."

Implementation of the WOMEN AND RELIGION Resolution will, therefore, require the effort of us all: lay people, churches and societies, professional religious leaders, UU affiliated organizations, UUA administration, staff, board of trustees, and districts. In 1977 recommendations for ways the UUA can implement the resolution were developed by task forces across the continent. Since then, a continental committee has been providing continuing leadership, as the particular programs have evolved. Great numbers of men and women are working on those specific recommendations and programs.

If you believe there is a direct relationship between historical religious mythology and the ways we view and treat women, we invite you to be a part of the implementation of the WOMEN AND RELIGION resolution.

The Rev. Leslie Arden Westbrook  
UUA MINISTER FOR WOMEN AND RELIGION



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# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 1977 GENERAL ASSEMBLY WOMEN AND RELIGION RESOLUTION

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## Ministry and Leadership

1. (A) **Implementation of the Women and Religion Resolution should be promoted by the UUA President, Staff, Board of Trustees, District leadership and leadership in local societies.** The UUA President should report annually to the General Assembly on the status of implementation efforts. The President's report should be made verbally and in written form. During this report, time should be protected for an opportunity for questions and input from delegates. An orderly, methodical, long-range program should be designed in order to implement the resolution at all levels of our denominational structure.
  - (B) **A person should be appointed at the UUA to serve as consultant and coordinator of the work of implementation.** General Assembly workshops, District conferences, and local church programs should focus on the resolution. At District annual meetings the resolution should be considered and voted upon. Conferences on the topic should, at times, be interdenominational.
  - (C) **Commission on WOMEN AND RELIGION** should be appointed and given the authority to appraise and facilitate the actual implementation of the Resolution. The Commission should be formed with the broadest representation of members: by geography, affiliation, age, sex and philosophical perspective. Appropriate funds should be granted to facilitate this work.
2. **An Affirmative Action Program for women ministers and women theological students should be developed by the UUA and the UU theological schools.** Specific suggestions include: a 'circuit riding female minister' to give leadership and role-exposure to lay-led fellowships; the encouragement of women speakers for local parishes and district meetings; continued participation of the UUA in the National Council of Churches Commission on Women in Ministry; a 'roving program' on the Women and Religion resolution for use by societies; and the encouragement of societies by the UUA Section of Ministry to consider women candidates.
  3. **Conferences for settled women ministers, for women theological students, and for women lay leaders should be developed, supported and encouraged.** Such conferences should address the issues of power, success and effectiveness, money management, volunteerism, and other women's issues.



4. **Male ministers, members of the UUMA and LREDA, and male students being interviewed by the UUA Ministerial Fellowship Committee and Accreditation Committee should be educated about the relationships between religious myths and sexual stereotypes and the deleterious effects of sexist language.** They should be educated on women's issues and the work in theology being done by women. Women's sermons should be distributed. A question on the record sheet of every minister which is distributed to churches searching for ministers should ask ministers to focus on the substance of the resolution.
5. **The President should contact all UUA department heads, UUA committees and affiliated UU organizations and ask them to report what their plans are to implement the Resolution.** Their response should be published in the UU WORLD.  
The Collegium, Beacon Press, the UUSC, and all other affiliated and associated UU organizations should be apprised of the importance of the Resolution and asked to focus some of their work on the substance of the Resolution.
6. **The UUA should appoint a staff using affirmative action guidelines.** Such a program should attempt to eliminate job stereotyping and seek to avoid placing women primarily in jobs backed by 'soft money'. In particular, pictures of the UUA staff, UUSC staff, etc. should be included in the UU WORLD to indicate the effectiveness of each organization's affirmative action program. **All UUA salaries as they appear in the UUA budget should be broken down into individual salaries.**
7. **UU theological schools, in their curriculum, faculty and structure, should reflect the increasing number of female students, their interests, their talents and their perspectives.** Seminars for male and female students should be designed which prepare them to minister adequately to the needs and concerns of women. UUA financial aid to theological students and schools should be granted only after a 'Title 9' review has occurred at the school.
8. **All materials distributed through the UUA Section of the Ministry should be revised to reflect the changing population of our ministry.** In particular, the Ordination Manual should reflect the fact that women as well as men are part of the liberal ministry.

## **Education and Program**

1. **Educational materials for children, youth, and adults, (including teachers and parents) should be developed.** Such materials should
  - \*explore the relationships between religious myths and sexism;
  - \*examine the deleterious effects of sexist language;
  - \*explore the role of women in religion since pre-cultural times;
  - \*tell the stories of outstanding women in our movement;
  - \*promote nontraditional role models for men and women;
  - \*celebrate personhood.

These materials should be developed for men's groups, women's groups,

mixed groups in our churches. Materials already developed should be revised to bring them into line with the philosophy and intent of the resolution. A 'Great Book' discussion program should be developed which uses Beacon books on the subject of women and religion.

2. **A Clearinghouse on Women and Religion should be established.** The Clearinghouse should compile resources such as sermons, discussion guides and program manuals from local societies and UUA organizations such as Beacon Press, the UUWF, etc. Other projects of the Clearinghouse should be: a non-sexist liturgical resource directory; profiles of women ministers; information on courses in religion and women's affairs; a UU women's professional talent bank; and a Women and Religion Packet.
3. **The UU WORLD should carry stories and educational articles on the Women and Religion program.** In particular, the WORLD should:
  - \*carry a large article and educational questionnaire for use by UU churches, societies, families and individuals which would assess the role of women in the leadership of our societies and encourage nontraditional roles for society members;
  - \*include a regular column entitled "Women's Interfaith Issues";
  - \*carry the President's General Assembly report on implementation of the resolution.All stories, worship resources, etc. in the WORLD should be edited so that sexist assumptions and language are deleted or changed.
4. **A new degenderized Hymnbook should be developed.** It should include non-sexist language and fresh material that is written by and for women. Local parishes should contribute work on this project by sending materials to the Commission on Common Worship, established by the President. In the meantime, the Worship Arts Clearinghouse should distribute its list of non-sexist hymns.
5. **Materials previously distributed by the Worship Arts Clearinghouse should be degenderized and new materials developed should be sensitive to the issue of language and sexism.** In particular, worship materials for 'families' should be developed.
6. **The UUA should design educational programs on the Women and Religion Resolution which will reach individuals and groups outside our denomination.** Such efforts should include:
  - \*public service television spots with the target audience women;
  - \*letters to other denominations, institutions and coalition groups informing them of the substance of the resolution;
  - \*dialogue and work with feminists of other groups in order to further examine the relationship between religious and cultural attitudes toward women.
7. **Materials on sexuality should be developed and collected, including the acceptance and celebration of women's sexuality as a part of human experience.** This material should include such subjects as the reproductive cycle, sexual preferences, and sexual behavior.

## 1977-78 WOMEN AND RELIGION TASK FORCE CONVENORS

Drucilla Cummins, Edina, MN

Billie Drew, Lexington, MA

Marn Hogan, Hamburg, NY

Rosemary Matson, Berkeley, CA

Janet May, Willowdale, Ontario

Joan Mendelsohn, Chicago, IL

Janet Osborn, Port Washington, NY

Bea Robbins, Silver Spring, MD

Jody Schilling, Berkeley, CA

# WOMEN AND RELIGION

## An Introductory Reading List

### GENERAL BACKGROUND

Boulding, Elise. *The Underside of History: A View of Women Through Time*. 1976 Westview Press \$24.75 An essential corrective for a distorted one-dimensional view of history.

Janeway, Elizabeth. *Man's World, Woman's Place*. 1971 Delta \$2.65 Paper. A Study of Social Mythology.

Miller, Jean B. *Towards a New Psychology of Women*. 1976 Beacon Press \$9.95.

*Myths Women Live By*. Kyriokos. A Journal of the Unitarian Universalists Women's Federation. Vol. 1, No. 3, UU World Supplement, June 15, 1977.

### WOMEN AND RELIGION

Annual Journal of the Universalist Historical Society. "Olympia Brown," V. (1963) A special issue devoted to Olympia Brown, the first woman ordained to the Universalist ministry (1863).

*A Study Action Guide for Women*. Women's Caravan, 67 Newbury St., Boston, MA 02116 \$3.50. A collection of articles for workshop and discussion groups.

Collins, Sheila. *A Different Heaven and Earth*. Judson press \$8.95. An overview of Women's Studies in Religion.

Daly, Mary. *Beyond God The Father*. 1973 Beacon Press \$3.95 Paper. Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation.

Daly, Mary. *Gyn/Ecology*. 1978 Beacon Press. Another groundbreaking statement by one of the foremost feminist theologians of our time.

Doely, Sarah Bentley. *Women's Liberation and the Church*. N.Y. Association, 1970. Essays highlighting the role of women in the church.

Fuller, Margaret. *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1971 Paperback \$2.25. The first feminist book published in America in 1855 by Margaret Fuller, leading Unitarian Transcendentalist.

Hageman, Alice L., Ed., in collaboration with The Women's Caucus of Harvard Divinity School. *Sexist Religion and Women in the Church: No More Silence!* New York: Association Press, 1974. A dozen essays by various authors. Paperback \$5.95.

Hitchings, Catherine F. "Universalist and Unitarian Women Ministers," *The Journal of the Universalist Historical Society*, (1975). A biographical dictionary.

Hunter, Edith F. *Sophia Lyon Fahs: A Biography*. Boston: Beacon Press 1966. \$5.95. Pioneer in liberal religious education.

Neuman, Erich. *The Great Mother*. Princeton, 1955. The history and meaning of the Female Goddess figure.

Ochs, Carol. *Behind the Sex of God*. 1977 Beacon Press \$9.95.

Patai, Raphael. *The Hebrew Goddess*. 1978 Avon Books Paper \$2.95.

Reuther, Rosemary. *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in Jewish and Christian Traditions*. 1974 Simon and Schuster \$3.95 Paper. Eleven theologians treat the subject of women as seen by theology.

Reuther, Rosemary and Eugene Bianchi. *From Machismo to Mutuality*. Paulist Press, 1976.

Russell, Letty M. *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective—A Theology*. 1974. Westminster Press \$3.95 Paper. A contribution to theology of human liberation—written out of a specific involvement and a conscious engagement in the liberation of women.

*The Woman's Bible*. 1974. \$6.95. *A Study Guide to the Woman's Bible*. 1975. \$3.50. Coalition Task Force on Women and Religion, 4759-15th Ave. N.E., Seattle, Washington 98105. Reissue of two volumes (in one) of the commentaries on parts of the Bible published by a women's "revising committee" in 1890's. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Unitarian and feminist, was a member of the committee.

*SIGNS. Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. Winter 1976. Volume 2, Number 2. University of Chicago Press, 5801 Ellis Ave., Chicago, IL 60637 \$4.00 Special section on Women and Religion.

Stone, Merlin. *When God Was a Woman*. 1976 Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch Paper \$3.95. Stimulating and controversial.

Thompson, Mary Lou, Ed. *Voices of the New Feminism*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1978. Available in paperback. Sponsored by the Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation.

## FICTION

Atwood, Margaret. *Surfacing*. 1972. Simon and Schuster. Reviewed in *SIGNS* (see above)—Volume 2 Number 2—as an example of a woman's spiritual quest novel.

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For further information, contact  
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## UUA WOMEN AND RELIGION COMMITTEE

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Joan Mendelsohn, Bedford, MA

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The Rev. Denise Tracy, Ms. U.U., Lansing, MI

## UUA AFFIRMATIVE ACTION PROGRAM ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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Notations by  
Rosemary Matson

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An Introductory Reading List (compiled in 1979)

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*(Links added March 2018 gco)*