

REACHING SIDEWAYS

AN EXCHANGE OF VIEWS AND IDEAS

Compiled by the Joseph Priestley District Women and Religion Committee

Volume I, No. 1

October, 1981

PURPOSE

REACHING SIDEWAYS will challenge sexism because we seek, in the words of our UUA Bylaws, "to affirm, defend and promote the supreme worth and dignity of every human personality, and the use of the democratic method in human relationships."

Toward this end, REACHING SIDEWAYS welcomes contributions about how the women and men in our societies are helping to implement the Women and Religion Resolution passed unanimously by the 1977 General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association. For example, contributions that call attention to articles, sermons, discussions, conferences, and other materials that explore the relationship between religious myths and sexism, between religious and cultural attitudes toward women, and the deleterious effects of sexist language.

REACHING SIDEWAYS will, of course, supply information about speakers and workshops at events sponsored by the Joseph Priestley District Women and Religion Committee.

Recently I received an unusually strong dose of inspiration in the form of an article in the Oct. '81 Harper's magazine entitled "What Do Women Want?" and subtitled "A Look at Smith College...and the future of feminism." Now before I mislead any readers into thinking that I am encouraged by what is going on at Smith College, let me assure you that I am inspired only by the amount of work that needs to be done to truly liberate men and women. Apparently, as stated in the article, "separatist" women students at Smith College who think of their future in terms of female communities without men, are arguing with the majority of the young women students who think that women's place is in the corporate world in positions as similar to men as possible. It would seem that the young women at Smith College are planning either to withdraw from the real world or to copy men as much as they can.

I ask myself how this is any better than the situation that existed when I graduated from a women's college in the late forties. The assumption then was that the majority of us would find a husband to suitably support us, have children and perhaps do some volunteer work if we somehow found any time on our hands. "Careers" were only for those women who, for one reason or another, mostly unfortunate, were unable to attract a suitable man. The place of a woman was determined.

But the place of the Smith College woman in 1981 is also determined. If she is to live in the real world, she must accept the "manly" virtues of ambition, of internalization of corporate goals and of belief in a patriarchal hierarchy. She must have a "career" and, somehow or other, children and a household if there is any spare time.

Is that what we need to have quality of the sexes? Are men living such satisfactory lives that they should be emulated? I think not.

For me, giving women the opportunity to join the patriarchal institutions and imitate the male stereotype is not the answer. What is needed is some help in the form of ideas to help both women and men fulfill the non-stereotypical role of human being.

Please note here that I am saying that men too need help. As I have studied the treatment of women, I have grown more and more aware of the demands and pressures on men as well as women. The code imposed on men is an unreasoned straitjacket and derived directly from the hierarchical, patriarchal conditions for women since the two are complementary and interacting.

Help for both sexes is provided in the field of feminist theology because in that area lies the promise of religious thinking and language which does not rely upon the denigration of any human being.

And this is what we are working for in our JPD Women and Religion Committee. It is perhaps unfortunate that our title "Women and Religion" seems to mean that we are not involved with the problems of men. But the title stems from resolutions proposed at the General Assembly of our denomination which were popularly called Women and Religion resolutions, even though they referred to both men and women.

Let me quote from two of these resolutions to demonstrate what I mean. The 1977 Women and Religion Resolution stated that our denomination is to "carefully examine our own religious beliefs and the extent to which these beliefs influence sex-role stereotypes." The 1980 Women and Religion Resolution calls for us "to provide opportunities for members to participate in activities that bring into focus the sexist nature of our religious heritage and also the emerging ideological understandings that value women and men as full human beings."

We are still a long way from allowing men and women to operate as full human beings. Those of us working on the Women and Religion Committee invite you, both men and women, to join with us by working on the Committee and by attending our conferences. Only through understanding the sex stereotypes and changing the old myths can we, both women and men, have the freedom to be human.

Sara Best
Chair, JPD Women and Religion Committee
1981-82

WHY SHOULD A MAN BE INVOLVED WITH THE
"WOMEN AND RELIGION" MOVEMENT?

Well, mainly because both sexes are going to have to work together to bring about the changes which both want and need. Women have always been intriguing to men, but there are a host of new reasons for noting what they have been doing, thinking, and saying. Their conditions and aspirations have undergone a metamorphosis which includes every man.

There are factors in our socio-economic milieu which impact every human being impartially, and some are detrimental to "... Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Women are leading the charge for improvement, but men can be no less concerned. For example, rigid work schedules keep a parent away from a child and adequate child care is hard to find as well as costly. Much of the difficulty could be ameliorated by the employer at small or no cost, and even perhaps, savings in absenteeism and morale. It's not a women's problem; it's a single parent need, and there are lots of single parents.

But this is only one facet of the new view that every person deserves a more satisfying life style. Sylvia Porter's recent article on "Unhappiness with Jobs" cited dissatisfaction with working conditions in a quarter of the work force. Once you had to "live with it". Now both men and women are more open about their aspirations and anxieties.

It is well understood in "Women and Religion" that the concerns of men and women are not very different and are certainly not in opposition. Men are welcomed at the meetings and it is hoped that they will adopt the objectives of the movement.

Guy Best

Background

More than two years ago a group of Unitarian Universalist women began a drive for re-wording the Statement of Principles in the UUA Bylaws. Continuation of this work last year resulted in a proposed amendment to the Bylaws. The proposed changes generally reflected changes in language and the raised awareness of women's concerns of the last twenty years; most clauses were shortened; a new idea reflecting ecological concerns was inserted. The entire exercise--sending the proposal through the process of approval by the General Assembly--was intended to raise the consciousness for all of the importance of language in all aspects of life.

For example, the clauses d and g which read: "Implement the vision of one world by striving for a world community founded on ideals of brotherhood, justice and peace;" and "Encourage cooperation among people of good will in every land" were combined to read "Strive for a world community of love, justice and peace."

More controversial was the proposal to change clause b which read: "Cherish and spread the universal truths taught by the great prophets and teachers of humanity in every age and tradition, immemorially summarized in the Judeo-Christian heritage as love to God and love to humankind" to read "Recognize our Judeo-Christian heritage as well as other traditions, and seek lasting values and new insights."

Five districts of the UUA, including the Joseph Priestley District, fourteen churches and fellowships, and the Board of Trustees of the UUA, all voted approval and the Bylaws amendment was placed on the Agenda of the General Assembly, 1981.

General Assembly, Philadelphia, 1981

Despite the wide approval, wider than for any other item on the agenda, the Bylaw Amendment was not considered by the Assembly. Most delegates who attended all general, informational and background sessions never heard the Amendment read or discussed. They could not hear its supporters tell what the changes meant to them. A substitute motion was placed before the Assembly and was approved. This

calls for a seven-member committee appointed by the UUA Board of Trustees (1) to develop a plan to involve member societies in the consideration of the Principles, (2) to conduct discussions at GA '82, (3) to propose and circulate proposed changes, and (4) to submit recommendations for placement on the GA agenda by 1984 at the latest.

This means that, if the committee develops a statement that speaks to our concerns, we might have an opportunity three years from now to start the two-year Bylaw process on this item. It is ironic that much time was spent at GA '81 on resolutions calling for "action in defense of religious and individual liberty" against threats posed by repressive "radical new right" groups.

Why It Happened

We live in a paternalistic (i.e., hierarchical or sexist) culture setting. (Note the national tendencies toward militarism, the failure of ERA and recent federal budget cuts which affect women most adversely.) UU's share the cultural characteristics of the larger society. One of these is the tendency to proclaim democracy while practicing authoritarianism at home, at work or in other aspects of life. We honor those among us who demonstrate independence of spirit, especially when it is joined with service for others; these persons are rare. The UUA leaders at General Assembly seemed to fear the prospect of open debate, as if delegates could not be trusted to listen reasonably one to another.

The voting structure of the UUA is skewed, giving exceptional dominance to religious professionals, who may tend to be cautious. Some lay delegates represent over 100 church members. Each minister or R.E. Director has one vote. In voting, one minister may equal scores of lay persons. At the opening session of GA '81 the count was one religious professional to two lay delegates. Final registration showed one to three at Philadelphia.

By not anticipating what could happen, in spite of advance warnings, the women who wanted others to participate in the process of amending the Bylaws were in some ways partially responsible for the failure to start the process or to send out their message. Also, they were not prepared with literature, colorful posters and meaningful flyers that would educate.

Girls Will Be Girls

At GA '81 we proved that we were typical American women, reared in a proper manner. Mothers across the continent would have been proud of us! We were not too clever, and we apologized for past victories---or rather we explained them away as if they were accidents.

Actually, we provided excellent examples for textbooks for Women's Studies. We fit the pattern of women reared in a paternalistic setting. We emphasized cooperation; we are peacemakers---not revolutionaries. We know very little about being members of teams, of staying with our group "no matter what". So we split apart.

We accept passively the judgments and decisions of others, not wishing to engage in debate. We would not "stoop" to arming ourselves with expert advice from parliamentarians, etc. We would never walk out, not even from an Information Session that closed off all information on our cause, until told to adjourn.

We wait to be told what to do. We ask for permission. Now that this whole question has been handed to a Board-appointed committee, now we can go about our business of asserting our wishes with regard to the wording of the Principles. Now we can say, "Because this comes from Boston---"

The Future

Our work is cut out for us. We begin with ourselves. Each of us has to decide which tasks come first. This account has been written as if men were not also victims. Not so. They were denied access to information; they did not walk out or protest. Men could say, "This is women's business", but they knew it was everyone's concern. We all need help and we must support one another. When that happens, GA '81 will have meaning for all of us.

Jewell McHugh
Chair, JPD Women and Religion Committee
1980-81

...a feminist should read and re-read carefully such dispassionate statements as the following from Vern Bullough's THE SUBORDINATE SEX. He writes:

Even if the husband dies before consummation, which was not usually attempted until the girl was about ten, the girl was regarded as a widow and could not re-marry.²

"Not usually attempted until the girl was about ten." The words let the information just slide past consciousness that of course it was/is often "attempted" earlier. Since this is a text often used in Women's Studies courses and contains much useful information, this detached quality of the writing requires special attention. It is "writing that erases itself."³ The style of patriarchal scholarship, even at its best, continues and participates in the Righteous Rites of female slaughter/erasure. In this instance what we are confronted with is not exactly untruth but a partially suppressed truth, which becomes absorbed, belittled, and discarded in the reader's mind.

1 from MARY DALY Gyn/Ecology, Beacon Press, 1978, p. 120

2 Vern Bullough, THE SUBORDINATE SEX, Penguin Books, 1974, p. 235

3 Conversation with Jane Caputi, Boston, November, 1976

Shirley Josephson

THE IDEAL MALE?

It must be a long time since I paid any heed to the men's magazines. I immediately noticed that there are no VARGA girl center-folds in Esquire in recent issues, but most startling is the nearly total omission of references to women. Well, occasionally something appears as it relates to males' images of themselves like an article entitled, "What Do Women Really Think About Men's Bodies?" Subtitle: "Boy, Have We Got News For You."

The big news in this article is that each male is under appraisal by each female as a potential sexual partner. The rest deals with the criteria involved. That ought to heighten any

self-respecting man's spirit of competition. Baloney!. I can see most of the men I know reacting by simply deleting the whimsicalities of female judgment from their consciousness. Far better to rely on the long-standing and well understood standards for male esteem--sailing a Hobie catamaran, driving an enviable car, wearing appropriate uniforms of the occasions. Who can fault a guy if a woman doesn't appreciate a genuine, red-blooded, American man who is well accepted by his male peers?

But back to the study of the subtleties of one's trappings and the nuances of effective pandering to the Goddess Corporate Success. Lots of space is taken by pictures and stories of what to wear, drive, look like, smell like and do to fulfill the image of what the successful, important, envied man is like. There are even a few articles on how and what to think. The editorial policy appears to be an omission of women as people. That concept would be too threatening to the male ego. This slant is born out by the pictures of women, few as they are, casting them as essential appurtenances to the male image, just as a fine trotting mare was once evidence of status for a man of the world. Some of the pictures which include women show a bit of cleavage, but the clear emphasis of the presence of the lady is to complete the picture of the ideal male.

Guy Best

REFLECTIONS ON A COMMITTEE MEETING

(Editor's note: The Ms. article Jan Reed refers to in her reflections tells how a teacher learned that we must avoid the artificialities of sex, race, and economic class categories that can easily trap a group of people who wish to build mutual understanding by sharing common human experiences and friendship. Workshops in which to share our experiences in the arts or in developing our personal philosophy are examples of the strands Jan Reed mentions as a way to develop the central theme of the next Women and Religion Conference scheduled for First Church, Philadelphia, March 19-20, 1982.)

We planned the spring Women and Religion Conference. We considered directions to be summarized in the conference theme. Se settled on a working theme, then moved into the specifics of speakers

and workshops as ways of expressing and implementing the theme. And we approached the jaws of the pernicious trap!

Our theme, we thought, would be something like, "Our Emerging Selves." It would take up from our previous conference theme of "Men and Women Working Together" and consider the next step. Assuming we knew who we were, we would work in becoming more of that who--better selves, self-actualizing individuals. Well and good--we were not reinventing the wheel as so many conferences do.

But then we went to work on the workshops. At that point, we took a giant step toward the trap. We settled back into the categories of artificial distinctions.

May Helen Washington discussed these artificial distinctions in an article in the September, 1981 Ms. She wrote in that article of her personal emergence from the illusions of racism, sexism and economic class. Washington had experienced differences (created through her class syllabus at University of Massachusetts, Boston) and she had experienced illusion breakers (stumbled onto in compositions of personal experiences). She began to discover common denominators of humanness. Particular to her experience was friendship. Washington referred to these common denominators as "mutual estates."

Just like Mary Helen Washington's syllabus, we discussed workshops based on race, sex and economic class. The jaws of the trap of artificial distinctions were about to spring. We could still escape. We could use the workshop strands of emergence as our focus. Within each workshop or presentation, we could seek the legacies of human beings emerging through the arts and sciences of human experience and being. We could explore the mythology of people expressing and repressing. We could analyze processes of socialization and their consequences. We could investigate the physiology of the human machine. But in all of our seeking, exploring, analyzing and investigating, we could, indeed we must, find ways of discovering and developing our "mutual estates" to the benefit of our emerging selves.

Jan Reed

COURAGE: THAT'S WHAT WE NEED

Events since our last conference have intensified the reasons for concentrating on the conditions of human beings and on the language and philosophy with which organized religion deals with the human condition. We need brave spokespersons for liberal religion. We need to consider our treatment of women within our own denomination. If we want change, then we must take the necessary steps. Let ours be a truly grass roots movement--listening to all the voices being raised on the issue of women and trusting our own judgment to select the best from each.

Guy Best

* * * *

"UNITARIANS EXORCISE 'SEXIST' PASSAGES IN BURNING CEREMONY"

The Baltimore Sun carried that headline on Monday, Oct. 5, 1981. Historic First Church, Baltimore, was the scene at Sunday Service of the eradication of so-called "universal truths" taught by great prophets when nine women read and then burned quotations from theologians and religious source books. Jean Zoerheide, in an interpretative statement, said "We publicly carry out the burning in a symbolic act of expurgating from our own lives these slanderous statements...These teachings have shaped...attitudes, causing women to be...undervalued. We affirm ourselves as women and declare our sisterhood with women everywhere."

Bob Zoerheide, Minister, said that this was "an historic morning." At the conclusion of the sermon he called for prayers for "forgiveness...for...what we have done to ourselves."

For copies of Bob's sermon and the women's statements, "Selected Universal Truths--A Repudiation", please write

Sara Best, Chair
JPD Women and Religion Committee
5211 Saratoga Avenue
Chevy Chase, Md. 20815

EMERGING SELVES

Two Conferences

Sponsored by

JPD Women and Religion Committee

Sunday and Monday
February 14-15, 1982
Cedar Lane Unitarian Church
Bethesda, Md.

Friday and Saturday
March 19-20, 1982
First Unitarian Church
Philadelphia, Pa.

One can attend both conferences
and experience different work-
shops and speakers.

Please see flyers with prelimi-
nary program outline.

Joseph Priestley District
Women and Religion Committee
9601 Cedar Lane
Bethesda, Maryland 20814

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Kensington, Md.
Permit No. 26