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Issue XVII

WOMEN'S CONCERNS NEWSLETTER



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Dear Friends:

I still get upset with those persons who get upset with those of us who keep raising the language issue. I feel that they must not be able to see the links between words that exclude or put women down and male domination and violence against women (and this includes psychological violence, sexist advertising and pornography).

As long as boys grow up learning to call women broads, babes, (and other such words), and hearing their fathers refer to mother as 'the old lady' or 'my woman', we will continue to have extreme tensions in male-female relationships. Women's bodies are referred to or promoted in a variety of ways that are demeaning and exploitive as if they exist only to satisfy the male sexual drive or the advertising industry.

Unfortunately certain groups within the Christian church are creating even more tension by elevating women to an unattainable pedestal, while at the same time proclaiming a God-ordained position which is inferior to men.

After months of planning and hard work those of us on the Board of Directors of a new crisis shelter in my home community were elated one day when we were able to say, "Hurrah, our first battered women!". Of course the joy came from our ability to meet a woman in need. But there was always the frustration that we were just band-aiding. Who was doing all of the work in the homes to change the attitudes that seemed to 'allow' men to beat up their wives? It is so good to learn that they are planning self-help groups for abusive husbands similar to the groups for abusive parents. Ten percent of Canadian women are physically abused. That is totally unacceptable!

This issue of the NEWSLETTER attempts to look at only a piece of the problem.

The Women's Concerns Newsletter is prepared bi-monthly by the Women's Desk of the United Church's Division of Mission in Canada. It keeps women in touch with each other as well as keeping us aware of issues that affect our lives. One of its purpose is to provide an opportunity for you to share your experiences as you grow and struggle on your journey to wholeness in Christ.

Send your own story, a meaningful Bible study or poem, news about women in the church, what you think about what you read here. This Newsletter is for all the women in the church to communicate with each other.

To receive the Newsletter regularly (it's free) or to contribute to it, write to Marion Logan, Division of Mission in Canada, 85 St. Clair Avenue East, Toronto, Ontario M4T 1M8.

WIFE ABUSE — A NATIONAL CRIME

by Shirley Endicott Small

Everything suggests that violence against wives is very common in Canada.

* Everytime a woman's shelter is opened it is rapidly filled with women fleeing from violent husbands.

* The Mississauga Community Legal Service (Ontario) estimates they receive 2 to 3 inquiry calls per day from assaulted women.

* Homemaker's Magazine which goes to upper middle class homes across the country found that 20% of the 296 women who replied to a questionnaire on violence said they had been forced to have sexual intercourse by their husbands.

Because women do not like to admit they are being physically abused, the extent of this crime has been greatly under-estimated. In Vancouver, Family Services, an agency used mainly by middle class clients, found when they asked about violence that the percentage of cases involving wife assault rose from 7.2% to 19.2%. This experience has been duplicated in other parts of the country.

My eyes were first opened to this topic in 1975 when I realized that I knew four women in my social circle who had been physically abused by their husbands. One husband was a surgeon, one was a professional engineer, the third a university professor and the fourth was a counsellor at a social agency. This realization was a shock to me for I had been teaching my undergraduate sociology class that interpersonal violence was limited to the "subculture of poverty" and to certain immigrant groups.

Other uncomfortable truths were to follow in the spring of 1978 when I moved out of the ivory tower and became

active in a group working to improve the services available to assaulted women. Here are three statements from a questionnaire we distributed. What do you think, are they true or false?

* Wife-beating was an accepted practice for so long in Western culture that there were laws regulating it.

* Men beat their wives because they are permitted to and nobody stops them.

* Wife-beating constitutes 76% of family violence.

Here are the answers:

- According to British Common Law tradition a husband was permitted to beat his wife provided he used a stick no thicker than his thumb. This is the origin of the expression "rule of thumb."

- Violent husbands are consistently taken "off the hook." For example, a study in London, Ontario has shown that police lay charges in only 2% of reported cases even though they advise 21% of the women to seek medical attention.

- A Scottish study of police records revealed that attacks on wives represented 75.8% of all violence in the family setting. Husband assault accounted for 1.1% and child assault for 10.7%.

What about these statements, are they true or false?

* Alcohol is the real culprit in wife-beating.

* Men who beat their wives are mentally ill.

These are two of the common myths about wife-beating which serve to make wife-assault one of the easiest crimes to commit without getting caught.

.... continued from page 2

- While alcohol is present in 1/3 to 1/2 of reported assaults, it appears to be a facilitator, not a cause of the violence. The fact that a man may be drinking allows him to blame the assault on alcohol.

- The "he does it because he is sick" idea serves to deny the man's responsibility for his action. Few men who beat their wives are mentally ill.

Many women have great difficulty with the assertion that "wife assault is a crime, not a sickness." Having been trained to serve and protect men, we find it easier to believe a husband is sick and that our responsibility is to excuse the violence and nurse him through this sickness. For women steeped in the Christian ethic of reconciliation, the idea that "he does it because he's sick" can be particularly attractive - and dangerous. I think of a woman I will call Jane. I met her at a gathering at the Centre for Christian Studies in Toronto. The doctor at the hospital told her it was the worst beating he had ever seen. "I always forgave my husband," she told me, "... he's really very sick." "But", I pointed out, "when all you did was to forgive, you gave him permission to hit hit you again." She agreed to see a feminist counsellor, a United Church minister I knew would support Rosemary Ruether's dictum: For the oppressed anger and self-esteem are theological virtues the same way that faith and hope are theological virtues.

A painful discovery for me has been the extent to which women support the rule of thumb principle. First, there are those who blame the victim: "Some women are hard on their husbands, they nag so they're really asking for it." Blaming the wife with "she provoked it" allows the husband to escape responsibility for his violence. If women won't assert that freedom from assault is a basic right, then who will?

Then there is the "holier than thou approach": "I sympathize with those women but I would never stay in a violent marriage." This reinforces an

abused woman's sense of shame and makes it difficult for her to reach out to her sisters for support. My own initial reaction was to feel that physically abused women are over there - and the rest of us over here. Answering the following questions helped me to see how much I have in common with battered women, the problems of assaulted women are the problems of all women.

1. Did you ever back down from an argument with a man because you felt intimidated?
2. Have you ever felt threatened by a man's superior physical strength?
3. Have you ever stayed in a relationship longer than you should have?
4. Did you stay because you felt responsible for the other person?
5. Have you ever had gnawing doubts that you could not make it on your own in the outside world?
6. Have you ever been fearful that you couldn't earn a decent living and manage the children by yourself?

Assaulted women need to know that their experience is not unique, that they are not crazy. To be able to say, "Yes I think I understand for in some small way I have been there too" is very supportive. That's what sisterhood means and that's what we can offer all women - those living in abusive situations and those who are not. It's one way we can help each other gain strength and wholeness.

Shirley Small is a founding member of Support Services for Assaulted Women an organization working to change community and professional awareness of wife assault.

VIOLENCE — A LEARNED BEHAVIOUR

Everything points to violence being a learned behaviour, says Anne Jones, a writer who spent five years researching the history of female murderers. The research resulted in a book *Women Who Kill* which Jones said she wrote "in a detached tone to reach the non-feminist audience."

"I want it to reach men," she said, "It is men who are doing the violence and men who must stop". Jones said in an interview that she was surprised by the extent of domestic violence and separation of the sexes during the 19th Century.

"The solid, happy home never seems to have existed". She discovered there were more women-committed homicides in the 19th century than now.

"Arsenic was the 19th century divorce. But homicide drops as more options come into our lives". The trail of violence to today's women stems from child and wife beating.

"Men beat women because they can --- (and) no one stops them. Men are becoming more and more scared and a batterer will not let go of a woman. They are so dependent on women for their emotional life, they can't cope, and are fearful of trying something on their own."

Jones states that "men find it difficult to imagine a world where they are not exerting power over others. It is women who must help women. First we must take care of the victims, then bring pressure to bear on social services — we must become these women's advocates and publicize what is happening".

"Pornography, sexual harrassment and anti-women jokes show men and women don't seem to like each other" the author states. "With the few Canadian women's shelters concentrated in major centres chances are the majority of women aren't near help."

Anne Jones declares "I was a battered child. That's the impetus for the book. I am committed to non-violence".

Dr. Donald Dutton of U.B.C.'s department of psychology says that one reason men assault women is that women are "safe" targets for violence. Out of 10,000 assaults on Canadian women every year, only 2 men are convicted. Victim surveys indicate that 9,200 are unreported and that police reluctantly respond to about half of the other 800. Only 40 arrests are made and 38 of these are dropped or settled out of court.

"Witnessing violence as a child, being a victim of violence or parental rejection seem to predispose an individual to react to stress with violence". Dr. Dutton stated that the source of stress could originate within the marriage -- such as a power struggle between the husband and wife -- or from without, such as unemployment, job stress and isolation from family or close friends. If a man feels powerless in his outside life, he may try to compensate by being a tyrant in his family and use physical threats as the ultimate instrument of power.

Reprinted from 2 articles in the Kitchener-Waterloo Record.



TO BE A WOMAN

The girls prepared skits to illustrate the questions they had about women's roles in India.

The first was about non-co-operation by husbands in disciplining children... surely a trans-national problem.

The next, a husband wanted a male child desperately, though they already had four daughters.

There was the young woman whose further education could not be financed because the money was needed for her dowry!

And the young couple, living in the extended family arrangement, whose mother-in law would not allow them to go to the movies.

These fine, middle-class Indian girls feel trapped
by dowry
by extended family
by parents
by history
by tradition.

Yet few of them know how to become free persons. In fact, they are not so different from Canadian girls who feel trapped
by custom
by male expectations
by history
by their own self image.

Lord, You treated women as full persons. You dignified the woman taken in adultery and restored her pride. You took Mary seriously and discussed theology with her. Yet you also appreciated Martha's care for Your well being.

How can I become a full person?
How can I be free
yet responsible to those I love?
How can I know
what it means
to be a woman?

Like A Mighty River
By Lois Wilson.

TASK FORCE NEWS: MEETING IN A CIRCLE

by Dolly Lansdowne

We, the members of the Task Force on the Changing Roles of Women and Men have incorporated a style of meeting which is very important to me. I am writing from the perspective of a non-status Indian woman.

Meeting in Circle is a gift Indian people bring to the United Church of Canada and is a vital part of our culture because it is inclusive and affirming to us as women.

When I think of meeting in a circle I think of two things:

1. From the past -- "The Medicine Wheel", a spiritual way of life, and
2. From today -- "Mending the Hoop", a phrase coined by Indians to describe consciousness-raising involving the rediscovery of our culture, and heritage.

"Mending the Hoop" started for me in Wabimaska, Saskatchewan in June 1980 when United Church Indian people from B.C. to Quebec met. The Circle included a cross-section of Indian people. We were many tribes, spoke many languages, and we varied in our degree of integration. We were aware of our brokenness. We felt rage, yet through us flowed hope, and strength, and finally a vision of healing blossomed.

Throughout that following year I observed the dynamics of the Circle Meeting. They are:

- 1) All people are included in the process of decision-making.
- ii) To abstain from the process involves a deliberate choice.
- iii) Most often people with opposing viewpoints sit directly opposite one another to insure that issues are dealt with fairly.
- iv) Confrontation could be avoided or used depending on the process.
- v) Circle Chairpersons have easier access to reading the response of the people

involved (as opposed to a hierarchical setting).

- vi) Indian elders often sit outside of the circle - my first assumption was that they were not participating or that they must disapprove of the issue, process, etc. I learned instead that this action was an affirmation of the process and that their reserve of strength and wisdom was available to everyone, and they gave their blessing to the process.
- vii) Those not involved in the process do not join the circle, but sit off to the sides.

A couple of reactions to my suggestion that the Church could implement Circle Meetings have been:

- i) The Circle is fine for small groups, as people get lost in large groups.
- ii) The Agenda could be set with no options left open to change it.

I responded to those reactions by sharing my vision of circles within circles, moving and growing and breaking away and feeding into a large circle, and also asked, "Are these problems unique to this style?"

It was important for me to experience an exercise shared with us at one of our Task Force meetings and I share it with readers of the Newsletter.

Close your eyes and imagine a ladder, with folks passing up and down, some afraid to climb high, some reluctant to come down. Imagine an angry person shaking the ladder from the bottom. Imagine being at the top. Now ... imagine a circle of folks standing, or sitting facing one another, or weaving in and out - walking outside the circle - coming back in. Imagine dancing Sarah's Circle. I encourage folks to participate in Circle Meetings.

THE LAW AND RAPE

by Nancy Jackman

The present law which deals with RAPE is totally inadequate - usually in court the woman has to prove that she has been violated rather than the offender proving his innocence. Court justices are often more sympathetic to the rights of the accused than of the victim.

A new Bill C-53 is to be introduced to the Federal government which will amend the criminal code to deal with sexual offences. It is better than what we now have, but is still not good enough. The final judge of Bill C-53 is a 9 MAN Supreme Court of Canada.

The government is about to appoint a new Justice and this person should be a woman! We ask you to write/lobby the Prime minister, the Minister of Justice, Svend Robinson (NDP) and Ray Hnatyshyn (PC) urging them to make this next appointment a woman and also to seriously consider the following aspects of Bill C-53.

What Is Good About Bill C-53.

1. Assault is defined as unconsented to touching, but Sec. 244 (4) (b) allows consent to be inferred from lack of resistance. Some women do not resist as they are terrified of being cut, shot or killed. This clause is potentially dangerous. Eliminate it.
2. A man may have an "honest though unreasonable belief" that his victim consented to rape. The woman may have kicked, screamed, cried etc., but if the man believed that she "wanted it that way", "honest though unreasonable belief" can be sufficient defense for the man's acquittal. This defense didn't exist in Canadian criminal law until 1980, and 1982 is the year to abolish it!
3. "Sexual assault" is not defined in C-53 and this may lead to confusion in law enforcement with no protection against minor sexual assaults like a "grab" at the office. A 3-tiered system of sexual assaults with differing penalties is recommended.

4. "Corroboration". Judges must warn or have the discretion to warn the jury that it is dangerous to convict without "supporting" (corroborating) evidence. This warning leads a jury to infer that there 'should' be supportive evidence. Abolish this.
5. "Recent complaint" means a woman can only use as evidence the first story she told of the rape, the first chance she had even if the first person she saw was a friend of the rapist's! No further evidence can be introduced. This could be changed to: All first complaints must be allowed.
6. Prior sexual history is admissible if the trial judge decides it's relevant. The law should be changed so prior sexual history is never admissible. A woman agreeing to sexual relations in the past doesn't mean she has agreed this time.

More information from: National Association of Women & the Law, P.O. Box 197, Station B, Ottawa, Ontario K1C 6C4.

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Toronto Area Caucus of Women & the Law, P.O. Box 231, Station B, Toronto, Ontario M5T 2T2. (Brief on C-53 costs \$1.25).

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Saskatoon - Women and Pensions Conference. For more information contact: Mona Frederickson, 1415 McKercher Dr. #18, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan (306)373-4730

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Correction from the January Issue:

The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women also has kit on 'Women and Pensions'. Write to Box 1541, Station B, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5R5,

A CRITIQUE OF THE SUBMISSION OF WOMEN MOVEMENT

by Diane Marshall

Since the early 1960s we have experienced a "new wave of feminism". While many women involved have been committed Christians, there have been other secular strains which have attacked church and family patriarchal structures and precepts and have thereby elicited (at times justifiable) defensive reactions from Christians of a variety of persuasions. We are now challenged as members of the Body of Christ, to face openly the request by women to be seen as full and responsible partners, calling us all to do justice and to rectify past injury, to hear the cry of today's "widowed and orphaned" - the women who are beaten and abandoned, physically and emotionally violated, living often below the poverty line on Mother's Allowance and the Old Age Pension, given inadequate protection in the work-place, robbed of dignity in the home, and silenced in the Church.

It is in this context that we are concerned about the resurgence in North American society, and in the church, of various forms of a "submission of women" movement.

We see this resurgence as gaining momentum in today's North American culture in large part as a reaction to what is perceived as the effect of the secular women's movement on the breakdown of family life. We disagree with this underlying analysis because we feel it is a simplistic reactionary stance which fails to take seriously the meaning of women seeking full personhood legally, economically, and socially. Thus "God's umbrella of protection" advocating women's return to a subservient status and man's reclaiming of all authority becomes a neat, packaged view of the social order which superficially provides peace and certainty. Our concern is that the "submission" books and study groups say something about the emptiness and frustration experienced by many women and men today who are desperate to find meaning and fulfillment in life, and are looking for a

world-and-life view. Yet the scapegoating of women inherent in these doctrines of submission is seen in the following statement by Mrs. Andelin: "If a man does not love his wife with his heart and soul it is the wife's fault" (Fascinating Womanhood, 1975). Thus for example a model of marriage develops whereby men are exempted from the responsibilities of full partnership, and women are held solely accountable for the "success" of the marriage -- a model which is a crushing burden for anyone to bear and which denies the biblical teachings of interdependence that we are to be "mutually accountable to one another in Christ", and to "bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ."

Thus it is our concern that the "Christian" veneer of such books and courses must be peeled away in order to take a long, hard look at their teachings and so expose doctrines which purport to be biblical. It is the Greek philosophy of Aristotle's "great chain of Being" which underlies the philosophical premises of the "umbrella of protection" - not the Judeo-Christian world view of the Creator God making men and women in His own image to be partners in creation. We must ask ourselves: Do we accept a social order based upon the Fall, or an order rooted in the creation and in the promise of redemption in Jesus Christ? How do we take seriously Paul's triumphant proclamation in Galatians 3:27 that: "In Christ is there neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female"?

The following is a brief attempt to analyse the theological roots and some of the implications of the "submission" movement in order that we can together as a Church begin to work towards a more full and biblical view of the partnership of men and women in community.

..... continued from page 8 a hierarchical model of church, family and society

I. THEOLOGICAL PREMISES

We are concerned that the "submission of women" teachings are being propagated as being biblically based. The phrase, "modern submission of women movement", refers to an increasing flood of literature and to the emergence of numerous organizations and groups in North America which teach and actively promote the sub-ordination of woman to man. Such doctrines are based on a specific type of theology, rooted in two premises, namely: (i) that the female was/is created for a secondary role, dependent on and obedient to the male, in fact not fully an image-bearer of the Creator: and (ii) that woman was responsible for the Fall of man and is therefore primarily responsible for the entrance of sin into the world. Thus, the Genesis 3:16 passage which is a part of the curse is interpreted as God's command to men to rule over all women, and is binding until the end of time. In this way, the consequences of the fall for women and men continue in the New Creation and despite Christ's redemptive and liberating work.

Thus this theology promotes a hierarchical model of church, family and society, in which sexual stratification whereby males exercise authority over females (but not vice versa) is considered to be "God-ordained" and immutable. Women's groups purporting to "teach women about their boundaries, creative opportunities, and the freedoms in their roles and relationships according to the Scripture" (Women Aglow Fellowship), seminars such as Bill Gothard's "Basic Youth Conflicts", and books such as The Total Woman, Fascinating Womanhood and The Christian Family, advocate "God's umbrella of protection" whereby, in Larry Christensen's words:

The husband lives under the authority of Christ....The wife lives under the authority of her husband and is responsible to him.... The children live under the authority of both..... Thus God has structured the family. (Christensen, 1970, p.18)

II. EFFECTS OF SUBMISSION TEACHINGS

A. Implications for Women

The deepest danger in these teachings is that of idolatry, whereby women are encouraged to "revere" and "worship" their husbands as part of their God-given order in creation. Marabel Morgan, author of The Total Woman, puts this heresy as follows:

"It is only when a woman surrender her life to her husband, reveres and worships him, and is willing to serve him, that she becomes really beautiful to him." (Morgan, 1975, p.96-7)

The corollary of this is the manipulative behaviour thus endorsed as a means of acquiring women's own ends. There is blatantly contemptuous manipulation of men involved, including sexual seduction, many tactics of which are essentially passive-aggressive ways of handling anger, and resulting in failure to meet the biblical mandate of Ephesians to "speak the truth in love and so grow fully into Christ". For example, Andelin, in Fascinating Womanhood, suggests that women should use tactics such as being charmingly saucy, teasing, pouting, etc., since men simply love such behaviours and are responsive to them! To quote Andelin:

"In acquiring femininity, you must first dispense with any air of strength and ability, of competence and fearlessness, and acquire instead an attitude of frail dependency upon men to take care of you."

B. Implications for Men

How do such teachings addressed to women affect men? For one thing, if a man feels inadequate or inferior the experience of a totally submissive woman may give him feelings of power. Secondly, men who are highly self-seeking, preferring their own careers and needs, and are unwilling to be "mutually accountable in Christ" or to practice servant-leadership, may find such a view of "love" comforting.

.... continued from page 9 to discern the spirits of our age

Thirdly, men who are hostile towards women may endorse women's submission as a means of control and of (pathologically) releasing their own anger. Some of the research concerning male violence towards women (eg. wife battering) is borne out by this latter premise.

III. CONCLUSIONS

There are seven major aspects of submission-of-women teachings which need to be carefully looked at with pastoral concern: (i) a search for meaning and definition which looks for simplistic solutions to complex issues in a historical period of rapid social change; (2) the use of manipulation to gain one's own ends; (3) the denial of women's God-given gifts in order to appease a male (and thus a basic betrayal of the call to be a "good and faithful steward" of God's gifts to the church); (4) the denial of growth for both men and women into the fullness of maturity in Christ because of rigid sex role stereotypes which prevent the flourishing of the fruit and the gifts of the Spirit; (5) an underlying materialism and lack of active concern for the poor and for caring and serving our fellow human beings in a suffering world; (6) the idolatry underlying the teaching that women must "revere" and "worship" their husbands.

This is a serious challenge to Christian women, since we are to love only the Lord our God with all our minds and hearts and souls, and to "have no other gods before" God. (7) The potential encouragement of a dominant "will to power" in men, which can manifest itself in a controlling and sometimes violent disposition which denies the fruit of the Spirit of gentleness.

The prophets and the epistles enjoin us to "discern the spirits of our age" and "to beware of false teachings". Thus, we have not sought to critique the submission of woman teachings out of a desire to be negative and critical but out of a commitment to honestly examine and challenge ourselves and our church. Often such teachings go unrecognized in our midst. We must begin to look carefully at the models we use -- often unconsciously -- of relationships between women and men, of marriage and family, of society, if we as a community of believers in Jesus Christ are to bring a distinctly biblical perspective to the search for "full partnership of women and men in all areas of creation".

Diane Marshall.

HAVENMERE

My swollen hands grope for the door of Havenmere,
Can it be me, a battered woman, knocking here,
A doctor's wife; my new car at the gate,
Me, bruised and sore, the target thing of hate?

The matron's ample arms enwrap me 'round'
Her silent gesture says -- a home is found,
The smell of coffee in this sheltered place.
Becomes the scent of welcome-warming space;
The room is clothed in light and woman-lined,
And I will learn to heal my heart of fear
And love myself again -- at Havenmere.

Patricia Collett
Calgary, Alberta.

(Following a visit to Discovery House)

LETTERS

I was touched by the article by Lynne Anderson in the January 1982 Newsletter "Women married to Clergy".

I am sending you a copy of my book, which is (as Ms. Anderson puts it so nicely) "partly on the subject of liberating the minister's wife from the expectation of the congregation". I don't think this is a book just for ministers' wives. Others have found much to identify with in it.

Lynne Anderson expresses the dilemma of many of us so beautifully.

Donna Sinclair, North Bay.

Pastor's Wife by Donna Sinclair is available from Canec Outlets and the Book Room, 85 St. Clair Avenue East, Toronto, Ontario M4T 1M8.

Your Newsletter is always a breath of fresh air to Christian Feminists. It's a good forum for sharing.

A friend of mine teaches kindergarten. This grandmother explains to the children each time they need to change the (exclusive) words to include everyone. Every *man* becomes *everyone* and *man* becomes *all*. Sometimes the children in the class raise the issue if the teacher misses one. They know its important that *everyone* be included.

Callie Bell.
Oakville, Ont.

Now Available

Guidelines for Inclusive Language, prepared by the Task Force on Changing Roles of Women and Men is now available from Mary Connor, 85 St. Clair Avenue East, Toronto, Ontario M4T 1M8.

"Our Ministry Our Lives" edited by Shelley Finson and Rita Chamberlain is now available from Canec Outlets and The Book Room, Cost is \$7.80.

I devour the Women's Concerns Newsletter when it arrives. It is always tasty, contains exciting new flavours to old and new topics and leaves me with a new awareness and a feeling of fulfillment. Although I left the church over 10 years ago --- the Newsletter has helped me realize some of the reasons why I was so uncomfortable in the "comfortable pew".

Your Newsletter (our Newsletter) provides a much needed bond with other women both inside and outside of the church.

Ferne Martin
Pakenham, Ont.

Personally I find this Newsletter informative, challenging, at times provocative, but balanced -- and decidedly Christian, as I understand Christ to have intended 'Christian' to be. Keep up the good work!

R. Marilyn MacDonald
Nova Scotia.

Correction - We apologize for an error in the January Newsletter. The last paragraph (p.6) of the article on Abortion should read:

Our United Church statement, attempting to disentangle the theological issues in coldly rational prose, does not begin to indicate the depths of grief, anger and longing that overwhelm many women caught in the predicament of a problem pregnancy. Nor of course can it probe the heart of one of the deepest mysteries of faith, the gift of life and the extent to which we have been "given responsibility for it." But even given these inevitable shortcomings, I do believe our United Church has developed, over a ten-year process of committees, commissions and General Council statements, a stand that is usable, respectful of all the values involved, and truly biblical.

THE MOTHERHOOD OF GOD

A SERMON

by Rev. Douglas Lapp

*For thus says the Lord: As one whom a mother comforts so will I comfort you.
Isaiah 66:12, 13.*

A GOD OF COMFORT

THE LORD SAYS: AS ONE WHOM A MOTHER COMFORTS SO WILL I COMFORT YOU. "As one whom a mother comforts". As I was preparing my sermon this past week, I looked out the window on the playyard of our Bond Street Nursery School which is beneath the study. There was my text before my eyes! I heard a child crying, and I saw on one of the benches a worker gathering the child to her. The child would not be consoled at first, but the staff member kept talking to her and patting her on the shoulder. Gradually the crying reduced to sobbing, then the sobbing to tear-stained calm. And then suddenly the child was off the bench and back into the playyard, and on with the serious business of play. AS ONE WHOM A MOTHER COMFORTS says the Lord SO WILL I COMFORT YOU.

"Comfort" derives from "cum forte", with strength. As a mother gives strength to the child, so the Lord gives strength to you. I think of the little girl, having received her needed comfort, going back into the playyard with strength. Strength to face the fray amongst other children, each with their need to assert themselves.

And isn't this the way it is with you in your difficult adult world? You, in your place where each must assert themselves and where sometimes such assertion rubs you or knocks you or unbalances you? And are you not able in the privacy of your soul to go to God -- the God who comforts, the God who comforts as a mother -- and seek your solace, and confide your sorrows, and be strengthened to return to the fray?

That's the thing about real comforting. Real comforting is not just soft and warm and cosy. Real comforting not only solaces but strengthens: it strengthens in order

that you may return to the place you were before you needed the comforting. Love and strength. The Motherhood of God. "I will comfort you as a mother comforts her child."

A GOD WHO UPHOLDS: Isaiah 46:13

Here is a picture which can be seen as a beautiful birthing scene. After the pain and pressure of labour the newborn child is placed in the arms of the mother, and the mother, though tired and drawn from giving birth is smiling the beautiful and soul-felt smile of motherhood. But not only that: how many times must the children be carried after being "carried from the womb". HEARKEN TO ME (YOU CHILDREN OF GOD) WHO HAVE BEEN BORNE BY ME FROM BIRTH, CARRIED FROM THE WOMB.

And how many times have you been carried by the God who bore you? Adults normally do not want to be carried: indeed, may resist being carried. But there is a time to be carried in the midst of some private chaos, there is a time to be carried in the midst of some illness or as the result of some accident. There is a time to be carried.

The Lord says "..... you shall be like a child that is nursed by its mother, carried in her arms and treated with love." Isaiah 66:12.

A GOD WHO PROTECTS

Or, I could offer different texts from the Psalms which picture the motherhood of God in terms of protective wings.

..... continued from page 12

HOW PRECIOUS IS YOUR STEADFAST LOVE. O GOD!
WE FIND PROTECTION IN THE SHADOW OF YOUR WINGS.
(Psalm 36:7).

HEAR MY CRY O GOD! OH, TO BE SAFE UNDER THE
SHELTER OF THY WINGS! (Psalm 61:1,4) BE MERCI-
FUL TO ME OH GOD, BE MERCIFUL TO ME, FOR IN YOU
MY SOUL TAKES REFUGE: IN THE SHADOW OF YOUR
WINGS I WILL TAKE REFUGE, TILL THE STORMS OF
DESTRUCTION PASS BY. (Psalm 57:1)

Now there are some references to outstretched
wings in the Bible which may refer to the Per-
sian and Egyptian representation of the diety
as a winged sun-disc, but the manner in which
Jesus picks up the theme leaves little doubt
about the mother-reference in the texts we
have quoted:

O JERUSALEM, JERUSALEM ... HOW OFTEN WOULD
I HAVE GATHERED YOUR CHILDREN TOGETHER AS A
HEN GATHERS HER BROOD UNDER HER WINGS.
(Matthew 23:37)

And how often in a world fraught with dire
danger have you felt confidence and security
because you know that we are gathered under
the shadow of God's wings. The Motherhood of
God!

THE FEMININE NATURE OF GOD

A mother comforting her child.
A mother bearing, giving birth to,
and carrying her child.
A mother-bird giving protection to
her young.

All images of God, images which help us and
nurture us in our faith. Female images.

Recently the growing movement for the
raising of the consciousness of women in a
society still dominated by males, has had its
effect in the field of Christian theology. A
significant number of theologians are writing
theology from a specifically feminist perspec-
tive in order to balance centuries of theology
written from a masculine perspective.

We need the interpretation of female theo-
logians in order to keep our perspective about

our knowledge of God. After all, no
one knows what God does look like. We
only know that God is. The Boston
minister, Reverend Phillips Brooks,
was invited by Helen Keller's teacher
to teach Helen (through the sign lan-
guage of her teacher) about the reality
of God. Helen Keller's face lit up and
she said: "I've always known there was
a God, but until now I hadn't known
God's name." As a blind child she had
no preconceived notions. God was
neither male nor female. God had
neither white whiskers or a smooth face.
God spoke with neither a masculine
voice or a feminine voice. There simply
was no issue about divine gender.

What we discover in the work of some
female theologians today is the effort
to remove some preconceived notions.
Male imagery was natural in the Bible
because Israel was a patriarchy. Male
imagery dominated the thought about God,
but did not dominate completely, as we
have seen. Jesus, a child of this
patriarchal society, and influenced by
a beautiful person named Joseph, taught
us to pray "Our Father..." It is an
effective and helpful image and there
is no need whatever for us to change
it. But some women are saying earnestly
and honestly that they have a stark
feeling of exclusion from the source-
springs of their faith if their feminine
experience, which at critical points is
essentially different from masculine
experience, is never, ever, reflected in
the symbols of faith. For some Christian
women, this sense of exclusion has been
a gradual process related to their need
to affirm their feminine perspective in
other areas of life. For others it has
been a sudden realization, something
akin, they say, to seeing that ancient
image of the sides of two goblets and
suddenly discovering that rather than
seeing goblets, they are seeing the
outlines of two human faces. Once they
see the human faces they can never see

the goblets. So, once they begin to "hear" all the male imagery -- especially in our traditional hymns -- they find it difficult to "hear" anything else, and so the sense of being excluded grows.

REJOICING IN GOD

Let us rejoice in the fact that our all-inclusive God has a female nature, a masculine nature, and a nature beyond all reference to gender. Remember that this is nothing new. It is not something discovered by feminist theology in the twentieth century. God has always been this way! What is new is a growing sensitivity on the part of all men who have never given it a thought before; women for whom the gender of God is simply not an issue; and women for whom language of gender is a burning issue.

None of us really wants a faith-expression that excludes a significant number of our sisters from their sense of possession of the faith and belonging in the community of faith.

Let us rejoice in the inclusiveness of God. To thus rejoice does not mean expunging every male image from the lexicon of our faith. But it does mean that we will employ inclusive language when it is natural to do so; we will affirm the feminine principle within God and rejoice in it; and we will affirm male imagery of God and rejoice in that as well, but with a new consciousness that male imagery does not say all that there is to be said about the nature of God.

Toronto, Ontario.

I Am Pieces

I am daughter, child, learner,
Unknowing, clumsy, inept,
I am the one who can't.

I am teacher, healer, mother,
Remembering, guiding, carrying,
I am the one who answers.

I am volunteer, driver, sorter,
Caring, doing, working,
I am the one who says yes.

I am listener, helper, friend,
Sharing, loving, hearing,
I am the one who cares.

I am fragmented, pulled, twisted,
Turning, whirling, spinning,
I am the one in pieces.

I am ransomed, forgiven, freed,
Growing, learning, becoming,
I am the one God loves.

*Betty Turcott.
Pickering, Ontario.*

COMING EVENTS

Theme: Roots & Wings

Waterloo, Ontario: June 11-13, 1982

Resource Persons: Dr. Dody Donnelly, Pacific School of Religion
Dr. Lois Wilson, Moderator, United Church of Canada

Registrar: Shirley Paul, Box 1090, Kincardine, Ontario NOG 2G0

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Women's Spirit Bonding: A National Ecumenical Feminist Conference.

Grail, Ohio, July 11-17, 1982.

Resource Persons: Rosemary Reuther, Carol Christ, Judith Plaskow, Letha Scanzoni,
Starhawk, Judith Ochshorn, Elizabeth Schussler-Fiorenza and
Carol Coster.

Contact: Janet Kalver, Grailville, Loveland, Ohio 45140.

* * * * *

International Association of Women Ministers -- A Summer Assembly

Camrose, Alberta -- July 19-21, 1982.

Theme: Bonds Across Boundaries -- discussions on the relationship of various
professional church women's organizations and other phases of the women's movement
as well as the needs of women across the world.

Resource Person: Nancy Edwards

Contact: Rev. Mabel Brandow, 215, 4415 Rae Street, Regina, Saskatchewan S4S 3B2.

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Banff Women's Conference

Banff Springs Hotel, Alberta

Dates: November 12-14, 15-17, 1982

Resource Persons: Ruth Evans, Division of Mission in Canada, Toronto, Ontario
Beverly Harrison, Professor in Christian Ethics, Union
Theological Seminary, New York.

Contact: Barb Elliott,
#2 - 1805 Rae Street
Regina, Saskatchewan
S4T 2E3

