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Exchanging God for “No Gods”: A Discussion of Female Language for God

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No aspect of the feminist movement has affected the church's life more basically than has that movement's attempts to change the language used in speaking to or about God. Beginning with the introduction of the first volume of the National Council of Churches' An Inclusive Language Lectionary¹ in 1983, inclusive language has steadily made its way into the Scriptures, prayers, liturgies, hymns, and publications of the mainline churches, largely through the instrumentality of those churches' denominational headquarters and often to the dismay of the laity in the pews.

The argument of the feminists is that women have been oppressed in the church since the second century and that the language of the church has fostered that oppression. For example, by the use of generic terms such as *man* and *mankind*, males have come to be seen as the definition of what it means to be human. And by the use of masculine titles and pronouns for God, maleness has been absolutized and males thereby given the right to rule over females. "Since God is male," Mary Daly says, "the male is God."² Therefore, claims Anne E. Carr, "God as father rules over the world, holy fathers rule over the church, clergy fathers over laity, males over females, husbands over wives and children, man over the created world."³ Such a hierarchical worldview must be abolished, say the feminists, and one way to do that is by changing our language.

There can be no doubt that in many respects the women have a just cause. They have suffered discrimination in the church for centuries. They have been denied leadership roles

and respect for their learning and persons. They have even been labeled by fundamentalist Southern Baptists as the source of sin in the world. They have been denied ordination by the Roman Catholic Church because they do not biologically "resemble Christ." That discrimination continues today, with the Bible misused as its instrument.

There also can be no doubt that such discrimination is a corruption and fundamental denial of the Christian gospel. The Scriptures clearly proclaim that both female and male are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), that husband and wife are to join flesh in a marital union of mutual helpfulness (Gen. 2:18), that the ancient enmity between the sexes and the subordination of women are a result of human sin (Gen. 3), that such sinful enmity and subordination have been overcome by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:28), and that all women and men alike are called to equal discipleship in the service of their risen Lord. The Scriptures further show that our Lord consistently treated women as equals and that the New Testament churches could have women as their leaders. Thus, when one encounters those few instances in the New Testament in which women are made subject to the rule of men, as in 1 Corinthians 14, two of the Pastoral Letters, and the household codes, one must apply the Reformation's principle of letting the Scriptures interpret the Scripture. If that is done, it becomes clear that the subordination of women was historically limited to specific situations within some of the early house churches, and that the gospel of Jesus Christ is a ringing proclamation of freedom under God, for both females and males. For the church to claim or act otherwise

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is a denial of its gospel.

It therefore seems only fair for the feminists in the church to ask that the church's language about *human beings* be changed to include them, so that males no longer define humanity. The new 1990 edition of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible has acceded to that request, and in it, generic English terms have been changed to reflect the meaning of the original texts. For example, John 12:32 now reads, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people [rather than 'men'] to myself."

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There is, however, a great difference between feminism as fairness and feminism as ideology, as Richard John Neuhaus has cogently pointed out,⁴ and it is in relation to language about God that the feminists are most radically ideological. By attempting to change the biblical language used of the deity, the feminists have in reality exchanged the true God for those deities which are "no gods," as Jeremiah would put it (2:11).

The feminist claim is that all language about God is analogical and metaphorical, and that therefore it can be changed at will to overcome the church's patriarchalism and to foster women's liberation. Principally, therefore, the feminists seek to eliminate all masculine terminology used of God, either by supplementing it with feminine terminology or by using neuter or female images for the deity exclusively.

In speaking of God and Christ, some simply use "she" and "her."⁵ For the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, others substitute *Creator*, *Liberator*, and *Comforter*,⁶ and they avoid the excessive use of terms such as *Father*, *King*,⁷ and *Master* by often substituting *Yahweh* or *God* or *Abba*.⁷ In *An Inclusive Language Lectionary*, the Bible's use of *Father* is changed to *Father* (and *Mother*), *Lord* to *Sovereign*, *King* to *Ruler* or *Monarch*, *Son of Man* to *Human One*, *Son of God* to *Child of God*. Rosemary Radford Ruether consistently calls her deity *God/ess*,⁸ while Rita Gross uses *God-She*.⁹ Others apply feminine usage only to the Holy Spirit or avoid the problem altogether by using impersonal terms for God such as *Wisdom*, *Glory*, *Holy One*, *Rock*, *Fire*, and *First and Last*, or neuter terms like *Liberator*, *Maker*, *Defender*, *Friend*, and *Nurturer*. Jesus is described as a male only in his earthly life, while he becomes *Liberator*, *Redeemer*, and *Savior* in his representation of the new humanity.¹⁰

Those who employ such changes in the biblical usage try to justify them by pointing to female imagery for God in the Bible or by claiming that the Catholic cult of Mary furnishes a tradition of female language and imagery in speaking of

the divine. "If we do not mean that God is male when we use masculine pronouns and imagery," asks Rita Gross, "then why should there be any objections to using female imagery and pronouns as well?" She continues, "Female God language compels us to overcome the idolatrous equation of God with androcentric notions of humanity in a way that no other linguistic device can."¹¹

Many things need to be said in reply. First, it is universally recognized by biblical scholars that the God of the Bible has no sexuality. Sexuality is a structure of creation (cf. Gen. 1-2), confined within the limits of the creation (cf. Matt. 22:30), and the God of the Bible is consistently pictured as totally other than all creation. This is what the Bible means when it says that God is "holy"—he is "set apart," totally other than anything he has made. "I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst," he says in Hosea (11:9); "The Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses are flesh, and not spirit" is Isaiah's word (31:3). "To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?" asks the Second Isaiah (40:18). Thus, by insisting on female language for God, the feminists simply continue to emphasize the nonbiblical view that God does indeed have sexuality. In fact, some of them have misused the biblical concept of the *imago dei* to say that God must be female as well as male, since both sexes are made in God's image (Gen. 1:27). That is a total distortion of the biblical understanding of God, who is without sexual characteristics.

Second, as Roland Frye has amply demonstrated,¹² the few instances of feminine imagery for God in the Bible all take the form of a simile and not of a metaphor, and that distinction is crucial. A simile compares one aspect of something to another. For example, in Isaiah 42:14, God will "cry out *like* a woman in travail," but only his *crying out* is being referred to; he is not being identified as a whole with the figure of a woman in childbirth. In metaphors, on the other hand, identity between the subject and the thing compared to it is assumed. God *is* Father, or Jesus *is* the Good Shepherd, or God *is* King. Thus the metaphor "carries a word or phrase far beyond its ordinary lexical meaning so as to provide a fuller and more direct understanding of the subject."¹³ Language is stretched to its limit, beyond ordinary usage, to provide new understanding.

Third, the Bible uses masculine language for God because that is the language with which God has revealed himself. The biblical, Christian faith is a revealed religion. It claims no knowledge of God beyond the knowledge God has given of himself through his words and deeds in the histories of Israel and of Jesus Christ and his church. In fact, it is quite certain that human beings, by searching out God, cannot find him. Unless God reveals himself, he remains unknown to humanity. Unlike every other religion of the world, the Judeo-Christian faith (imitated by Islam) does not start with the phenomena of the world and deduce the nature of God from them; in this respect, the biblical religions are unique in history. Rather, the Judeo-Christian faith itself is the product of God's self-revelation within time and space to a chosen people, and apart from that self-revelation, biblical faith has no language for or experience of the divine. In short, only God can reveal himself.

But the God of the Bible has revealed himself. Contrary to those modern theologies (cf. that of Sallie McFague) which claim that God is the great Unknown and that therefore human beings must invent language for God that can then be changed at will, the God of the Bible has revealed himself in five principal metaphors as King, Father, Judge, Husband, and Master, and finally, decisively, as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we ask "What is the ontological nature of God?" we must reply "God is the Father of Jesus Christ." As Alvin Kimel explains,

God is not just like a father; he is *the* Father. Jesus is not just like a son; he is *the* Son. The divine Fatherhood and Sonship are absolute, transcendent, and correlative.... The relationship between Christ Jesus and his Father, lived out in the conditions of first-century Palestine and eternally established in the resurrection and ascension of our Lord, belongs to the inner life of God. It constitutes the identity of the Almighty Creator . . . "Father" is not a metaphor imported by humanity onto the screen of eternity; it is a name and filial term of address *revealed* by God himself in the person of his Son.... No matter how other groups of human beings may choose to speak to the Deity, the matter is already decided for Christians, decided by God himself. To live in Christ in the triune being of the Godhead is to worship and adore the holy Transcendence whom Jesus knows as his Father.¹⁴

If one believes that Jesus Christ is the Word of God made flesh, the Son of God incarnate in time and space—a belief that feminists such as Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Rosemary Radford Ruether and a host of others would deny—then there is no contradiction that can be made to the particularity of God's self-revelation. God is not just any god, capable of being named according to human fancy. No, God is the one whom Jesus reveals as his Father

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The same particularity obtains in the Old Testament. Once again, God is not to be identified with just any god. For this reason, the central commandment in the Bible, first contained in Deuteronomy 6:4, begins with, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord." That is, the God of Israel is not identical with the diffuse numina known to other peoples but is one particular God who has done particular things in particular times and places. Principally, he is "the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exod. 20:2 and throughout the Old Testament). If Israel asks who God is, the reply is that he is the God of the Exodus. And it is that God of the Exodus, then, whom Jesus also reveals to be his Father (cf. Mark 12:29-30). God defines himself in the Bible, through centuries of acting and speaking in the life of his covenant people, and it is only through that self-revelation, now

handed down to us in the Scriptures, that we have any knowledge of him.

Surely several questions arise, however, and the first is this: Why does God reveal himself primarily in personal terms? If God has no sexuality, if he is Spirit (cf. John 4:24), then why does he not name himself through the media of impersonal metaphorical language? Why are not his primary designations those of Rock, Fire, Living Water, Bread, Way, Door, Refuge, Fortress, and other such metaphors that can be found throughout the Scriptures? Put another way, why does the Bible insist on those awkward anthropomorphisms for God, in which he is described as having hands and feet and mouth like a person, and which are finally brought to their ultimate anthropomorphism in the incarnation of Jesus Christ? Why a personal God when God transcends all human personality?

One answer is that a God named primarily Rock or Way or Door does not demand that we do anything. All of those impersonal metaphors for God in the Bible are encompassed within a principal revelation of God as supremely personal, because the God of the Bible meets us Person to person and asks from us the total commitment of our personalities: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5); "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). God asks of us primarily love in return for his love that was manifested in his dealings with us: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" (Hos. 11:1); "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16). No impersonal designations of God, except they be explained by the Bible's personal names for him, can adequately express that gracious and demanding relationship of love with himself into which God woos and calls us.

More pressing for the feminists, however, is the question of why God reveals himself only in masculine terms. Elaine Pagels is quite correct when she states that "the absence of feminine symbolism of God marks Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in striking contrast to the world's other religious traditions, whether in Egypt, Babylonia, Greece and Rome, or Africa, Polynesia, India, and North America."¹⁵ But why could a personal God not have revealed himself in feminine metaphors instead? God is never called "Mother" in the Bible and is never addressed or thought of as a female deity. That was unique in the ancient Near Eastern world; Israel was surrounded by peoples who worshiped female deities—Asherat and Anat, Nut and Isis, Tiamat and the Queen of Heaven, Demeter and Artemis. And such a masculinizing of the deity is still unique in our world.

The feminist argument is that the names for God in the Bible have been determined by the patriarchal cultures out of which the Bible arose, but that argument founders on the revelation in Jesus Christ, as we have seen. Feminists have a very difficult time with God the Father and God the Son, although some of them hold that the feminine element is introduced by the Holy Spirit, even though the Spirit too proceeds from the Father and from the Son and is one with them. No, the Bible's language for God is masculine, a unique revelation of God in the world.

The basic reason for that designation of God is that the God of the Bible will not let himself be identified with his creation, and therefore human beings are to worship not the creation but the Creator (cf. Rom. 1:25). In the words of the Decalogue, we are not to worship "anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them" (Exod. 20:4-5; Deut. 5:8-9), because the God of the Bible is sharply distinguished from everything that he has made. To be sure, God works in his creation through the instruments of his Word and Spirit; he orders his creation and sustains it; he constantly cares for it; but he is never identified with it. And it is that holiness, that otherness, that transcendence of the Creator, which also distinguishes biblical religion from all others.

In most of the cultures of the world, deity and world are not differentiated. Rather, the divine is bound up with and revealed through the natural world. For example, in ancient Mesopotamia, the gods and goddesses were thought to emanate out of chaotic matter. And indeed, not only the Babylonians but also the Egyptians and Greeks and Romans saw in the manifestations of nature the life and activity of their deities. The expanse of the sky, the heat of the sun, the growth and death of vegetation, the fury of the storm—these were to those ancient peoples not impersonal happenings and objects but cosmic Thous which affected human life and demanded adjustment to them. Nature was alive for primitive peoples (as it still is for many today). Its changes were attributed to divine will, its conflicts to the struggles of opposing gods and goddesses. Its harmony was thought to be the result of the organization of the cosmic, divine state, as in Mesopotamian theology, or its harmony was said to stem from the genealogical relationships of the deities, as in Hesiod's *Theogony*. God and world were seen as one. Deity was believed to be revealed through all persons and things, and was therefore to be met through the phenomena of the natural world. In the worship of the biblical Canaanites, any natural object could be a medium of revelation—a stone pillar, a sacred grove, a stream—just as in the worship of Mesopotamia the heavenly bodies were thought to be deities (cf. King Josiah's destruction of such objects of pagan worship in 2 Kings 23:4-14).

It is precisely the introduction of female language for God that opens the door to such identification of God with the world, however. If God is portrayed in feminine language, the figures of carrying in the womb, of giving birth, and of suckling immediately come into play. For example, feminist Virginia Mollenkott writes of the God of Naomi in the book of Ruth as "the God with Breasts," "the undivided One God who births and breast-feeds the universe."¹⁶ The United Church of Christ's Book of Worship prays, "You have brought us forth from the womb of your being." A feminine goddess has given birth to the world! But if the creation has issued forth from the body of the deity, it shares in deity's substance; deity is in, through, and under all things, and therefore everything is divine. Holding such a worldview, Mollenkott can say that "our milieu" is "divine,"¹⁷ just as Zsuzsanna E. Budapest can go even further and write, "This is what the Goddess symbolizes—the divine within women and all that is female in the universe.... The responsibility

you accept is that you are divine, and that you have power."¹⁸ If God is identified with his creation, we finally make ourselves gods and goddesses—the ultimate and primeval sin, according to Genesis 3 and the rest of the Scriptures.

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But we can never rightly understand ourselves and our place in the universe, the Bible tells us, until we realize that we are not gods and goddesses. Rather, we are creatures, wondrously and lovingly made by a sovereign Creator: "It is he that made us, and not we ourselves" (Ps. 100:3). The Bible will use no language which undermines that confession. It therefore eschews all feminine language for God that might open the door to such error, and it is rigorous in its opposition to every other religion and cultic practice that identifies creation with creator.

The principal fight of Deuteronomy, of the Deuteronomic History (Deuteronomy through 2 Kings), and of the prophets is with Canaanite baalism and with Mesopotamian astral worship, in which God has been identified with his world; the New Testament implicitly endorses the separation of creation and Creator by carefully stating that before there was the creation, there was the Word and the Word was God (John 1:1). Indeed, prophets and psalmists and the New Testament are quite certain that the world may pass away, but God will not pass away, because God and his world are not one (Ps. 46:1-2; 102:25-27; Isa. 51:6; 54:10; Mark 13:31 and parallels).

No passage in Scripture more carefully preserves the understanding of God's otherness from his creation than does Genesis 1, a chapter that is the product of centuries of theological reflection. At first glance, it would seem that the priestly authors of Genesis I share the mythopoeic worldview of Mesopotamia, in which God is identified with his creation, because they borrow some of the language of that Mesopotamian view: God creates by bringing order into the primeval chaos, the great deep or *tehom*, which is the linguistic equivalent of the Babylonian Tiamat, the goddess of chaos. And the earth and the firmament are created from the chaos, as they are in the Babylonian story. But while the priestly writers use the language of their time, they carefully alter and demythologize it. In the Babylonian epic, the gods emanate out of the primeval chaos and therefore share common substance with the creation; in Genesis 1, God is above and beyond creation as its sovereign Lord. In the Babylonian story, the god Marduk must fight with the goddess of chaos, Tiamat; in Genesis, there is only one God, and he speaks to effortlessly bring about the universe. In the Babylonian account, creation takes place in the timeless realm of the divine; in the Bible, it is the beginning of the sacred history. In Babylonian theology, then, nature, which

reflects the life of the divine, gives a cyclical pattern to human history—the cyclical pattern of its continual round of birth and life and death; in the Bible, the pattern for human history is linear, and both human beings and nature are subject to a time different from their own—namely, to God's time, to salvation history, which has a beginning and an end.

God, the biblical writers are saying, is in no way contained in or bound up with or dependent on or revealed through his creation. God creates the world outside of himself, by the instrument of his Word. Between God and his world stands the Word of God (cf. John 1:2), which always addresses the creation as an object of the divine speech (cf. Isa. 1:2; 40:22, 26; Mic. 6:2 et al.). The world does not emanate out of the being of God or contain some part of him within it. He has not implanted divinity within any part of the creation, not even in human beings, and therefore no created thing or person can be claimed to be divine.

**Because God is not bound up with his
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The assurance and meaning that this biblical understanding of the Creator's relation to his creation give to faith, then, are profoundly important. First, because God is not bound up with his creation, that means that heaven and earth may pass away—we may blow the earth off its axis at the push of the nuclear button—but the eternal God is able to take those who love him into an everlasting fellowship with himself that does not pass away (cf. Ps. 102:25-27; Isa. 51:6; Mark 13:31 and parallels). In this nuclear age the person of biblical faith can therefore lead a life not of fear and anxiety but of joy and certain hope in God's eternal salvation (cf. Ps. 46:1-3).

Second, because God is not bound up with nature's cycle but stands above and beyond its spiral and subjects it to the linear time of his purpose (cf. Rom. 8:19-23; Isa. 11:6-9 et al.), the pattern for human life is no longer that of nature's endless round of becoming and passing away but becomes a joyful pilgrimage toward God's goal of his kingdom.

The feminists, who want to make Creator and creation one, should realize that there is no meaning to human life if it is patterned after and subjected to nature's round. As Ecclesiastes puts it, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.... A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains for ever.... What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; and there is nothing new under the sun" (1:2, 4, 9). Such a cyclical understanding of human history was the classical understanding until the time of Darwin, when it was seen that nature not only repeated itself but also evolved in newness. In many philosophies, the cycle of nature therefore came to be viewed as a spiral, to allow for the introduction of novelty. Nevertheless, nature's round remained the pattern for human life. That means, then, that a mother may painstakingly raise her children, who

grow up and raise more children, who in turn grow up and raise their offspring, and each generation passes away in its time, ad infinitum. No goal is given to living. Each generation is born and suffers and dies, and human life does indeed become "a tale told by an idiot . . . signifying nothing."

Realizing that a cyclical understanding of human history results in meaninglessness, every nonbiblical religion and philosophy in the world has tried to escape that emptiness. In India and China, the goal of life is to escape the cycle of history into the timeless realm of Nirvana, a solution which implies that our everyday life has no meaning. In the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, the escape from history is rational, and human beings take refuge from the circle of life by retreating into the realm of pure form. In modern philosophies, such as those of Nietzsche and Spengler, the only alternative is nobly to assert, if finally futilely, individual freedom. In Nietzsche, this leads to suicide, in Spengler to a form of fatalism. But whatever the escape sought, not one of these positions is positive, no one of them holding that the common life we live on this earth in time has any meaning.

Such too is the view of history in some forms of modern existentialism and in that branch of modern drama known as the theater of the absurd. In Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*, for example, no action takes place because the message is that all action is meaningless. Life goes around in a circle and finally means nothing. History is an endless repetition of events, having no goal or purpose.

**Meaninglessness results
from a theology that
identifies God with his creation**

Such meaninglessness results from a theology that identifies God with his creation. And that identification almost automatically comes about when feminine language for God is used. Many feminists have argued that feminine language for God does not necessarily lead to the deity's identification with creation. But feminist writings themselves demonstrate that it does.

We have already seen such a demonstration from the writings of Virginia Mollenkott. It can perhaps most clearly be shown from the works of Rosemary Radford Ruether, who could be called the leading feminist writer in the United States today. Ruether wants to use female language for God, and therefore she names the divine God/ess. But Ruether, like all of the feminist writers, does not want her deity to rule over her: as I said at the beginning, feminists want to get rid of a hierarchical view in which God is their Lord. God for them must be not a Sovereign but a "friend" (Sallie McFague) or a "householder" (Letty Russell) or the power of love-in-relation (Isabel Carter Heyward, Dorothee Solle). Ruether therefore defines her God/ess as the Primal Matrix, as "the great womb within which all things, gods and humans, sky and earth, human and nonhuman beings are

generated"—an image, she rightly says, which survives in the metaphor of the divine as the Ground of Being¹⁹ (cf. Tillich). But this is no mere image or metaphor for Ruether. This God/ess is divine reality: ". . . the empowering Matrix; She, in whom we live and move and have our being.... She comes; She is here."²⁰

For Ruether, then, this God/ess is very much bound up with nature's life, and therefore in her book entitled *Women-Church* Ruether can write liturgies for worshiping groups of females that celebrate the cycles of the moon, the solstices and the seasons, as well as the cycles of menstruation and menopause and other changes in women's lives. We "reappropriate the hallowing of nature and cyclical time of ancient pre-Judeo-Christian traditions,"²¹ she says, just as Sheila Collins, in her work, maintains that "the exclusivity of the linear view of history dissolves.... The cyclical view of history becomes once again a possibility."²² We "reclaim our true relationship with somatic reality, with body and earth," writes Ruether, "and with the Great Goddess that sustains our life in nature."²³ That is clearly a return to the worldview of Canaanite baalistic and Mesopotamian pagan theologies. Indeed, Ruether draws on the language of the latter. To celebrate menstruation, Ruether instructs the female in women-church to descend into a ritual bath, which "is seen as a descent into the primal sea [read 'Tiamat'] from which all things emerged in the original creation."²⁴

The result is that Ruether and all those feminists who want to erase the distinction between God and his creation finally share with the most radical feminists, who have abandoned the Christian church and faith altogether, a view of divinity that is at home in modern witches' covens. Writes Starhawk, a self-proclaimed Wicca worshiper,

There is no dichotomy between spirit and flesh, no split between God-head and the world. The Goddess is manifest in the world; she brings life into being, is Nature, is flesh. Union is not sought outside the world in some heavenly sphere or through dissolution of the self into the void beyond the senses. Spiritual union is found in life, within nature, passion, sensuality—through being fully human, fully one's self.

Our great symbol for the Goddess is the moon, whose three aspects reflect the three stages in women's lives and whose cycles of waxing and waning coincide with women's menstrual cycles....

The Goddess is also earth—Mother Earth, who sustains all growing things, who is the body, our bones and cells. She is air . . . fire . . . water . . . mare, cow, cat, owl, crane, flower, tree, apple, seed, lion, sow, stone, woman. She is found in the world around us, in the cycles and seasons of nature, and in mind, body, spirit, and the emotions within each of us. Thou art Goddess. I am Goddess. All that lives (and all that is, lives), all that serves life, is Goddess.²⁵

Such statements serve as a vivid summary of the end result of a religion in which Creator and creation are undivided.

And if female language for the deity is used, such beliefs are its logical outcome.

When such views are held, meaninglessness haunts human life. Perhaps that meaninglessness can be most poignantly illustrated by Ruether's views of death. There is no eternal life for those of faith in Ruether's female God/ess religion. Rather, the end she envisions for all of us and our communities is that we will simply end up as compost:

In effect [at death], our existence ceases as individuated ego/organism and dissolves back into the cosmic matrix of matter/energy, from which new centers of individuation arise. It is this matrix, rather than our individuated centers of being, that is "everlasting," that subsists underneath the coming to be and passing away of individuated beings and even planetary worlds. Acceptance of death, then, is acceptance of the finitude of our individuated centers of being, but also our identification with the larger matrix as our total self that contains us all.... To the extent to which we have transcended egoism for relation to community, we can also accept death as the final relinquishment of individuated ego into the great matrix of being.²⁶

Such a view finally means that there is no purpose for the creation of each individual human being, and that my life and yours in our communities have no eternal meaning beyond their brief and transitory appearances on this earth.

For feminists...there is no such thing as original sin and the "fall" ...is good, a liberation into knowledge

If God and creation are identified with one another, perhaps most disturbing of all is the feminists' claim to embody the deity within themselves—in other words, to be divine. "I found God in myself and I loved her fiercely," exults Carol Christ:²⁷ that is the logical result of a religion in which the deity is believed to be contained in all things and all persons, and feminists who hold such views then become a law unto themselves. Indeed, for feminists Dorothee Solle and Isabel Carter Heyward, there is no such thing as original sin, and the "fall" of Genesis 3 is good, a liberation into knowledge and action and reliance on one's self.²⁸ "We do not have to sit around all year singing, with Luther, 'Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing,' " writes Solle. No, "we are strong; we can accomplish things."²⁹ According to Solle, God is unnecessary: "To live, we do not need what has repeatedly been called 'God,' a power that intervenes, rescues, judges, and confirms. The most telling argument against our traditional God is not that he no longer exists or that he has drawn back within himself but that we no longer need him."³⁰

God is in us, maintains Solle, as our capacity to love. We are one with God in a mystical relation. We do not serve God; we manifest him:

In the mystical tradition, there is no room for deferring to a higher power, for worshiping alien rule, and for denying our own strength. On the contrary, mystical texts often explicitly criticize the master-servant relationship....

Here, religion is a sense of unity with the whole, a sense of belonging, not of submitting. We do not honor God because of his power over us; we immerse ourselves in him, in his love.... He is, as Meister Eckhart says, the fundament, love, the depths, the sea. Symbols from nature are preferred where our relationship with God is not one of obedience but of unity, where we are not subject to the commands of some remote being that demands sacrifice and the relinquishing of the self, but rather where we are asked to become one with all of life.³¹

And so, for Solle, because God is in us, all we need is love. That is the central idea in the Bible, she maintains:

The tradition has added Christology and ecclesiology to it, the virgin birth, the resurrection and the ascension, the Trinity, original sin, and eternity.... I do not think we can restore this ... house of language. I think we will have to abandon it in the condition it is in and build a new one on this simple foundation: All you need is love.³²

To the contrary, however, in a world where human torture is the rule in most prisons, where a person on a subway platform in New York City can push a woman in front of an oncoming train "just for the hell of it," where little children in a nursery school can be tied up and sexually abused, where whole races can be uprooted or starved to death or burnt up in gas ovens, it must be said that Solle's is a naive understanding indeed, and that we do in fact need a Power greater than human evil—or, for that matter, a Power greater than even the highest human love and good, for it was the best religion and the best law that erected the cross on Golgotha. If there is not a God who is Lord over life, who "intervenes, rescues, judges, and confirms," and who has given his final judgment and won his decisive victory in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, then human evil will always have the last word and there is no hope for this world. The feminists, believing themselves divine, think that by their own power they can restructure society, restore creation, and overcome suffering. But the tortured history of humanity testifies to what human beings do when they think they are a law unto themselves with no responsibility to God, and those feminists who are claiming that God is in them will equally fall victim to human sin.

The God of the Judeo-Christian biblical faith is holy God, the almighty Creator and Lord, totally other than everything and everyone he has made. We therefore cannot know and worship him unless he reveals himself to us. But with a love surpassing human understanding, he has revealed himself to us as the Holy One of Israel, who delivered her out of the house of bondage, and as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In that revelation, now mediated for us through

the Scriptures, he has offered to adopt us as his beloved children (cf. John 1:12; Gal. 4:4-7), to allow us to call him Father, *Abba* (cf. Rom. 8:14-17), and to know him as his Son Jesus Christ knows him. If in trust and obedience we accept that offering of himself to us, he promises to be with us all our lives long, to guide us in the paths of righteousness, to give us joy in the midst of the world's tribulation, to unite us in communities of love and peace with like-minded believers, to send us out to perform tasks that will give meaning to all our lives, and finally, at death, to receive us into his realm of eternal life and good that cannot pass away. For my part, I can imagine no reason ever to reject such a God or to exchange him for those deities of earth that are "no gods." Women suffer discrimination, yes; our world is full of all kinds of evil. But God is holy, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and by faith in him we shall always be more than conquerors, and nothing shall ever separate us from the love he has for us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

¹ *An Inclusive-Language Lectionary*, published for the Cooperative Publication Association by John Knox Press, Atlanta, Pilgrim Press, New York, and Westminster Press, Philadelphia.

² Daly, "The Qualitative Leap Beyond Patriarchal Religion," *Quest* (Women and Spirituality) 1 (1974): 21.

³ Carr, *Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women's Experience* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 51.

⁴ Neuhaus, "The Feminist Faith," *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life* 2 (April 1990): 60.

⁵ See Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), pp. 345, 347.

⁶ Letty M. Russell, *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective--A Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), p. 102.

⁷ Letty M. Russell, "Changing Language and the Church," in *The Liberating Word: A Guide to Non-sexist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 92.

⁸ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983).

⁹ See Gross, "Female God Language in a Jewish Context," in *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, ed. Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), p.173.

¹⁰ Russell, "Changing Language and the Church," p. 93.

¹¹ Gross, "Female God Language in a Jewish Context," pp.170, 171-172.

¹² Frye, "Language for God and Feminist Language: Problems and Principles" (Princeton: Center of Theological Inquiry, 1988).

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁴ Kimel, *A New Language for God? A Critique of Supplemental Liturgical Texts--Prayer Book Studies* 30 (Shaker Heights, Ohio: Episcopalians United, 1990), pp.11-12.

¹⁵ Pagels, "What Became of God the Mother? Conflicting Images of God in Early Christianity," in *Womanspirit Rising*, p.107.

¹⁶ Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Image of God as Female* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), p. 58.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.109.

¹⁸ Budapest, "Self-Blessing Ritual," in *Womanspirit Rising*, pp. 271-272.

¹⁹ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, pp. 48-49.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

²¹ Ruether, *Women-Church: Theology and Practice* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), p.104.

²² Collins, "Reflections on the Meaning of Herstory," in *Womanspirit Rising*, p.70.

²³ Ruether, *Women-Church*, p. 108.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

²⁵ Starhawk, "Witchcraft and Women's Culture," in *Womanspirit Rising*, p. 263.

²⁶ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, pp. 257-58.

²⁷ Christ, 'Why Women Need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological and Political Reflections,' in *Womenspirit Rising*, p. 277.

²⁸ See Solle, *The Strength of the Weak: Towards a Christian Feminist Identity*, trans. Robert and Rita Kimber (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), pp. 126-29; and Heyward, *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation* (New York: University Press of America, 1982), pp. 150-52.

Some Discussion Questions: Where have you seen inclusive God-language used? What theological problems arise when we call God, "mother", "rock"? What assumption is being made when we refer to God in terms that he did not reveal himself with in Scripture? Why is it theologically important that God revealed himself in masculine terms? Does that mean that God is sexually a male? Or that human men are gods? Why not? How should we respond to a woman who was abused by her father or another man and finds it difficult to call God, "Father" or "Lord"?

Other Resources on Inclusive Language:

Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism, edited by Alvin F. Kimel, Jr from which this essay is reprinted, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1992) also includes thoughtful essays by theologians Roland M. Frye, Robert W. Jenson, Thomas F. Torrance, Leslie Zeigler and others.

Battle for the Trinity: The Debate Over Inclusive God-Language by Donald G. Bloesch, (Ann Arbor: Vine Books, 1985)

The Politics of Prayer: Feminist Language and the Worship of God, edited by Helen Hull Hitchcock, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992). This book addresses inclusive human and God-language. It includes essays by

²⁹ *The Strength of the Weak*, p. 158.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 133-34.

answer as we examine it in study. The most basic world view questions are:

1. What is the nature and character of God?
2. What is the nature and character of human beings?
3. How are good and evil defined and understood?
4. What is the nature of the universe?
Peter and Brigitte Berger, Joyce A. Little, Roland Frye, Donald Bloesch and others.

Resources Available from PFFM which critique feminist theology:

ABC's Nightline Program on Re-Imagining, televised May 24, 1994 with guests Susan Cyre and Re-Imagining speaker Rita Brock. (video available for loan)

PBS McNeil/Lehrer Program on Re-Imagining, televised June 17, 1994 including interview with Kari McClellan and others. (video available for loan)

Presbyterians Pro-Life GA Commissioner luncheon with Susan Cyre speaking on Re-Imagining Conference. (video available from PFFM, suggested donation \$20)

TV38 Chicago, "Among Friends" interview with Susan Cyre and Re-Imagining speaker, Mary Hunt. Although the moderator did not remain objective, the tape contains valuable insights into feminist theology. (video available for loan)

Bible Study of the Gospel of Mark Study of 1994-95 PW Bible Study'

by Susan Cyre

The distinctive of studying the Scripture from a world view perspective is that it should affect a Christian's understanding of the nature of the universe. It should yield understanding of the nature of God and how he relates to all people. It should yield understanding of the nature of humans; and the nature of good and evil. And it should contribute to our understanding of the basic doctrines of the Christian faith. The outcome should be a better understanding of the mind and will of God in the full scope of history, as well as in our own time; in the universe as well as in our personal lives; so that Christians can act in ways consistent with the will and intent of God as they relate to every aspect of the culture.

Looking to Scripture to shape our world view requires that we raise certain questions that we look to the Scripture to

A woman pastor contrasts the PW Bible study with Scripture and the Confessions. It contains "Comments" and "Questions for Discussion" which make it appropriate for group discussion. (suggested donation \$2)

We can go on to ask questions of a more specific moral and ethical nature. And we can ask more specific questions about doctrine. We can explore relationships between humans and between groups of humans.

Besides learning what questions to ask of the Scripture, we can benefit from developing good study techniques. Shaping a world view requires more than casual reading. Some general techniques that can be applied to all the books of Scripture are:

of THE GOSPEL OF MARK

1. Develop your observational skills by giving close, deliberate attention to the words, the ideas, the literary forms, and the development of the book. Work on understanding the book as a whole. Grant the author the possibility that he is working toward something. Don't expect each verse, or each passage to have to stand on its own.

2. Develop interpretive skills by learning the meanings of words, by looking for relationships between passages in the book, and by looking for relationships between the book at hand and other books or passages of the Bible.

3. Look for the application to the culture and to your own life as a result of your grasp of the book as a whole. There may be several specific teachings to take from the book, but if you fail to try to understand the book as an integrated whole, you may misunderstand and misapply its individual parts.

We're going to try to model a world view study of the Gospel of Mark by going through this process. We've designed it to help you observe and interpret the book in the hope that it will produce answers to fundamental world view questions.

Put the book in context:

Who wrote it? Who was the audience? When was it written? What is the purpose of the book? What type of literature is it?

Read the entire book. Write a brief outline of the book noting major divisions. Notice how often the word "immediately" is used. Is Mark's gospel a "teaching" book or a "doing" book or a "teaching by doing" book?

Notice how often the word "authority" is used. What is the difference between authority and power? Notice the name Jesus calls himself; the one that Mark, the author, calls him; and the name the disciples use to refer to Jesus. What do these names tell us about how each viewed Jesus and his ministry?

Who are the main characters? Write a thesis sentence for the book.

As we continue, begin to look for and describe teachings and events related to:

Creation - Nature and character of God; worship; relationships; dominion; sovereignty.

Fall - Nature and character of human beings; idolatries; sins

Redemption-(law and grace) - judgment; reproof; forgiveness; repentance, mercy; restoration

CHAPTER 1

(chapter 2 will follow in the next issue)

Observe the Text to understand the author's meaning:

Read 1:1-3. Look up the OT reference, Isaiah 40:1-11. What is this saying about who God is? About his relationship to Israel? About God's word? About Israel's punishment and restoration? Now why did Mark use this reference in his book? What is "the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?" What is Mark saying about Jesus Christ by using this OT reference? Who is Jesus Christ? What is he saying about Israel both in terms of judgment and restoration? What is the relationship of Jesus Christ to Israel-what is his role or work?

Read 1:4-8. Who is Mark saying is the messenger. What is the messenger to do according to the Isaiah and Mark texts? Read 9:11-13. Who is Elijah? Read 1:6, 2 Kings 1:8, Malachi 3:1-6, 4:1-6. Read Acts 13:23-25. What is John the Baptist's role? Who in 1:5 is going out to John? Who was supposed to call the people to repentance? Contrast the dress, education, location of the scribes and Pharisees to John. How do you think the scribes and Pharisees reacted to John's ministry?

Read 1: 9-13. Do you see a relationship between vs 7 "One is coming" and vs 9 "Jesus came"? This is the first time "immediately" is used. Watch how often in Mark it is used. What do we learn about Jesus relationship to the Spirit and the Father here? Notice reference to Spirit in Isaiah 40:13. Read Isaiah 42:1-9; 61:1-3. Calvin speaks of the reason for Jesus baptism saying, "...the reason for Christ's undergoing baptism was to offer His father full obedience, while the particular reason, was to consecrate baptism in His own body, that it might be common between Him and us." Explain this in terms of the Spirit in vs 8 and in vs 10.

An audible voice identifies Jesus, "Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased." See Psalm 2, Mark 1:1, Mark 9:7. Why does God speak these words? What's happening here? How is Jesus being identified through this baptism and the accompanying sights and sounds.

Notice the tense of the verbs in this section. Is Jesus the subject of the verbs or the object? In other words who acts? Do you see this then as a time of preparation? Who impelled Jesus to go into the wilderness? Who is ultimately in authority here? Do you see Satan's control being limited? Is this reminiscent of any other OT book? What is the text saying by referring to wild beasts and Satan?

Read 1:14-15. Notice the phrase again, "Jesus came" as a fulfillment of vs 1:7. Whose message is Jesus preaching? What is the message? What is the response to the message to be? Think about "kingdom of God" for a moment? What does that mean? Who is king of the kingdom? Who are the subjects? What is the geographic area? What does it mean when someone is king? Explain it in terms of authority. Would you say "resistance" is already emerging as a theme? Why?

Read 1:16-20. Of the twelve disciples, who are the ones called here? Read Jeremiah 16:10-21. Why did the disciples “immediately” leave their nets and follow Jesus? Who did they recognize him to be? What is the promise they immediately saw? How is this tied to 1:14-15?

Read 1:21-28. vs 21- Where did Jesus go upon entering Capernaum? This is the first place we are told Jesus begins his ministry and where does he begin it? What day is it? Was Jesus hesitant about going to the synagogue and teaching? How do you think the scribes and Pharisees responded? Why? vs 22- What is the response of the people to Jesus teaching?

vs 23-27 What does Jesus do next? If Jesus teaches with “authority” what does healing the man with an unclean spirit tell us? Do you think it odd that the man with the unclean spirit had taken up residence in the synagogue? Notice in vs 8, 10,12 Mark had spoken about another spirit. Do you see a possible contrast between the Holy Spirit and the unclean spirit? Notice the first one to confess Christ as the “Holy One of God” is an unclean spirit. Calvin suggests this confession is an attempt by the unclean spirits to say that Christ is one of them--to associate the things of Christ with evil. That would explain Christ telling the spirits to be quiet--he didn't appreciate their confession. What in vs 27 is the sign of authority?

vs 28 What is the result of Jesus' teaching and healing? Do you see that the road to the cross is already laid? Explain.

Read 1:29-31. What happens now? Notice “immediately” is used twice in this passage. Why do you think Mark tells us that Peter's mother-in-law “waited on them?” How does this relate to “authority?”

Read 1:32-34. What is the importance of relaying “after the sun had set?” How many people came to Jesus door? Why? Why didn't Jesus allow the demons to speak?

Read 1:35-39. What does prayer tell us about the source of his authority? Why doesn't Jesus stay in Capernaum? Where does he go in the towns? How do you think the scribes felt about that?

Read 1:40-45. What does the leper's request to Jesus show about his understanding of Jesus authority? Notice how often in this section the words “clean” and “cleansed” are used. As well as “immediately.” What is Jesus ministry in terms of casting out “unclean” spirits and “cleansing” the leper? Can you say what Jesus ministry is? Notice that Jesus touches the leper to cleanse him. He also touched Peter's mother-in-law but did not touch the man with the unclean spirit in vs 22-26. Do you think he had to touch the man or was there perhaps another reason that he touched him?

Why did Jesus send the man cleansed of leprosy to the priest? What is Jesus attitude about the Law? Read Lev 14:1-4,30-32 the law Jesus is referring to. What should the response of the priest have been? What is the response of the

people? Where are people coming from to Jesus? Do you see Jesus as a celebrity?

Interpret the Text:

What do we learn in this chapter about who Jesus is? What is his relationship to the OT? to God? What is the effect of his preaching? healing?

What does he have that the scribes do not?

What is the response of the people?

What do we learn is the pivotal point of the clash between the scribes and priests and Jesus?

BIBLE STUDY NOTES

(Compare these notes to your thoughts after you have looked at the passages and answered the questions yourself)

Mark 1:1-3. When an Old Testament passage is quoted in the New Testament, it is not just to recall the specific verses quoted but rather to recall the entire text. If we quoted the short phrase, “Four score and seven years ago”, it would immediately recall to us the entire Gettysburg Address. By referring to Isaiah 40, Mark is telling the gospel of Jesus Christ. Isaiah 40 says, “Here is Your God” and that is Mark's message to his readers--“Here is your God, Jesus Christ.” Jesus Christ according to Isaiah is the fulfillment of prophecy, “the word of our God stands forever.” Jesus comes ruling with might and like a shepherd tending his flock. Jesus will gather the lambs--those Hebrews scattered and punished by the exile for their sins will now be restored.

Mark 1:4-8 The identification with Elijah is made again in chapter 9, but it is established immediately here by showing that John dressed and looked like Elijah. According to Malachi 3-4, Elijah would return before the Messiah. Mark is showing that the prophecy of Malachi has been fulfilled.

According to verse 5, “all the people of Jerusalem” go out to John. What an affront this was to the scribes and Pharisees of Jerusalem to have the people flocking to the wilderness listening to this poorly clothed, uneducated man, when they should have been at the temple listening to the well-dressed, well educated scribes and Pharisees.

Calvin makes an interesting comment on this section, “Repentance is not the cause of the remission of sins...men are told to repent that they may perceive the reconciliation that is offered to them.” The sequence is important. In reformed theology, God does it all. His actions do not depend on us. Our response enables us to perceive his actions.

Mark 1:9-13 Again this is the fulfillment of prophecy that the Spirit of God would come upon the Messiah. While the Spirit comes upon Jesus, God identifies Jesus as his Son in whom he is pleased. This Messiah(the anointed) is King and will rule the nations, “how blessed are all who take refuge in him”(Ps 2:12) God is identifying Jesus as Divine, as Messiah, as King. While there will be opposition to his rule,

the victory is assured, just as the victory over Satan in the wilderness is assured. Jesus goes to the wilderness to confront Satan not impelled by Satan but by the Spirit of God. Although he is tempted, he is surrounded by angels ministering to him.

Mark 1:14-15. The message is a call to repent according to the teachings of the OT. It is the same message the OT prophets preached--turn back to the living, true God and repent. As Presbyterians, we believe there are two covenants, the first began with God's command to Adam, the second covenant began with Adam and Eve's fall and God's promise of salvation.

Westminster Confession on nature of two covenants:

1. The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him, as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.
2. The first covenant made with man was the covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.
3. Man, by his Fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace: wherein he freely offered unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life, his Holy Spirit to make them willing and able to believe.
4. This covenant of grace is frequently set forth in the Scripture by the name of a testament, in reference to the death of Jesus Christ, the testator, and to the everlasting inheritance, with all things belonging to it, therein bequeathed.
5. This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel: under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all fore-signifying Christ to come, which were for that time sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the Old Testament.

6.037-6.041 from our Book of Confessions which together with the Book of Order comprise the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA)

Mark 1:16-20. The OT promise was that restoration for Israel would begin when fishermen were sent to gather the scattered

We are a group of Presbyterian women and men, clergy and laity who are:

Working to restore the strength and integrity of the Presbyterian Church's witness to Jesus Christ as the only Lord and Savior, by helping individual Presbyterians develop a consistent Reformed Christian world view;

Committed to the restoration, in the lives of individual Presbyterians and in the Church, of Reformed theology as taught in Scripture and expressed in the Confessions. To affirm the Christian faith is necessarily to reject all false ideologies. The First Commandment carries both a commitment to the One True Lord God and a rejection of false gods, "I am the Lord your God, ... You people. Now, Jesus calls the fisherman. They followed not because they thought Jesus a charismatic teacher, but because they saw in their call, a fulfillment of the prophecy. Indeed, the kingdom of God was at hand.

Mark 1:21-28. Jesus begins his teaching in the northern part of Israel around the Sea of Galilee and he stays in this area until chapter 10 when he begins traveling toward Jerusalem and the crucifixion. Notice that although we read that Jesus taught, we do not learn of his teaching, instead he teaches about his authority by displaying it. He has authority even over unclean spirits. The people in verse 22 make a comparison between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees that shows the road to the cross is already set. The scribes and Pharisees refuse to recognize Jesus' authority and instead seek to destroy him for his refusal to recognize their authority.

Mark 1:29-31. Jesus has authority to heal. Peter's mother-in-law is so completely restored that she waits on the visitors.

Mark 1:32-34. The people observed the Sabbath according to Jewish tradition by not traveling or carrying anything over a certain weight. It is not until the Sabbath ends at sunset that they come to Jesus and bring the sick.

Mark 1:35-39. Jesus is fully God, fully man but while on earth according to Philippians (2:5-8) "he emptied himself, taking the form of a bondservant, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." His authority while he walked on earth was from God, the Father, to whom he prayed.

Mark 1:40-45. The leper had no question about Jesus authority to heal, the issue was Jesus willingness. Jesus can heal by willing it to be but he chooses to speak and touch, showing his personal response to our brokenness. By sending the man to the priests, Jesus showed his willingness to observe the biblical commands in Leviticus. It is also a witness to the priests. They should have been amazed as the people were at Jesus' authority. #

Susan Cyre is Executive Director of PFFM and candidate for Minister of the Word and Sacrament.

Presbyterians for Faith, Family and Ministry

shalt have no other gods.” To commit to the Lord God and reality as he has defined it, without also rejecting false gods and their world view is to unite the worship of the living Lord with idols;

Committed to discussing the doctrines of Reformed Christian faith and their world view implications by contrasting them with the beliefs of false religions and their distorted world views. Today the primary attack on Christian faith is from the false religion of feminist ideology which includes New Age, pagan, neo-pagan and wiccan teachings;

Convinced that an obedient understanding of family and ministry can only grow out of a faith in Jesus Christ that is based on Scripture and the Confessions and is free of compromise with false ideologies.

News From Aroun

October 12-13, the Ohio Council of Churches had a day long conference with speaker Delores Williams. Union N.Y. Seminary professor Williams told the November, 1993 Re-Imagining participants, “I don’t think we need a theory of atonement at all. .. I don’t think we need folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff.”

Church Women United in Southern California and Southern Nevada are planning a two day rerun of Re-Imagining 1993. Their conference will be February 10-11 with the same topics as Re-Imagining ‘93. The group will Re-Imagine God, Jesus, Scripture, Sexuality and the Church. Presbyterian Women is a supporting member of Church Women United.

Rita Brock, a speaker at Re-Imagining, was the Bible study leader at the Ecumenical Student Gathering in St. Louis, December 28, 1994- January 1, 1995. The PCUSA was a co-sponsor of the event. In her book, Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power, Brock calls the Trinity, “the unholy trinity,” rejects Jesus as the incarnation of God and

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claims the atonement is child abuse. Instead, according to Brock, incarnation takes place in "Christa" communities.

Chung Hyung Kyung, was the keynote speaker at the Disciples of Christ Women's Gathering last June. Chung told the Re-Imagining '93 participants that god was just "life giving energy" which dwelt in trees and the sun. She encouraged participants to make supplication to the trees to receive some of this energy. She told the Disciples women's group she rejects the trinity which she calls the "old boys club" and considers herself a "panentheist," --one who believes god dwells in material objects.

A Re-imagining Community has been formed which hosted 470 women at a follow-up one day conference in Minneapolis, October 29, 1994 with Rita Brock the main speaker. The new community states they receive no denominational funding. Its steering committee, however, includes many of the same people that were responsible for the first Re-Imagining .

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