

Mormon Women's Forum

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Private Spaces, Public Voices

Answering Machine

We will hear
whatever you speak
at this frequency,
they said.

Anything else
you want to say
flies to the wind.

We will help
with anything
on this list,
they said.

Anything else
you need,
you don't need.

We will see
your life between
these boundaries,
they said.

If you trespass them
you will not
be known.
Better that you
see and speak
and solve for us,
they said.

We'll call back
when we're ready
to hear more.

Leave a message.
I'm gone.

Public Themes and Private Expressions

Linda Sillitoe

I appreciate the invitation to participate in this session called "Private Spaces, Public Voices" because it comes at a time when I am working at reconciling and harmonizing my private and public worlds.

No matter what I am writing for public consumption, the private impact is often as great and more difficult to fully express. Although I write all I can into the article, book, or documentary I'm working on, there often seems to be more behind, within, and under the topic that remains impressed—on me—rather than expressed for readers.

My first writings as a child were poems, and poems come from the center of any experience. They are often as natural, intimate, and radical as dreams. Given the nature of this conference and this session, I propose to focus on several public episodes or themes in my writing experience and read the poems I was writing during that time.

The first group of poems seems déjà vu in this setting. In February and March of 1979 I reported for *Utah Holiday* magazine on wards and stakes in Virginia that were lobbying the

"This place, this place": The Private and the Secret, and a Place for Making

Lisa Orme Bickmore

It occurred to me recently that I have dreamed, in every house I've ever lived in, of a room, a small lost room, of my own. I mean literally dreamed—not merely wished for, though I've done that as well, but dreamed in the night of a room, one that I know is there, but which I can't find. When Margaret Toscano asked me to talk about "Private Spaces, Public Voices," I remembered this with a sort of Eureka: for the realization was a crucial bit of information that helps to solve a long-time puzzle I've been engaged in making and interpreting to myself. The puzzle involves the shifting pieces of a life made up of ideologies and ideas, of loved ones who sometimes feel like a very complicated and cruel harness, and above, below, and through it all, the desire to create, to make, to think, to speak, to sing, to cry, to write.

Today, I am going to speak to you in the pieces of a puzzle. I said that I was engaged in both making and interpreting the puzzle of my life, and this is true: I have both deliberately and unwittingly made this life for myself, and other forces are involved as

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Sillitoe, cont.

legislature to oppose the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment in a campaign directed by general authorities in Salt Lake City. The effort was secret, even to the point of laundering funds raised by bishops, and aligned with Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum. Four Virginia women counter-organized, calling themselves "Mormons for ERA," and exposed the Church's effort. In the fall I wrote another article regarding the Church's efforts to reach sisters through speeches and the media and the efforts of Mormon women to reach President Spencer W. Kimball, who had extended the priesthood to black men. By the end of the year, the story had evolved toward Sonia Johnson's excommunication and an anti-ERA lobby that extended into Missouri, Illinois, Florida, and other states.

A year later, I was surprised to find myself working for the *Deseret News*, frequently writing on women's issues. By this time, President Kimball was in fragile health, and the newspaper had mocked up pages to use when he died. One day as they readied those pages, I sat in the newsroom and wrote my own good-bye. He rallied, and I was told I would probably lose my job if I allowed *Sunstone* to publish that poem. I held it until after I left the newspaper.

November's End, 1979

*Five women talking
church and politics
(religious politics)
in a room lit yellow
in a Virginia woods.*

*We laughed at the disaster
that hadn't happened
yet and held our breaths.
Suddenly through the window
a vast current of dark*

*swept in on us, a flood
of event dry as dark air.
I floated out on that tide
and peered back from miles out.
I saw us there, all of us,*

*women in a yellow room,
and me seeing not the future
but us where we were
like dew on a slick leaf
in the murmurous night.*

oh how to be the wind

*oh how to be the wind
blustering dust down chimneys
sailing roofs like paper airplanes
postponing airplanes in fine air
spinning
the world clean the world crazy the
world gone*

*but here we hang by stems
in our navels side by side
here it comes and we wave
like small anonymous hands*

Mormon Women's Forum—An LDS Feminist Quarterly

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an early elegy in lower case

*i pay my respects by saying what's true
in love and anger*

*you served us crumbs, you see, and we hungered
for our own bowls
of bread and milk*

*love your silvery chains, my sisters
we did we do
for they are your redemption*

*oh it is not so simple says my brain
he let sisters too
gowned in white into those clean chambers*

american brothers too are yoked unequally

*but it is too late now for anything
but the oversimplification from my heart*

*in this lush room where we keep prophet ghosts
i want to fold you in
like a child too sleepy to trust in slumber*

but say instead goodbye hopeflicker goodbye

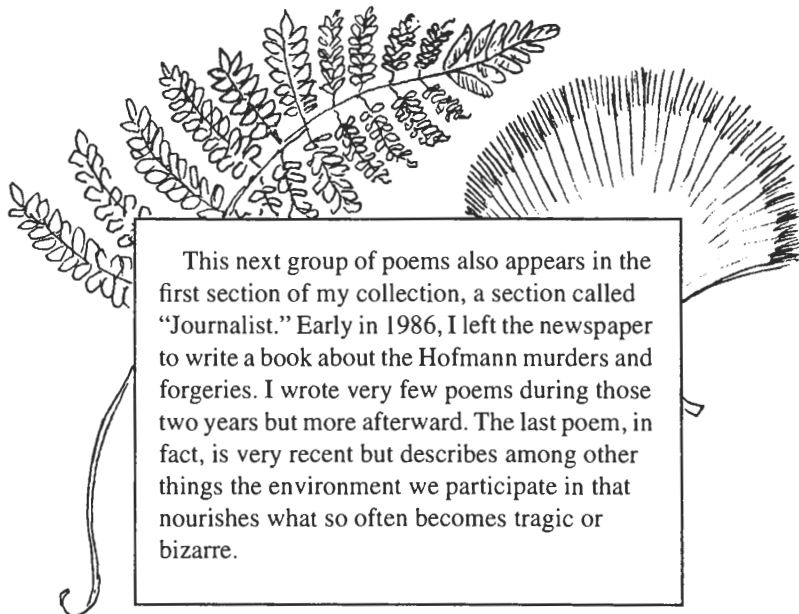
*for my brothers' sake i weep at your death
for my sisters i keep my seat as you pass*

sonnet for spring

*honeysuckle in exhaust, a fine green
beard between walks; spring softens us
again. harder to know the earth as a drum
encased in living skin, not concrete;
harder to forget the beat of boots on skin.
forgetting doesn't mean you don't remember.*

*daily we avoid small obstacles and wait
our turn. we forget who burned, who burns,
who still knows the crunch of a fist on her face
and the unwelcome thrust; we need a newborn jazz
to sing out the forgotten. we meet the boots
on mutual ground and agree we all are barefoot.*

*walking home we smell the honeysuckle, and at
skies' edge we spot the lift of shining wings.*



This next group of poems also appears in the first section of my collection, a section called "Journalist." Early in 1986, I left the newspaper to write a book about the Hofmann murders and forgeries. I wrote very few poems during those two years but more afterward. The last poem, in fact, is very recent but describes among other things the environment we participate in that nourishes what so often becomes tragic or bizarre.

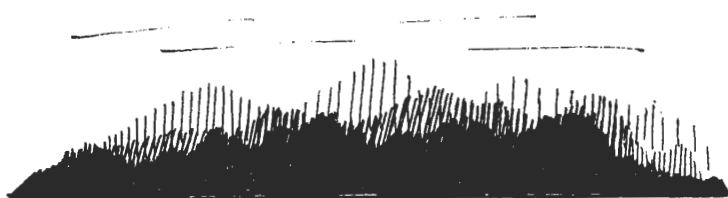
During Recess

*Spring sneaked into town while court convened.
One noon, I walk from my office to my
old neighborhood and find it well-kept.
The ditch I'd hurtle galloping home
from school has been curbed and guttered.*

*Jack's shop is owned and run by Asians now
who mop, exchanging Vietnamese. I buy candy
from the uncrowded shelves and return to work
tracing my old route to junior high, now a shell.
Behind me, my grade school hollers its recess.*

*Listening back, I hear my own voice, my own shoes
on the hopscotch, swiftly recalling how
to ignore the bell until the line forms
then beat the blood in my face to the door
where I assume that Miss Blunt still waits.*

*No one supposes I am walking back to my ugly notes
on a double murder, a naturalist losing spring
to unearth a spider web. Extricated, it must gleam
geometrically, word by word. Sunstreams, continue your
hard green in the surprised leaves; give me, unjustified
what killing cost: more sky, more time.*



Relativity

*One night I dreamed that I had killed a snake
in the presence of people who all understood
why I had to. That was all they understood.*

*For no one observed how the inner form
collected itself and pursued me, intent
on my destruction. Like drivers on the freeway,*

*oblivious, people walked me to tall buildings,
rode the elevator to the wrong floors and obstacles.
Tolerant of my alarm, their minds were elsewhere.*

*But it was coming, the snake that can go anywhere
intent on my destruction. Then I happened upon a room
with fabric on the shelves. The people working there*

*said, these swatches cure ghostsickness. I slipped on
a sleeve that hid my hand, thinking I could turn
the spell to counteract what crept after me.*

*I rushed through the maze to find my writing room
and dusted everything with the snake on my arm, knowing
I must rinse, coil, and hang it fast outside my door.*

*Our kinship tracks me still, as I wake on his birthday:
the anonymous cousin and killer I exposed, the likeness;
and I born on the birthday of one that he destroyed.*

Killer

*Sometime before it became too late,
you should have been brought here
and doused in red and blue
(some green)
until your inky caverns emptied
poison on the red clay
and left you whole.*

*poison to be powdered
like burned bone
under the Navajo sun
then swept on a long tangent
by the dark wind.
nor could you approach
this land unrecognized: here*

*a sane man lives by his heart.
a crazy man lives in his head.*

I call this section of my collection "Journeys in Tandem" because relationships have always been crucial in my development as a person and as a writer. This family space has not been as public as the journalistic space, yet it has housed everything, both nurturing and hindering the individual voice.

"This the first and great commandment:
Thou shalt not be aware. . ."

Alice Miller

Words for Cassandra

*Specifically, leave the nectarines
on the tree, the picket gate closed,
the serpent undisturbed. Don't move,
don't cry out, keep it to yourself.*

*If you describe flung-open gates,
fruit flesh, or unapproved abandon,
we will turn like a chorus
leaving you, I warn, all alone!*

*Even if you dance yelling
before us, we will not hear
your voice become threadbare.
You are free then, to reach*

*a sorry end, grieving us.
No one can spare you that,
for the truth is our truth—
we will not be aware.*

missing persons

*i know where the bodies are buried in my house
and can whistle past
indefinitely before i sift*

*almost at once
the remains of a girl scout at nine
her green uniform folded
more neatly than when it was worn
the sturdy body quite gone*

*a turquoise bib recalls
the docile boy with oatmeal around
the mouth that opened, swallowed
despite sleeping eyes.*

*lost her baby i heard then
in between those i kept
only to find the more they survive
the most i lose them again*

*what do i do now
with this doll dress my lastborn wore ten months*

Charm for a Sick Child

*we will dream now of a cave
with a figure at the entrance.
see the magic seeds she holds*

*to twinkle new stars into your
angry blood. two fingers cross
your wrist, then above your head*

*my hand traces the entrance;
dream beginning and end
as you swelter in bed.*

*remember the godmother
little one.
pockets of glass slippers
and surprise home runs.
your wishes hover here
like candle smoke.*

*the wave not the wand is potent.
and godmother mothergod mother
will bring you seawater, sun*

*and thunder, a fresh start.
what in my bones knit you
within me still weaves magic.*

*sleep now. here is the sign
more ancient than memory.
here is the turn in the tide.*

*how do i greet these ghosts
who haunt the remains of the children*

*the young mother who dressed
each child in red for this photo*

*the weary one who rocks until dawn
the yellowed newspaper girl smiling like a bride*

*under the most dust i find the diary
kept from twelve to sixteen
about boys often as not
keening for them as if nothing mattered but love*

*there is nothing here i can keep or discard
i'm putting it all back
sprinkling dust over the top
and closing the closet door*

as if in the dark the ghosts will rest

To an ESTJ from an INFP
with love

*Your world enters on airwaves,
reportedly, letting you scan
a dozen cities, traumas, forecasts,
and have the day pinned by breakfast.
I dangle in a corner spinning
fiber from my suspected core
to transform the door we agreed on.
If you blunder through the web
I have a choice: I can show you
the shards (you'll feel bad,
the web may come easier tomorrow)
or not.*

*I pounce on the crumbs you toss
fondly into the corners and I swell
with more fiber. Spin, you say, spin!
How we've relied on knowing I can
enthral you, twirling spirals
up from your feet, securing your hands,
leaving only your eyes to listen.
But a distraction—what happened
to the cable tv guide?—and you
burst your bonds without noticing.
Threads become dust, an archivist's foe.
I can always do it again.*

*Under the same moon, we dream
one another's nightmare:
you stride among shelves in area
sufficient to place every thing
in each edition and sequence,
astonishing as so much proof;
I dream a room where I spin
myself empty, and empty again,
until intricate threads connect
every corner and edge, explode
in their own sticky joy,
and thrum in the ineffable breeze.*

As a journalist, I became a student of minority cultures in Utah, particularly Native American tribes and communities. What began as a fascinating topic has become a revolution in my life. The last section in my collection of poems is called "Journeys Between" and includes poems that move between worlds—between American and Native American cultures, between sleeping and waking, between the physical and the spiritual realities.

Dearly Oblivious

*People of my dreams, your interest
remains mild when I tell why
we must care for your child
in a mess, or indicate the menace
no one else fears; or protest
the new edict that segregates
families by how Indian they appear.*

*You say, that's interesting,
but this is how things are.
Why am I always herding orphans?
This baby inside makes
my back ache.
Your doctor tells me to bend
backward and spiderwalk until
that child can be born.
When I say that's ridiculous,
you remind me how things are.*

*When I can't breathe, can't find air,
your interest is mild. When I bleed
the baby (too formed to lose now!)
no one else panics. How things are.
When I show how and why to hover,
you smile politely and keep
dreaming a landlocked world.*

*You all understand one another,
yet I spend myself trying.
Why don't I write my babies
into the air before they die?*

Journey Poem III

*This time the eagle came to me.
Not to us, drawn by the vortex
of our talk, nor to you, planning
the ceremony; but to me alone driving
just beyond the roadblock men had set
to control all traffic. Later recalling
how this time the eagle came to me,*

*it mattered more, driving home early,
emptyhanded beside aspen with new hats
lit by a high sun in a brindled blue sky.
Though women have forgotten how to plot
what men still fear, integrity demands
that I reject what rejects my woman's core.
Yet this time the eagle came to me,*

*driving toward a ceremony behind a roadblock.
It rose from the fields as I approached,
paused before my windshield like a mirror, swept
to the other side, turning slowly as I turned.
This happened before—the vision and the roadblock—
except that second look. As if delays need not end
the journey, this time the eagle came to me.*

October Shoot

*we stopped north of the reservation
to tape a roadside inferno, not ours.
afterward, breakdowns pursued the van—
a pack of rattle-mouth skinwalkers.*

*running hard and late all day, we walked
one night, awake with stars flashing
crystal and garnet, a rainbow round the moon
above stone sentries, breathing dark.*

*outside a female hogan—a navel in field
and sky—as foreigners we awaited passage.
inside its weave, the medicine man talked us
from our world into his and staked us there*

*withholding unearned vision, saying come back.
oh, we left tracks everywhere, like leaf and lizard
on sandstone, our every wish indelible and known,
our cameras full, our plans and maps windlost.*

Journey Poem IV

*“With any separation, there is pain.”
Clifford Duncan, Ute healer*

*Only the clouds cast shadows in this land,
and so clouds come, soothing the stones, leaning
toward birds and rabbits crouched under the cedar.*

*I see that now. I understand how clouds may be
directed; have witnessed an old short woman
plead and wail for her people, raising a wind*

*that wraps the crowd in dust like a rough shawl.
Before her prayer ends, the wind is gone.
I've seen eagle feathers die and live again.*

*If with new eyes, is seeing a birth or death?
for as every thing connects, the fissures race.
The rip is killing me as I am born.*

I'll end with:

Introductions

*When you were small,
someone told you the stars
were little people twinkling.
You've known them all your life.*

*When I was small,
someone told me that
the little people twinkling
were fiery balls too vast to know.*

*Tonight where the sky is whole,
mesa to mesa, no clouds, no lights
but theirs, the little people pipe
their own melodies around the moon.*



Linda Sillitoe and Lisa Orme Bickmore gave the presentations printed in this issue of *MWF Quarterly* at the 1993 Counterpoint Conference, in a session chaired by RevaBeth L. Russell. Some of Sillitoe's poems appear in her collection *Crazy for Living* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993).



Book Review



The Sanctity of Dissent

Paul Toscano (Salt Lake City:
Signature Books, 1994)

Reviewed by Barbara Bishop

The Sanctity of Dissent consists of a series of essays Paul Toscano has written about his relationship to Mormonism. From the first essay, given at a BYU Honors Banquet in 1979, to the last, written in late 1993, these responses express Toscano's attempts to plumb the depths of the theological tradition he joined in 1963 and was excommunicated from in 1993. Some will find that his explorations illuminate that which is most spiritually and intellectually compelling in Mormonism. Some will find his ideas increasingly divergent from the direction the modern church seems to be heading. My interest in this book stems from the many years I have listened to its author express opinions about theology, spirituality, feminism, church government and authority that I find appealing and distinctive.

At their best, the essays display a boldness and honesty, coupled with the self-awareness and earnestness of their author. Writing always about a religion he obviously cares for deeply, Toscano takes seriously its doctrines, temple covenants and the possibilities its theology holds for further growth and expansion. In fact, in his essays, "Beyond Tyranny, Beyond Arrogance," "Liberty and Justice for All," and "The Call of Mormon Feminism," Toscano takes upon himself the task of launching us into future theological potentiality, while maintaining a belief central to Christianity, the atonement's saving grace for all imperfect beings.

I have always admired Toscano's dauntless courage in re-examining accepted ideological and historical "truths." For example, Toscano writes that plural marriage may have had a "spiritual meaning" for those who first

introduced it to the church (33). This spiritual dimension currently eludes our understanding, as is indeed the case for many other beliefs and disturbing historical facts. An underlying assumption in these essays is that a consideration of the spiritual can provide illumination on most if not all matters. That "the kingdom of God is within" Toscano demonstrates through an exploration of the spiritual world "that is co-extensive with the natural" (110). His mysticism is presented without sentimentality or embarrassment. Here is a thinker who explores ideas thoroughly, who introduces us to their complexity and paradoxicality, but who nevertheless maintains a sense of what he does not know, of the mystery and ineffable. His belief that "the way to the spirit world is not upward, but inward" informs his feminism as well. It is not that Toscano dismisses political equality for the sexes. It is simply that for this author everything—all issues, all religious beliefs, indeed all of life—is spiritual. Implied and stated is that our internal beliefs and spiritual states of being shape the outward political realities against which we often struggle.

Toscano's unapologetic mysticism intrigues me. I appreciate his careful descriptions of how his beliefs have changed over time. As he chronicles his "paradigm shifts" with good-humored anecdotes and speculative assertions, we see the possibilities enlarge before us. "For me," writes Toscano, "there is but one true way of salvation but many true ways of worship. I believe in the worship of Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and mystics of the East and the West. I have worshipped with many of them and have been edified" (34). As Toscano expresses in these essays, I have often wished for wider acceptance of the notion that "none of our religions has the corner on the truth." And that "we must get truth where we can" (35). Toscano's call for balance between order and liberty, his clear sense in the sanctity of individuals and his interpretation of Mormon feminism as a "spiritual revitalization" strike me as ideas which deserve further attention.

In recent years Christian mysticism has enjoyed wider acclaim, in part because of increased interest in Eastern religions. Toscano deserves credit for calling attention to Mormonism's own magical,

mystical origins, a fact this author celebrates without hesitation.

"Worship," suggests Toscano, "is contact with the divine" (97). In similar language evoking grace, personal revelation and prayer, Toscano compels us towards a revitalization of our deeply mystical and spiritual roots. Ironically, Toscano can no longer participate in the rituals he invokes so provocatively and poignantly.

When Toscano confesses his own struggles with arrogance, rigidity and tyranny, and when he includes personal experiences that illuminate, these essays contain an energy that is irresistible. Unfortunately, the tone of the essays becomes increasingly strident; the very lapses that he faults church leaders for in "A Plea" become Toscano's own. His sentence structure turns increasingly imperious, dogmatic and rigid. In the later essays, and especially in the one for which he was excommunicated, he wags an accusatory finger and states, in language that does not admit for the possibility of error or argument, "The Truth." As a reader, I resist such dogmatism. I start counting the "musts" and "shoulds"—I counted eleven on one page. Such a vitriolic tone doesn't invite dialogue, discussion or connection between reader and writer. Missing in the latter essays is humility. Toscano seems to relish a good fight, and while I admire his willingness to confront, I want to distance myself from such bitterness.

I think Toscano will continue to have important ideas for the Mormon community. I'm sorry he was excommunicated. Yet I question his assertion in the "Prologue" that his exile status was inevitable from the beginning. I wait for new ideas from this author, coupled with personal experiences of grace and couched in a less-strident tone.

Finally I hope that, contrary to his assertion in the last essay that there is "little love... among the Latter-day Saints," (177) this author will find reservoirs of love, first in himself and then in those surrounding him.



Lisa Orme Bickmore, cont. from page 1:

well, including my upbringing in an LDS family and social milieu. I will be reading to you fragments of my thinking and writing, including excerpts from my journal and poems that I've written. Perhaps some fragments will speak to you; perhaps these pieces of writing will speak their own small bits of the truth, the stubborn and complicated truth.

Journal: "And it's absolutely true that I cannot do any work here. There's no space that's mine. I feel out of place in our room. It's not mine. The laundry room is mine. Maybe. I wanted to work on that poem yesterday. But no."

Journal: "When Wendy asked what I'd do if I won a million dollars, and unhesitatingly, before the trust fund for the kids, college, before paying off debts, even before a good piano, I said I'd buy a little house to be all my own."

Journal: "I am dying to ask him, to ask him what does a life of poetry mean? How does he have his solitude? How does he make an artist's aloneness? I know, because he is a man, because he is a "great poet," he can have the solitude . . . but when he was young—how then? I want to write poems that remake the world. I want to write poems that break lives, that trouble the waters, that speak lustrous words. Worlds of words; and I do not covet the domestic as my subject anymore. My heart wants to rove. My heart wants to wander; and I'm being asked to bind it here."

Journal: "In *Tous les matins du monde*, art has to be apart from the house. It has to be solitary. It has to summon up the dead. It has to make the dead sigh to listen, to charm them, entrance them from beyond . . ."

Elegy for a Life

*Just a single room, a small one, in the late afternoons of January,
Or the mornings of September; and an old window that may
Or may not open anymore, it is so old, and the old glass thick
And wavering, in square panes; and that light drifting in, slow
As a brittle leaf on a sheer lift of air, and shot with atoms of gold,
Air and light indistinguishable, so that each breath brightens;
And all is still there, and silent, and lonely, and companionable;
The corners hold the private intoxications, the wine of love and
words,
The rustle of old songs, an odor of rose petals. I will live there
No longer. At the top of the stair, I close the door and turn away.
I've locked it with the one key left, and tied it to a transparent
Chain, and wear it always, or until I lose it, around my neck,
Between my breasts. The address of the room I have written
In a book, and tied it up with fine twine, in an unsolvable knot.*

At the Passing of Generations

Sudden cold settles in the valley;
I have brought pears
To ripen on the low table,
attended by the bees droning
In and out of the room.

The cold escorts in waves of migration,
the birds and insects
Who know when to stay and what signs
decree leaving; judging
The nows, the laters of flight.

A good old man is dying in the north,
leaving as gradually
As the frost lingering longer on the
orchard grass in the mornings,
The flesh articulating the bones.
Does the same cry hum in his
leathery throat as in mine,
Rattling the bars of the body:
Let me go Let me go Let me . . .
Not daring, himself, to leave?

Every day for the past year, I have thought of quitting
This place, our life. At night, even in the cold, I like
To keep the windows open.

The whispers that insinuate themselves through the screen,
Into my ears, under my pillow, say, Oh Lisa, Lisa,
If you'd been our girl
Your name would unlock your own inheritance, oh splendid
But Lisa, Lena, Linda, you are not our girl anymore
Take your pen, your notebook

Your useless words like cheap beads on a breaking string,
We'll not see you again soon—goodbye, goodbye—much later.
With these blank pages,

I am down by some trees at a dank river. I wait, like winter,
For something, for the freeing word. That word, I think, is
Lodgepole. Or fir. I walk

Through the unfamiliar trees, the pale voices of the leaves,
The soft names they name; hearing my own changing syllables,
An exodus of sounds.

The Door

Journal: "Last night and tonight, I felt desperate, wildly claustrophobic, sorrowing, pity, pain, hope. I wept for how powerless I sometimes feel. I need to stop hedging my bets, seize the power I need to keep going, let the chips fall where they may. Does this mean that I have to stop occulting my power? Keeping my own counsel has been a source of personal power. I have missed, with sharp immediate pain, that wild energy that galvanized me and made thinking about leaving possible. It still seems like the grandest thought, the largest and most freeing action, and now, the least possible. I love the room of the thought and visit it as often as I can, don't want to forbid myself that room, those visits."

Journal: "Must find my way back to this place, this writing. Must find my . . . self. Must find it. Mustn't forget."

What Love Is

Revisiting the site of late summer,
The park in the city, and the aviary,
Now silenced by a hard winter; if
The lively idea of rescue didn't feel
Absurd, now, and still necessary . . .

I am parked there, by the banks of snow
That cover those late summer grasses,
And those of early autumn as well,
With the overnight slipping down
Of leaves, murmuring, this place, this place.

I drive past the park on my way
To hours and appointments, and stop
In the coffee house for a dark cup

That sees me through such bitter deprivations,
The useless longings that constitute
A memory. It is more than enough,

And there will still be faint tunes,
Flickering in and out of hearing
Like candies moved upon by some unnamed breath,

Speaking what is, beyond time,
Through detachments and the fatal link,
The unbreakable moment: living through us,

The bridge, the burning white moon overhead,
And beneath, the water eddying, going.

In all the nights' dreams it swings on its hinges
And taunts me, the nick it makes in what used to be
Unmarred space, letting in that urgent field.

In the field outside the door stands a tree, a honey locust
For the sweetness of its name; and I am sitting
In my grandmother's chair, my hands busy

Mending the emptiness that I lift and let fall
With the silver hook. In the chair my sewing hands
Have withered and are small; but in the tree

Nests a bird whose song is all Wake up, recall,
And my mind is large with memory—no room
For any other thought but of the one

Who once seized my hands in the dark field, who swung
Me in a great arc, the unexpected dance in the glass
Night, the shattering field—oh, breakable me,

Me, who once could take the fragile sentences
And sing them back to their strength; for whom he
Breathed upon ashes, for whom he put his hands

Into fire and kindled a failing flame; whose fiery lips
Grazed mine and breathed the honey words
back to my tongue:
Saying, I know you, I know you, the one who went

Straight to the tree and never left it. So why, now,
Must I sit in this old chair as if my intent were
To put down roots myself, to never move again?

Journal:
"burning jasmine incense

music
meditation
prayer
rain on my skin
letting light soak into every part of my body
natural meditations—meditations of the natural world
watching the smoke of the incense stick, a 'column of
ash and smoke'"

Journal: "What I must do to summon up the gods/the muse(s) to
speak to and through me: I soak myself in the places of memory,
I drink the cup, I breathe the smoky air, I recite the incantation . .
. So it's a ceremony, so I find out it's a ceremony and I've been the
unwitting celebrant . . . well, so, now gather your wits and enter
the place, the portal, the threshold: open the door, open the dark
door, go in, go in, go in."

What Have You to Confide to Me?

I am at the basin,
My hands and wrists wet from washing.
Before you unexpectedly came,
I stripped to the waist, to wash my
hands and arms,
My shoulders and neck and breast,
at the end of the day,
Washing and preparing for sleep.

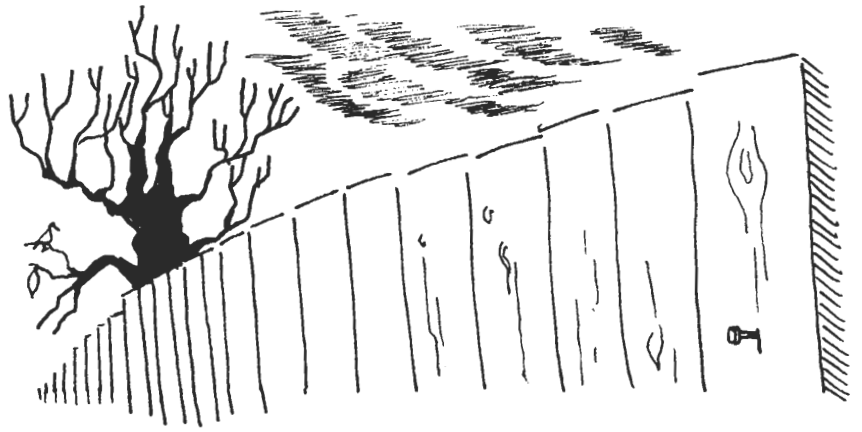
And then you stand near me,
My untranslatable, the momentary
voice that walks with me,
Companionably, unpredictably along.

You meet me on the stairs when I am
alone, and take my hand;
You meet me where the stairs ascend,
in the city in November,
Remind me of the one good thing.

Along the sprawling fence the jays
roost and then-disappear,
Kiting away and diving beyond the
trees, the far branches.

I am the one
Who finishes supper soonest,
Who sits with you at the porch
where no one sees you,
Who brings you the bread and cheese,
and the pint of dark ale, and a twist
of tobacco for the pipe;
Who watches with you the stars
raking the sky,
Who knows the obscure constellations.

I have known you and
waited for you so long, so long
I thought I had missed you.
I know you stay only a moment longer,
here with me at the basin.
I lift my eyes to the glass, to see us,
the two each of us
In the one face, my face.
As you promised: my brother, my son,
father, my listener,
You speaker and shadow
of every lively word,
I wait for you.



Journal: "Cornelius Edy: Nothing is safe from the dance of ideas."

Journal: "... (remember the key he had to the hidden room? the room that needed to be excavated?)"

Journal: "I have the most miraculous thing here today—a quiet house in springtime. I'm sitting at my kitchen table, having a cup of tea, writing; looking out the glass doors (opened) at the field, the further mountains. If I can have this . . . well, if I can, then it's bearable."

Hymn

I have said that I would linger years in stifling attic rooms
With a pen in my hand and dingy paper in readiness
For your voice to speak itself through my lips

But instead I have not waited at all, you've not
Pouted at my unworthiness or the shambling wreck
Of this room, my life. And in the place of all sullenness

You have brought me abundance, a splendor of gifts,
And have left the window open so that cool autumn air
Pours perpetually in, stirring the still atoms

Of this dwelling; and you have woken me in the night,
With murmured airs praising my name which none other may hear,
And have pressed yourself on me, over me, your hair falling,

The dark star of its fall in the full moonlit sky;
And have shown me the road to the river, and then to the sea;
And have urged me on to the door so that I will depart

Into the air which stings like wine in the throat.
I have found cold apples heaped on our bed and have felt
Your hand on my skin. I have not needed to court you, because

You are in love with me, with my words and voice,
And when I have wept to submit to the harsher gods, you
Have sung me back to you in holy words, your ravishing hymn.

There Are Mountains

*In the darkness the horizon, beyond which
Are mountains, is flat, and beyond that appears
A glowing light, as if from a city just
Farther on, after the sinking of the plain.
To see this city, even to imagine it,*

*Stand outside a large window, one that might open
If the weather were not so terribly,
Bitterly cold, and if the snow did not shine
As lustrous as grounded light. In the sun
To come, the snow will settle, grainy, dust-laced . . .*

*But here, at the day's even hours, the field,
Like flight over moving water, gleams,
Itself a whole whiteness. From beyond the field,
From the unseen city beyond which are the mountains,
Comes a young woman, home from the universe.*

*She travels on a night bus; the inner lights
Are small and radiant, luminous
In the dark envelope. She comes from the city
Beyond the plain, a city with no addresses,
No boxes to receive the unsent letters*

*On heavy paper in fading ink. Here,
The place toward which she travels, is home, and
There is an unlit Christmas tree in the room
Farthest from the window. On its first night
It blazed in every pane. It looms tonight,*

*Its last night, a solemn dry shape. This is home,
If there ever had been a home, before
The endless rebounding of travel. As
The bus travels through the long night, the woman
Sleeps, her dark head resting, dreaming, on*

*The window. She dreams of arms, of an embrace,
Of her mother, her sisters, her lover.
She travels over mountains, through mountains,
Under them; in her ear the travelers tune
Sings, in praise of the cities manifest*

*Only in the spill of their lights into the sky,
In praise of their namelessness . . . and the refrain
Is the litany of the names for the home
She'll never have, as she has never had,
Nor any of the women before her, beyond her.*

▲ Ups & Downs ▼

(These stories are based on reports from the Associated Press.)

▲ A recently released study in Great Britain showed that girls are outperforming boys even in such traditionally male fields as technology, science, and math.

Researchers indicated that this trend isn't really all that new: for years, statisticians had been manipulating test scores to make it appear as though boys were outperforming girls in all non-verbal areas. However, "based on raw scores," said one researcher, "girls consistently blew boys right out of the water."

Women have been "trickling up" into positions of greater responsibility and leadership in British politics and industry over the past two or more decades.

▼ More than 30% of China's women are illiterate, with fewer girls going to school than boys because of traditional prejudices. Ninety percent of all Chinese illiterates live in the rural western provinces, where girls account for more than two-thirds of all student-age children absent from school. Only 1.1% of Chinese women are college graduates.

▼ Unemployment among Japanese women rose last year for the first time in 18 years, thanks to an economic downturn that eliminated roughly 90,000 service-sector and secretarial jobs.

Only 6.8% of Japan's parliament is female (the incoming U.S. Congress is 10% female), and there are no female prefect governors. While entry-level wages for Japanese women are 92% that of men's, by the time women reach their early 50s, they earn only half of what men earn.

▼▲ The prime minister of Sweden expressed astonishment at the lack of female representation in the European Union, saying that he feared the EU would be viewed as a "men's club." Although Sweden voted to join the EU by a narrow margin, many Swedish women opposed entry, fearing that their legal rights and welfare benefits would be endangered. Five countries have since appointed women as EU commissioners.

▼ In Jordan, 23 reported murders during 1994 were attributed to the practice of "honor killings," in which "family honor" was valued more highly than a woman's life. Also reported were hundreds of cases of abuse, beatings and marriages forced on Jordanian women.

Neanderthal Watch

Stating that prohibiting a woman from moving to Oregon with her three children on the grounds that her children would not be raised "in a proper Mormon environment" was "purely speculative," the Utah Court of Appeals overturned Judge David S. Young's ruling that a divorced Utah woman had to live in Summit County in order to retain custody of her three children. Young completely disregarded the fact that the mother had faithfully taken her children to church for years and had stated her intention of continuing to do so.

Young's ruling had drawn the ire of women's rights group throughout the state. Young has come under scrutiny for his anti-woman rulings and attitudes.

The Interfaith Search for the Divine Feminine

by Carol Lynn Pearson

A year or so ago you may have smiled, as I did, at a story in the newspaper under the heading, “All is forgiven: Galileo was right.” The first lines read:

It’s official: The Earth revolves around the sun, even for the Vatican.

The Roman Catholic Church has admitted to erring these past 359 years in formally condemning Galileo Galilei for entertaining scientific truths it long denounced as against-the-Scriptures heresy.

We further learn that thirteen years after he appointed it, a commission of historical, scientific and theological inquiry brought the Pope a “not guilty” finding for Galileo, who at age sixty-nine in 1633, was forced to repent by the Roman Inquisition and spent the last years of his life under house arrest. His sin had been challenging the biblical vision of the earth as the center of the universe, asserting instead that the earth makes an annual journey around the sun.

I tell this story today because it is a fine example of a paradigm shift, one that in its day was condemned, but that we see now brought us closer to truth.

I wish to place my subject today, “The Interfaith Search for the Divine Feminine,” in a similar context. I believe it to be a paradigm shift of the most profound magnitude, one that will surely bring us closer to truth and one that will affect us far more deeply than the one that involved Galileo, because the way we see ourselves and the way we view each other is much more vital than the way we view the planets.

We have for the last five thousand years viewed maleness as the center of the universe, with femaleness revolving around it in a subordinate or auxiliary position. The shift that has been occurring in the last couple of centuries and particularly the last couple of

decades is creaking into place an idea that seems outrageous to some—the idea that femaleness is as central as maleness, that the one does not revolve around the other. This shift is happening as an absolute historical necessity; and just as it affects the way we look at the face in the mirror, the face across the breakfast table, the faces on the train and on the television, so it affects the way we look at the face of God.

And the way we look at the face of God affects the way we look at one another, which is finally why we must look again at the face of God. Because, as Catholic theologian Mary Daly said, “If God is male, the male is god.” Of course. And changing the way we view God will change the way we look at and behave toward one another, which is finally the most compelling justification for the search.

It is happening. Millions of women and men in all parts of the world are searching for—and in their own way finding—the female face of God. And, given the leisurely pace of historical progress, I find the speed at which this shift is happening astonishing.

Just over twenty years ago my friend Jan Tyler and I—both of us starving for validation of female spirituality—made an appointment with BYU archeologist Wilfred Griggs because we had heard a rumor that in his work with the Dead Sea Scrolls there was a mention, a hint that could be interpreted as referring to the Heavenly Mother, and indeed there was. What a difference two decades can make. Today there is an avalanche of excellent books and articles that approach the subject from every angle—history, psychology, archeology, scripture, personal experience. (See *When God Was a Woman, The Chalice and the Blade, The Language of the Goddess, The Hebrew Goddess, The Great Cosmic Mother, The Goddess Within, In Her Many Names, The Return of the Goddess, The Goddess Changes, The Feminine Face of God.*)

I believe that there are those who feel—who hope—that the interest, even passion, that a large number of Mormon women and men are showing in the subject of the Heavenly Mother is just a blip on an ongoing patriarchal landscape.

The contribution I would like to make to this conference today is to assure everyone present that this phenomenon is not a blip. It is a paradigm shift. It is universal and it is permanent. It is far from complete but it is irreversible. And all of this under a sun that was always the center of the universe, no matter what the Pope said.

The book *Megatrends for Women* gives some interesting glimpses into what women will be up to in the next number of years. A whole chapter is devoted to the Goddess and another is titled, “Women and Religion: To Hell with Sexism.” We learn that in some American seminaries there are significantly more women than men preparing for the ministry. And we further learn:

Central to women’s spiritual quest is outright rejection of the notion that God is somehow male. . . . the collective memory of the Goddess is reawakening as millions of women acknowledge their power . . . and channel sweat and creativity into transforming the world.

While informed by the academic, the observations that I would like to share with you today are more personal. You can go to the bookstore or the library and read the same literature that I can. But what you cannot do—and how I wish you could—is to experience first-hand what I have in the last three and a half years as I have presented my play, *Mother Wove the Morning*, to well over two hundred audiences in this country and abroad. The positive response the play has received punctuates in my mind the depth and breadth of the interfaith search for the divine feminine. Some religions are addressing the subject with enthusiasm. Some are addressing it with caution. Some are addressing it with great reluctance and with fear. No religion is not addressing it.

The following stories are illustrative. Let me speak first of the Catholics.

One of the first performances I gave was on the UC Berkeley Campus, sponsored by the Catholic student organization at Newman Hall. This audience clearly caught every nuance in

the script—laughing at the very mention of Tertullian. After the performance, I visited with the audience. A young man said to me in italics, “*Do you know how important this is? Do you really have any idea how important all this is?*”

In Chicago I received a card that said:

Dear Carol:

...I am a Catholic priest ...Last night I saw you perform “Mother Wove the Morning” and I left at the end without shaking your hand. I don’t know what I was afraid of, but I realized this morning what a gift you have given me, and I am ashamed of myself for not telling you personally and publicly. ...Perhaps I was afraid because of the guilt that was stirred up as I remembered how I have treated “Mother.” ...For the first time it “came home” to me just how much we have lost by banishing “Mother.” ...I wish that the Catholic bishops could see your play next fall at their annual meeting ...May Mother and Father bless you!

Also in Chicago I performed the play for one thousand girls at Mother Macaulay, which, I was told, is the largest private school for girls in the world. As several of the faculty members drove me to where I was staying, one of them said, “I love my church, but I am determined to help make some important changes in my church.”

To that I replied, “Tell me, if you took patriarchy out of the Catholic Church, could you still have the Catholic Church?”

“Oh,” she said with eyes shining, “then the church could be truly Catholic!”

At a breakfast at Notre Dame University, where I was invited to perform my play, a young man offered a blessing on the food directed to “Our Father and Mother.” And in my own Oakland Stake Center, at an interfaith commemoration of Martin Luther King Day, the Catholic priest who gave the main address spoke of God our Father and Mother.

This, of course, does not mean that in Rome the Pope visions God in terms as

much female as male. But the Pope does vision the sun as the center of the solar system, which surely is a good omen. In the meantime there is foment among the Catholics on feminist theological issues, producing the stories I have just told you and producing as well the story I read in the newspaper of Matthew Fox, a radical Oakland theologian, being expelled from the Dominican order for a variety of offenses—one of which was his feminism, including his work to bring the feminine into the image of God. Prior to being expelled, Fox was silenced for a year by his order, and for that year he did not speak in public. However on the day that the year’s punishment ended he gave a public address that began, “As I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted ...” That is a good story to keep in mind at a conference themed to the subject of silence. Women will not be silenced. We may be interrupted from time to time. But we will not be silenced.

Another little glimpse I have been privileged to have into what people in other churches are doing comes from doing my play at a Christian mission conference that had as a special guest Brian Wren, a minister in the United Reformed Church in England. I already owned his book, *What Language Shall I Borrow?*, subtitled “God-Talk in Worship: A Male Response to Feminist Theology.”

When I met Dr. Wren and during the time that he spoke at the conference, he was wearing a T-shirt that read, “God Is Not A Boy’s Name.” And his talk echoed the sentiments I had read in his book.

[Patriarchy] distorts our vision of God by seeing the divine life exclusively through male eyes and depicting God in the image of male dominance. This implies that the other half of humanity, created co-equally in God’s image and likeness, is not fit to depict that divine life.

And:

The impassioned resistance to the very idea of speaking of God in female terms is linked with

patriarchal culture’s disvaluing of the “feminine.”

If the structure of patriarchy, and its disvaluing of the “feminine,” are brought to light, I suspect that some will reaffirm the patriarchal order, but that many will be willing to follow the implications of their conviction that women and men are created as coequals in the image of God.

The United Church of Canada seems to be a place where the concept of God as Mother is being welcomed. I received a very enthusiastic phone call from its Director of Media, who had been given a video of my play. He subsequently wrote me a letter asking to distribute the play to their many dozens of bookstores, suggesting a cross-Canada tour, an appearance at their National Conference in 1994, and a showing of the video on Canada’s “Vision” television network.

The Jewish tradition is also being affected by the re-visioning of God. After a performance of my play in San Francisco I was approached by a woman who introduced herself to me as the first ordained female rabbi in the Reformed branch of Judaism. My good friend Gloria, who at age sixty had a wonderful, belated bat mitzvah, tells me that the synagogue she attends in Los Angeles is busily bringing female imagery into their worship.

And the more radical Jewish feminists are writing and celebrating new Sabbath prayers.

I leap now from the Jews to the Evangelical Christians, which is quite a leap. While attending church with my brother and sister-in-law in Utah, a woman—who had the day before stopped me in Smith’s Food King to tell me how grateful she is that I have a voice and can speak for women who do not have a voice—stopped me again in the foyer of the chapel. She brought out a book from under her scriptures. I took the extended book. It was *Women In the Maze*, subtitled, “Questions and Answers on Biblical Equality,” written by Ruth A. Tucker, a professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. I thumbed through it while keeping one ear open for the Relief Society lesson. The cover quotes the same statement from a child I use in my play: “Dear God, are boys

better than girls? I know you are one, but try to be fair." The first chapter is titled, "Is God Masculine?" And her answer?—Of course God is not masculine; and while not throwing away the good image of Father, we have to find a way to enlarge the image, and she suggests there is emotional benefit from perceiving God as Mother. She chastises both the Mormons and the pagans for opposite extremes, the Mormons for making God not only metaphorically but literally male and the pagans for their pantheistic goddess worship of Mother Earth.

I presented my play at a national conference of Evangelical and Ecumenical Women and met Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, whose name I had long known and several of whose books I had read. She is a professor of English at William Paterson College of New Jersey and is an outspoken evangelical feminist. In one of her books Virginia says:

Because of human alienation from the Ground of our own Being, we have developed gender definitions that are distorted. And then Christians . . . have legitimated those gender distortions by settling exclusively into certain biblical metaphors for God until those metaphors have developed the force of an idol. We have spoken of God as our Father, our King, and our Master so exclusively that we have forgotten the many other biblical metaphors that depict God in ways that would undercut male primacy and female secondariness and teach us a partnership model of relating.

Clearly in an effort to challenge these exclusively male images, Virginia Mollenkott chose as the title for her speech at the conference we shared, "Claiming Our Birthright As Daughters of God Herself." So if you had thought the evangelicals were all safely ensconced in patriarchy, you were wrong.

A year or so ago as I was presenting my play for a week in Kansas City, I arranged a visit in Independence with the current president and the just-past president of the Reorganized LDS

equivalent of the Relief Society. I had a wonderful, warm visit with these good women, and I learned that their "women's issues" are really quite different from the "women's issues" in my church.

They are concerned about making women who have not been called to the priesthood feel as valued as those who have been. They feel listened to by the church male leadership but know there is a long way to go before they have full voice. They are not troubled by the lack of women and female imagery in the Book of Mormon because they have given up the Book of Mormon as an historical document. They are not troubled by the specter of eternal polygamy because they believe Joseph simply erred in that regard. They are not troubled by the disappearance of the Heavenly Mother because they have no anthropomorphic God. I asked them if they have any information of Joseph's teaching of a Heavenly Mother. They said no. I asked if they sing the hymn that we call "O My Father," and I sang a little of the melody. They said they sing that melody but they have different words to it.

They are, however, in their own way, changing the image of the sex of God. Like many protestant churches, they are not attempting to add female images but they are deleting male images so that they emphasize words like "Creator" and "Sustainer."

As I left her home, one of these women said, "The way we see it, we've got Emma's church and you've got Joseph's." In fact, as I went with her on a tour of the RLDS temple in Independence I heard a phrase I have never heard in all my years as a Mormon. The man leading the tour stopped us in a hallway and pointed to the wall and said, "And here we will have large portraits of Emma and Joseph." I noticed it as I would have noticed if in my Sunday School class the teacher had said, "Eve and Adam."

That night these two RLDS women leaders attended my play and afterwards voiced their deep appreciation of my work and their commitment to making the world a friendlier place for women. As we parted they said, "Anytime you

want to come home, we'll be glad to have you."

A while ago I received a letter on United States Marine Corps stationery. A chaplain in Japan-Okinawa wrote that he had received rave reviews about my play from a psychologist friend who doesn't usually rave about anything, and he asked if I would please send him a copy of the video so he could use it with his Marines to "broaden perceptions of feminine understanding and insight." Is that a good idea, or what? Uncle Sam wants . . . the Great Mother!

I could go on and on telling you about my adventures with various churches and individuals of various religions. I have performed my play under the sponsorship of Catholics, Evangelicals, Presbyterians, Unitarians, Congregationalists, the United Church of Christ, and Unity. I've received gratitude from Mennonites, Sikhs, Southern Baptists, Episcopalians, modern gnostics, Methodists, Muslims, Russian agnostics, Religious Scientists, Protestants of all kinds, atheists, and Mormons. Especially Mormons. All over the world and in all religious traditions the common need is evidencing and the questions are the same. Why have we been for all of these centuries without our Mother? Why do we need our Mother? Is a good Father not enough?

Carl Jung said that the most important psychological task humankind faces in our century is the reintegration of the feminine divine into our religious experience. That important? Why? Why do our psyches, our spirits need a Divine Mother? Who would say you do not need the mother in your own family, even though your father is just great? Who writes home "Dear Dad" and never acknowledges "Mom"? Who goes home for Thanksgiving and hugs her father and not her mother? There is an empty space in our spirits and in our worship where the face of our Divine Mother needs to be. But the loss is not just one of aesthetics or sentiment.

The meaning of the empty space is what demands our attention. The empty space has tragic consequences. If the parentage of our spirits is not as fully female as male, then femaleness is not as

central, as potent, as important as maleness. And if that is the case, the human female is not as central, not as important as the human male. Qualities we label “feminine” are not as desirable as those we label “masculine.” The devaluing of the female contributes to our inability or unwillingness to vision God in a female image. We are caught in a sad circle: God is not female because the female is not godly because God is not female.

I am not so naive as to believe that restoring the feminine face of God would be a quick fix to all the world’s problems. But I do believe and I say without hesitation that restoring the feminine face of God will escalate the valuing of femaleness, will increase the balance of power and respect in male-female relationships and will increase our willingness to look at the world through female eyes, feel with female hearts and try to solve some problems with female brains.

I believe that virtually every social problem that exists will be not erased but will be positively impacted when we see ourselves mirrored in the image of a Father and Mother God. War. Rape. Domestic violence. Incest and other sexual abuse. Racism. Loss of self-esteem among adolescent girls. The epidemic of eating disorders. Teenage pregnancy. Divorce. Materialism. Excessive international competition. Misuse of Mother Earth. The povertization of women. All of these problems, and more, will be positively affected as we gradually unveil the female face of our Creator. The upheaval that is going on around this subject is not part of the problem of society’s ills. It is part of the solution.

A few weeks ago on Easter Sunday in my ward in California, predictably every powerful, righteous divine image was a male image. And then, as we sang the hymn that I used to love, “We’ll Sing All Hail to Jesus’ Name,” we sang at the end of the third verse, “The grave yield up her dead.” I mean they sang. I sang, “The grave yield up its dead.” In a spiteful moment I might have been tempted to sing—and very loudly—“The grave yield up his dead.” But I didn’t. I don’t. I never do and I never will. I will never

wish upon my sons and my brothers the incalculable damage that has been done to the spirits and the psyches of women for centuries. Make no mistake: though only I and my several radical friends in the ward consciously noticed, on a subconscious level—every woman, every man, every little girl and every little boy—was affected in their innermost psyche by that song. The masculine “he” equals God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The feminine “she” equals the grave. This is consistent with the imagery we experience every Sunday. Do not think for a moment this has no bearing on the societal ills I mentioned a moment ago. Rape. Incest. Domestic violence. I believe that when we become finally, fully aware of the connection between our language, our spiritual images and the devaluing of women, we will weep with utterly broken hearts.

I had a better experience singing a hymn just over a week ago at a fireside in Provo. We sang “O My Father,” originally entitled, “Invocation to the Divine Father and Mother.” I had not heard that hymn for a couple of years and I was afraid it had been banned or discouraged. Most in the congregation there were BYU students. I looked around and listened to these wonderfully bright and beautiful young men and women singing,

*Truth is reason, truth eternal
tells me I’ve a Mother there...
When I leave this frail existence,
When I lay this mortal by,
Father, Mother, may I meet you
In your royal courts on high?*

That clear and profound revelation, taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith to Eliza R. Snow, to Zina Diantha Huntington and to others, is in place and will remain in place and will expand and roll forward to bless the lives of the Latter-day Saints and others in the world. And it will happen not because we’ve got to keep up with the Episcopalians, not because of the irritant of conferences like this one and articles in *Sunstone* and *Dialogue* and *Exponent II* and the *MFW Quarterly*, and not because of letters Carol Lynn Pearson and others have

written to the Brethren—though irritants do produce pearls. It will happen, finally, because of the tremendous innate goodness of the Mormon people, the followers and the leaders, female and male, who will respond simply because this is the right thing to do, and we want to do the right thing.

It will not happen with a revelation that strikes like a lightning bolt out of the heavens. It will happen like the opening of a window—a glass darkly—that has been there all the time unnoticed in a shadowed room, opening now to let in the warmth and the light of the sun—a sun that has always been there with its generous rays—a sun that has always been the center of the universe, no matter what the Pope said.

We are among the openers of the window. We and our sisters and brothers of many faiths. I cannot think of a greater privilege. Let us do it with determination, with patience, with love and, above all, with gratitude and reverence.

This talk was presented at the 1993 Counterpoint Conference.

In Memoriam

**Helen
Candland
Stark**

**A Founding Mother
of 20th Century
Mormon Feminism**

I Have An Answer

Questions to Gospel Answers

Answer: *To question or complain about church programs or policies is the same as "steadying the ark." It shows a lack of faith in God and in the leaders God has chosen.*

Questions: Are church leaders infallible? Do all church programs work well? Are there never times when it is appropriate to say, "this program or policy is having a negative effect on me, my family, my ward, people I know"? Is it inappropriate to provide feedback or crucial information about local conditions that decision-makers in Salt Lake might not be aware of? Is it wrong to ask questions in a church that began with a question?

The story of the daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27) seems instructive. These women stood to have no inheritance whatsoever in the Promised Land, so they went to the authorized leader, Moses, and presented their case. Moses had never thought about the inequitable situation he was on the brink of inaugurating. But instead of chastizing the women for their "presumption," or scolding them for faithlessness or accusing them of not sustaining him as the prophet, he took their concerns to the Lord. The result was a reworking of the inheritance laws to take into account female posterity. (Not necessarily the greatest system from a modern point of view, but far better than the original plan.)

It is an integral, essential part of sustaining our leaders to give them honest feedback. It is important for leaders to know the kinds of questions for which we (women in particular) desire prophetic, revelatory answers—not because such answers cannot be found privately and personally, but because the impact of such questions and answers extends far beyond the private and personal.

As with the story in Numbers 27, women's concerns may otherwise never enter into male leaders' consciousness if we stay silent. We are not asking general authorities for *their* fallible, mortal *opinions* about doctrines and practices, but rather, we are providing honest feedback to and asking questions of our leaders in the hope that they will respond like Moses and take these concerns to the Lord and receive *real* answers.

If asking our leaders to ask God about things which have a broad-ranging impact in the lives of the members of Christ's church is "inappropriate," then what in the world is the point of having modern prophets at all?

—Lynn "modern daughter of Zelophehad" Matthews Anderson

NETWORKING

Salt Lake City MWF

Cory Sargent • PO Box 58281
Salt Lake City, UT 84158
(SLC) (801) 297-2120; (Utah County)
370-3839; FAX (801) 364-4256

Bay Area MWF

Nadine Hansen
20571 Scofield Dr.
Cupertino, CA 95014
(408) 255-7235

Southern California MWF

Carlan Youkstetter
1685 West Haven Road
San Marino, CA 91108
(818) 284-2989

Greater Boston MWF

Lynn Matthews Anderson
70 Fairview Avenue
Belmont, MA 02178
(617) 489-9649

Columbus Ohio MWF

Mary Ellen Robertson
1220 Chambers Road 409-C
Columbus, OH 43212
(614) 481-8835

Area Contacts:

Davis County, Utah

Kristie Morton
555 E. 1400 S.
Kaysville, UT 84037
(801) 451-2173

Washington

Melanie Jenkins
NW 385 Dillon, #B
Pullman, WA 99163
(509) 334-3208

Canada

Howard/Zella Forsyth
Box 584
Magrath AB T0K1J0
(403) 758-3549

Illinois

Violet Kimball
15 Crestwood Drive
Edwardsville, IL 62025
(618) 288-5001

Orange County, California

Kathryn Turley Sonne
8581 Kelso Drive
Huntington Beach, CA 92646
(714) 968-7186

Texas

Phyllis Rueckert
7106 Meadowcreek Drive
Dallas, TX 75240
(214) 661-3809

For info about LDS women's electronic discussion groups, send e-mail to: lynnma@netcom.com

Mormon Women's Forum
P.O. Box 58281
Salt Lake City, UT 84158

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