

## **“RE-IMAGINING” REVIEW: RADICAL FEMINISM IN SHEEP’S CLOTHING**

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### ***Introduction***

The post-modern women who gathered at Minneapolis came to re-imagine God, the church, and the family. Seventeen hundred delegates came to the 1993 conference and about half that many in 1998. Primarily they were national leaders from mainline denominations associated with the World Council of Churches. The first Re-Imagining conference grew out of The World Council of Churches’ “Decade of Solidarity with Women.”

These feminist conferences created a stir in North American Christianity that sent aftershocks even through the normally complacent mainline denominations that sponsored the events. Major underwriters for the first and second events were the Presbyterian Church USA,<sup>1</sup> the United Methodists, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, and the Episcopalians.

### ***Ecumenism Gone to the Devil***

Sadly, the Re-Imagining movement is not an innocent, feminist adaptation of the Christian message to modern times. It is an assault on the foundations of Christianity in order to displace it with neo-paganism. Official statements were, not surprisingly, filled with blasphemy and irreverence as these misguided women gloried in their own sexuality and vain wisdom in their attempt to make a goddess in their own image.

The anti-Christian agenda of the conference “. . . praised every imaginable religion or spirituality except orthodox Christianity, and recognized the power of every deity except Jesus Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

### ***Let’s Re-imagine***

When one begins to re-imagine God, then nothing is sacred—everything is on the table for reconstruction. Truth, reality, social institutions, modes of communication all fall prey to the corrosive analysis of post-modern subjectivism.

The feminist expression of this sweeping religious critique was manifested at the two Re-Imagining Conferences. Here are some of their conclusions on religion, God, Jesus, sexuality, and the family:

***Religion.***—The religious and philosophical presuppositions of the Re-Imagining movement are entirely post-modern. There is not absolute truth nor can we know God, except by

subjective experience. With the historic Christian understanding of God and revelation summarily dismissed, the use of imagination in religion is unfettered.

The post-modern theological view of man becomes the same as secular post-modern thinkers. One conference observer remarked that “The gospel of Re-Imagining is palatable to our ‘New Age’ assumptions. There is, for example, no sin, no guilt, no shame, no need for salvation, no call to holiness, no need for obedience, no summons to servanthood.”<sup>3</sup>

**God.**—The idea of God is much more manageable and less threatening if He is depersonalized. The Re-Imagining feminists did not merely “re-imagine” God—they deconstructed Him! In His place they have substituted a New Age monism.

Monism really is not new, but is an ancient pagan philosophy with elements of eastern religions. To the priestesses of Minneapolis, their god is a universal divine energy that permeates the material world, including a divine humanity.

Part of their worship involved bowing to each other to recognize their mutual divinity, as well as the regular singing of, “O great spirit, earth and wind and sea, you are inside and all around me.” In the 1998 version of the Re-Imagining Conference, this Gnostic spirit was displayed in printed program statements like, “I found God in myself, and I loved her. I loved her fiercely.”

To the exclusion of Jesus and God the Father (too patriarchal sounding), prayers were made to “Our maker, Sophia.” Sophia, of course, is the Greek word for “wisdom” and represents not only the feminization of their god, but reveals their goddess as the fluid, intangible wisdom within people and in the cosmos itself. Self-worship is involved in praying to the intuitive Sophia.

**Jesus**—At the first conference, Delores Williams of Union Theological Seminary in New York City, created a storm with her proclamation “I don’t think we need a theory of atonement at all. I think Jesus came for life and to show us something about life. . . . I don’t think we need folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff.”<sup>4</sup>

At the 1998 conference, the attack on Jesus’ identity continued: “What does it take for us to break rank with the slave masters’ religion?” asked another speaker, Carter Heyward. Her answer was to re-imagine Jesus Christ. Heyward said that it is a mistake to emphasize “the singularity of God’s presence in Jesus”:

“It was not Jesus’ identity with God, as if Jesus somehow thought of himself as divine . . . Jesus in reality was not God . . . Jesus was human like us, and also, like us, he was infused with God, with sacred spirit, and in that sense was divine, and he had a clue.”<sup>5</sup>

Heyward proclaimed the view that all of life is simply an extrusion of divine reality, meaning that all persons and things are essentially divine and no person can claim to be unique, not even Jesus:

“While nobody, even Jesus, is divine in and of him or herself, everybody, like Jesus, is able to god, and I use this [god] as a verb ... That is what we are to do ... to god, and that is what the Jesus story is all about.”

**Sexuality.**—At the 1993 conference the delegates applauded 100 of their own who approached the podium to celebrate their sexual identities as lesbians, bi-sexuals, or transsexuals. The head of CLOUT, Melanie Morrison, told the convocation, “We are keenly aware that the world is not safe for lesbian women, and often the least safe place is the church.” CLOUT stands for “Christian Lesbians Out Together.”

**Family.**—Part of the sexual agenda of the radical feminists in the church is to break down the traditional family. This is because traditional families have traditional roles of father and mother, husband and wife. Mary Hunt is a Roman Catholic lesbian and co-founder of WATER, the “Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual.” She proposed to the Re-imagining conference that a free-love friendship be substituted as a metaphor for family. She explained her meaning:

“...imagine sex among friends as the norm, young people learning how to make friends rather than to date. Imagine valuing genital sexual interaction in terms of whether and how it fosters friendship and pleasure.... Pleasure is our birthright of which we have been robbed in religious patriarchy. It is time to claim it anew with our friends.... Responsible relational sexuality is a human right. I picture friends, not families, basking in the pleasures we deserve because our bodies are holy and our sexuality is part of creation’s available riches.”<sup>6</sup>

Delores Williams of Union Theological Seminary, notorious for her 1993 rejection of Christ’s atonement, said as much in 1998 as the Roman Catholic Hunt: “Women must create a community where people can be free ... a context of the sacred where no sexuality is unclean. In the heart and soul of the deities we are all loved, and it doesn’t matter who we’re sleeping with.”<sup>7</sup>

## **Feminist Theology**

The feminist theology of the Re-Imagining movement stresses experience and the retelling of life stories, especially stories of abuse, repression, and defilement. Feminist story telling is a claimed contribution to the church. Personal stories challenge traditional theology by encouraging it to abandon moral absolutes and by encouraging the church to make its message more relational. This is the only path to “healing and wholeness.”

One would expect to find feminine qualities, a nurturing spirit, for example, in feminist theology. Much like the Africanization of Christianity that adapts the message and forms of the faith to local religious traditions, the feminization of Christianity follows suit. Their bastardization of the Lord’s Supper is particularly offensive. At both conferences, the ritual that focused the purpose of the Re-Imagining message was the “milk and honey” service. Listen to the liturgical words from the 1998 session:

“This is the body of God for healing the bitterness of the human heart ...” declared Rev. [Sally] Hill as women passed the milk and honey mixture around their tables. “We have seen the power, rising from the earth ... Together we have given birth to a Re-Imagining Community which extends to every corner of our world!”<sup>8</sup>

## **Saner Voices**

Not all mainline women agree with the radicals. Diane L. Knippers, president of the Institute on Religion and Democracy, was an observer at the 1998 conference. She laments that Re-Imagining is here to stay:

“It’s tempting to dismiss Re-Imagining as a kind of side-show. But the movement remains influential in the mainline denominations as the vanguard of feminist theology, the most prominent trend on seminary campuses today. The majority of Re-Imagining Revival speakers had either taught at seminaries or worked for church agencies, and their ideas are seeping in.”<sup>9</sup>

Another 1998 observer, Sylvia Dooling of “Voices of Orthodox Women” of the PCUSA, concurred. She concluded that Re-Imagining is not a fringe movement; on the contrary, it is growing within the mainline denominations. Re-Imagining has forsaken the rich heritage of biblical Christianity for post-modern relativism and hedonism. Her summary is insightful:

“The gospel of Re-Imagining appears to contain no good news at all, no hope. Its message is that everything has been so ‘mucked up’ by patriarchal systems that all we women can do is revolt—engage in revolution. Go out into the world and dismantle the boundaries of the historic faith; trouble the waters; spread the story of victimisation (sic) and oppression. Tell everyone how you’ve been abused, how angry you are, how lonely you are. This is the truth that will set you free. Get in touch with your body and use it in whatever way you choose—because there is no such thing as morality, nor a summons to holy living. The philosophy of Epicurius abounded, ‘Eat, drink and be merry.’”<sup>10</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The Re-Imagining movement is not going to go away as long as mainline denominations bankroll its conferences and promote its proponents within denominational agencies. A standing committee for “Re-Imagining the Future” has been meeting in the Twin Cities and has announced a 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference in June 2003; many of the same radical feminist speakers are scheduled.<sup>11</sup>

To re-imagine is to go back to the drawing board. To re-imagine God and Christianity is to paint oneself as the center-piece on that drawing board. While true believers are rightfully angered by the graphic blasphemies of the Re-Imagining movement, God Himself is not moved. In fact, He may be indignantly amused by their doodlings before He brings them to judgment:

“Why do the heathen rage, and the people *imagine* a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed (i.e., Christ), saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.”<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, believers must “...with gentleness [correct] those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.”<sup>13</sup> We may do so with confidence knowing that “...the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down *imagination*s, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The PCUSA contributed more than \$66,000 to the 1993 conference, and imposed a head tax of \$22 per member to help underwrite the 1998 conference.

<sup>2</sup> Editorial by Harold S. Martin, “Paganism at the Re-imagining Conference in Minneapolis (1993)” in *Brethren Revival Fellowship Witness* 29:3 (May/June 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in *Presbyterian Layman* (Jan/Feb 1994) 10.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.layman.org/layman/news/reimagining-revival.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in *Presbyterian Layman* (Jan/Feb 1994) 10-11.

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.banneroftruth.co.uk/articles/1998/reimagining\\_revival.htm](http://www.banneroftruth.co.uk/articles/1998/reimagining_revival.htm).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.banneroftruth.co.uk/articles/1998/reimagining\\_revival.htm](http://www.banneroftruth.co.uk/articles/1998/reimagining_revival.htm).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Their website is [www.reimagining.org](http://www.reimagining.org).

<sup>12</sup> Ps 2:1-4 (KJV).

<sup>13</sup> 2 Tim 2:25-26 (NASB).

<sup>14</sup> 2 Cor 10:4-5 (KJV).