

Women, Work & Worship in the United Church of Canada. Shirley Davy. *Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 1983. Pp. 312*

This anthology embodies the strengths and the weaknesses of two current phenomena: the rise of the amateur; and the cult of the committee. *Women, Work, and Worship in the United Church of Canada* is the end product of a two-year project shepherded by Shirley Davy and funded by Nancy Rowell Jackman. It is intended to capture the history of the United Church and its current situation from the perspective of its women. As Jackman says in her Preface, it is for "all those women who have gone before us, and ... those who are to come, who need to know who we are, who our foremothers were, and who our granddaughters and grandnieces will be" (p.v). The volume is a compilation of materials submitted by United Church women, some insightful and some important, but mostly only interesting to "insiders." And one suspects even they will cool towards its feminism. Given the project's purpose, it is not surprising that *Women, Work and Worship* is disjointed; yet it need not have been. If Davy or someone else had taken the material in hand and constructed an integrated account, their subject and their readers would have been well served.

The volume has four Sections. The first four chapters present a brief overview of women's activities in the United Church, including the pre-1962 women's organizations which were concerned with missionary work or with local projects, and the post-1962 United Church Women. The most interesting chapter is "Faith and Finance," in which Davy documents the significance of women's fund raising work. Sections 2 and 3 (chapters 5 through 7) are arenas for the amateurs, as bits and pieces are reproduced from submissions by local women's groups or individuals. It is here that the book holds its promise of entertainment for the local readers.

The fourth section offers six research papers of varying quality. The first details the rise of women's groups and women individually to positions in the church structure. The second traces several forms of Christian feminism, urging what writer Randi Warne labels "radical feminism." The third research paper (Chapter 10) explains the growth of the diaconate for women from its inception in 1836 in Germany to its adoption by Canadian churches in the first years of this century. The deaconess orders, Diane Haglund argues, did not succeed as an effective vehicle for women's ministry. The other research papers, (a programme for liberating Christianity through changes in language and image, a sketch of ministers' mates, and a biography of United Church minister Ruth Tiltman composed of reminiscences by those who felt her influence), merit a quick scan. This fourth section has good footnotes and bibliographies. Unfortunately, no one compiled an index.

Women, Work and Worship offers occasional insight into its subject matter. For example, Andrea Shaver suggests:

The different expectations attached to male and female clergy spouses can provide valuable insights into our attitudes as a church towards women and men (p. 248).

The examples in her article prove the usefulness of her work on clergy spouses. In all innocence, the anonymous poem "The Ladies Aid" summarizes the significance and the injustice surrounding women's church work. Churches go into debt repeatedly:

And the Ladies Aid Society, it promised all the rest.

.....

But when I see the sisters work to raise the cash which lacks,
I sometimes feel the church is built on women's tired backs;

And sometimes I can't help thinking, when
we reach the regions blest;
That men will get the toil and sweat—and
the Ladies Aid the rest.

In all seriousness, Shirley Davy offers some suggestions for restructuring and rethinking the role of women in the United Church which are both specific and stimulating. Why not focus groups on particular needs instead of lumping all women into one group? Why not create a women's support structure inside the national church staff? What about a national organization of women with an administrative presence and a regular printed voice? These and other suggestions (on pp. 76 to 80) are a gold mine.

But alongside the insights are the flaws. The book is disjointed, when it could have been a readable, integrated study with several important theses carefully fleshed out. It could have been humanistic, its analysis based on a real sympathy with the problems and predicaments of the actors; instead it is feminist, with a sometimes confused focus on the apportionment of power and an embarrassed acknowledgement of the practical accomplishments of women in the church.

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The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets.
Barbara G. Walker. *San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983. Pp.1124.*

Since the re-emergence of feminism in the late '60's and early '70's, there has been a need for a dictionary of myth, ritual, and religion as they relate to and affect women, an inclusive reference compendium along the lines of the usual encyclopedia of religion. *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* obviously seeks to fill that gap, to provide information on almost every

mythic and religious subject women might be interested in.

Author Barbara Walker is to be commended on the scope and ambition of her work. She has pulled together an enormous amount of material based on an extensive bibliography (which she appends), and she has organized it alphabetically with cross-referencing as needed. In many of the really important entries (for example, "Eve," "Ishtar," "Isis," "Kali Ma," "Sex," "Theology"), Walker quotes liberally from her sources. In others she summarizes them. At the end of each entry she lists the sources by author. The layout of the book is pleasing to the eye, with easy-to-read marginal glosses taking the place of cramped footnotes. The articles vary in length, but on occasion they are inappropriately long or short. Where appropriate, line drawings accompany the entry, and there are numerous black-and-white illustrations throughout.

Without doubt the book is useful and interesting, for it pulls together a great deal of disparate evidence and presents much previously unavailable material in one easily consulted volume. Particularly interesting to Women's Studies scholars will be the bibliography (with strange lacunae but reasonably complete to 1981/82) and the listed sources of entries. However, it is precisely Walker's sources and her use of them with which I have difficulty.

Any Women's Studies scholar wishing to discover evidence about goddesses, women's myths, rituals, and religions, women's mysteries and such must do, primarily, "marginal" work. She must consult for the most part male-originated translations, histories, archaeological reports and other such source material; she must read between the lines, pay careful attention to notes and other marginalia, assiduously examine textual apparatus, and be on guard for editorial slips, significant omissions, tell-tale explanations. In short, she must become a scholarly detective. Only then may she be ready to present