

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

by the Rev. Shirley Ann Ranck, Ph.D.

A great new mythic story has been emerging in the years since *Cakes for the Queen of Heaven* was first published. Out of the chaos of massive paradigm shifts in our sciences, terrifying statements by leading theologians that “God is dead,” startling images of our planet photographed from space, previously unknown civilizations unearthed by archeologists, and scholarly feuding in all fields about the meaning of it all, there have appeared new patterns of understanding. We have had to examine our prehistory and our religions with new eyes. We are beginning to tell a new story.

Part of that new story is the reclaiming of women’s contributions to art, literature and religion. Explorations by archeologists, biologists and historians into the other half of our human story—the women’s half—has raised new questions about the earliest human cultures. Did both men and women once revere a divine female? Did women once share power and respect equally with men? Were there early civilizations that

Cakes for the Queen of Heaven is about exploring the answers to these questions, this new mythic story that informs our lives and our society today. It is possible to rebuke the story as “just myth,” but myths are truths which can help us understand our past and our future in new ways. If new data proves the story to be wrong, the myths will change again.

The focus of *Cakes for the Queen of Heaven: In Ancient Times* is the Ancient Near East, Old Europe and the predominant Western culture. It is important to understand that this curriculum does not attempt to cover the female religious heritage worldwide. In our search for myths and images relevant to women we can look not only to pre-Christian and pre-Judaic cultures, but also to the wealth of material rooted in Africa, Asia and among the original peoples of the Americas. A few images and stories from these diverse traditions will be used here. We must remember that women constitute one-half of the world’s population and our religious heritage cannot be contained in one short curriculum. An excellent multi-cultural curriculum,

*Rise Up and Call Her Name*¹ by Elizabeth C. Asher, was published by the Unitarian Universalist Women’s Federation. It is a global exploration of woman-honoring and Earth-honoring traditions.

This new edition of *Cakes for the Queen of Heaven* is being produced in two parts, Volume One introduces the mono-patriarchal God of the Bible and early historic times, the history of patriarchy, and the ultimate loss of power to patriarchy that became the established religion. Volume Two explores female images and voices in Judaism and Christianity, as well as the oppression of women in patriarchal religions. Finally, we will consider present-day forms of feminist spirituality and our hopes for the future.

A new word, *thealogy*, was first used by religious scholars Naomi Goldenberg and Emily Culpepper.² *Thea* is the Greek word for “Goddess” just as *theos* is the Greek word for a male God. From this root we get *theology*, the study of a (male) God, or *thealogy*, the study of a female Goddess. The word *thealogy* was used in the original *Cakes for the Queen of Heaven* and will be used in this revised edition.

Another new word has been created for the telling of our new story. It is *herstory*. It is not etymologically correct. It was made up to distinguish our story as women from the male-oriented *history* that has come down to us. Feminist theologian Mary Daly has chosen not to use *herstory* in her writings because she feels that “It fails because it imitates male history. Inherently it has an ‘odor’ of mere reactive maneuvering which is humiliating to women. It conveys an image of history’s junior partner.”³ Nevertheless, the word *herstory* has been so useful that it has now found its way into some dictionaries. *Herstory*, when used in this curriculum is intended to mean *equal partner*, not *junior partner*.

The recent herstory of Unitarian Universalist women, our journey during the past thirty years, and the role that *Cakes for the Queen of Heaven* played in that journey, is told by Rev. Elinor Artman as part of “The Cakes Story” in the materials that introduce this curriculum.

The publisher, Unitarian Universalist Women and Religion, and I wish to thank the Unitarian Universalist Association for permission to revise and republish *Cakes for the Queen of Heaven*. We wish to thank the Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation and the Fund for Unitarian Universalism for their generous grants to support this work.

A special thank you to Misty Sheehan who coordinated the review process and to all the reviewers who made so many thoughtful and constructive suggestions: Margot Adler, Elinor Artman, Michelle Bentley, Emily Champagne, Elizabeth Fisher, Kendra Gray, Susan Holly Horn, Janet Johnson, Marty Kelly, Susan Willo LaMonte, Elizabeth Lerner, Nita Pendergraft, Elizabeth Pendergraft, Elizabeth Pendergraft, and Elizabeth Thomsen. I have tried to take their comments into account.

The content of the course is so rich and diverse that it has defied scholarly consensus and its interpretation. I believe that a new world view is emerging which it needs mythic stories to guide us through. Which stories will win the minds and hearts of women and men? We who have worked on *Cakes for the Queen of Heaven: In Ancient Times* hope the story told here will help to carry us forward into partnership, community, and peace.

Shirley Ann Ranck
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CAKES ADVISORY CIRCLE



A very special thank you goes to the members of the Advisory Circle of women from Unitarian Universalist Women and Religion. Their advice and support have been invaluable. In our discussions of feminist theology we reached the conclusion that we should identify ourselves by our backgrounds. Here are our stories and biographies.

Rev. Shirley Ann Ranck, at age seventy-six, is a grandmother who enjoys her work as an interim minister, moving all across the United States and Canada and guiding congregations through times of transition. Moving from place to place began early in her life as she grew up in various middle class neighborhoods in the cities and suburbs of New Jersey, some near the ocean. Her family roots are English, Irish, Dutch, German, French and possibly Native American. As a young woman she commuted to New York City for office work and for graduate study at City University of New York and Fordham University. She worked for many years as a clinical and school psychologist before entering the ministry. At Starr King School in the mid-seventies she began to research women's religious herstory and to feel the impact this material was having on her and other women. Her involvement with Women and Religion began in 1980 when she was asked by Rev. Leslie Westbrook to write a study guide in feminist theology as part of the effort to implement the Women and Religion Resolution. The study guide became *Cakes for the Queen of Heaven*. She has been involved in district and continental women's gatherings ever since.