

WOMEN'S SEMINAR IN CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY

Topic: Feminism and Theological Education:

Multiple Commitments, Moments of Grace

Moderator: Susan M. Simonaitis, Fordham University

Presenter: Mary C. Boys, Union Theological Seminary, New York

Prior to the session, members reviewed a paper written by Mary Boys entitled "The Scholarship of Teaching." This paper, along with two brief articles also written by Boys, "The Grace of Teaching" (*The Cresset* 59/6 [1996]) and "Evaluating an Uncertain Craft: Faculty Assessment and Theological Education" (*Theological Education* 31/2 [Summer 1995]) became the background for a dialogue on the theology of teaching. Boys framed the seminar dialogue with comments about her paper and her own teaching/learning experiences, and she initiated dialogue among the participants in two ways. First, she and Susan Simonaitis engaged in a public dialogue focused by the question of "What is happening when teaching/learning events 'work' (or 'don't work')?" Second, Boys divided the members of the seminar into small groups that discussed a list of questions. These questions (in particular, the "summary question" noted below) generated substantive issues that were raised in the plenary conversation that took place after the small groups. "In your view," Boys asked, "what is the 'one thing necessary' in becoming a critically reflective teacher of theology?"

Boys's writings describe and analyze the dialogical nature of teaching students who bring to us perspectives that are most often "other" than our own. She argues that embedded in good teaching is the difficult practice of helping students "find their voice." Not only are students "strangers" to us, but they are also impossible to "change." As a result, excellent teachers create environments in which students "change themselves." Boys urges us to consider "engaged pedagogy" as a method of teaching and a way of life. Such a pedagogy engages the whole person (her faith, mind, heart, self-disposition, and life-orientation). It also, according to Boys, is fundamentally grounded in dialogical process.

Using dialogue as a pedagogical style requires commitment to "a particular way of relating." According to Boys, this relational matrix must incorporate

an ongoing conversion to dialogue, and therefore to processes that facilitate genuine conversations; attentiveness to specific life contexts of the subjects and subject that draw upon critical reason, analytical memory, and creative imagination; a flow of energy between reflection and engagement or action; posing problematic situations, and framing involving questions that draw people into deeper ways of analyzing and imagining; and sensitivity to power relations [particularly those of race, class, and gender].

Though Boys suggested that the dynamics of power in the practices of teaching theology must be explored more thoroughly, the plenary discussion headed in another direction, toward the "virtues" of excellent teaching. At the

business meeting following the seminar, two suggestions emerged: (1) when we invite respondents to papers, we should invite someone to reflect on teaching in relation to the text or the paradigm of theology that has been presented, and (2) that we develop a syllabi exchange so that members of the seminar can see concretely how other theologians construct their courses and convey their theologies of teaching to students.

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