

the just at the hands of the unjust. The authority of truth which women command is, like that of Jesus before Pilate, powerless in that it lacks both physical force and institutional leverage. Like Jesus, who went to his death in faith that the truth he embodied was stronger than the hatred of his enemies, and that the love of his Father would turn his death into glory and his destruction into the salvation of the world, women are perhaps being asked to participate in the mysterious salvific will of God in a way more painful, in a sense, than martyrdom by infidels. Like Jesus, they do not suffer at the hands of a neutral power, but ultimately at the hands of the Church they belong to and love.

I do not want to suggest that there should be any slackening of the effort, by every non-violent means, to end the current power struggle in the Church with full recognition of the equality of women and men as disciples of Jesus in the Spirit. And I am convinced that the struggle will continue to be waged around the symbolic issue of ordination. But it can only be a struggle according to the Spirit of incarnate Truth and Grace if external efforts are interiorly fired by the conviction that there is no real authority that does not act out of the justice of God and that, finally, no unjust suffering of the Christian, willingly accepted for the salvation of the world, is undergone alone or fruitlessly. When women break their silence before the abuse of power in the Church it must be to declare in full knowledge and salvific acceptance, "You would have no power over me unless it were given you from above."

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SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

Discussion after the panel of presentations centered on several issues. (1) Sandra Schneiders clarified the distinction she proposed between power and authority as exemplified in Jesus and Pilate, pointing out that she was not advocating a self-sacrificial attitude for women but rather illuminating the Christian meaning of the suffering that women in fact experience at the hands of the Church. The example of Jesus is one of resisting evil in standing for the truth. (2) The relation between the women's movement in the Church in the first world and the concerns of third world women was further probed; it is important that women in the Church develop a cross-cultural perspective, to see that "all of us are capable of being oppressors," and that each group in the Church has only a "piece of the truth." In this context, Margaret Farley pointed out that feminist theology is, in a very basic sense, not individualist but cooperative. The bonding of women envisioned by feminist theology is radically inclusive of lay women and nuns, middle class and poor, within all racial and cultural groups. (3) One participant argued that the central issue that women raise in the Church is clericalism. He pointed out that when women claim power in the Church they are attacking the concept of a male celibate caste. Panelists countered by saying that women do not seek to "take power" in an aggressive sense but operate with a definition of power that involves the empowerment of others.

(4) Another participant related the theme to spiritual direction, urging the importance, beyond theological argument and academic studies, of women staying with their own experience of God in prayer, as with their experience of anger, courage, patience, etc. He pointed out that "who God is" is being newly born in the Church through the mystical, indeed politically subversive, dimensions of women's experience. JoAnn Wolski Conn agreed that such experience is the basis for developing new symbols of God. (5) In response to the discussion of women's experience in prayer, Jamie Phelps and Mary Buckley both stressed the need for women to check individual insight with wider groups as the cooperative context for expressing their faith. It was pointed out that such expression is especially difficult for women. Men's experience has always been affirmed in the Church. When women try to claim their own experience—which has traditionally been denied in the Church—they are likely to feel rejected, wrong, bad. Hence the importance of finding contexts where women together can speak the truth. Women are so conditioned to take care of others, to understand and never hurt, that the task now is one of having the courage to let men in the Church take care of themselves as women resist the evil of sexism and speak the truth of their own equal discipleship.

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