

- Topic: Alternatives to Dissent? Seeking Responsible  
and Constructive Approaches to the November 1995 *Responsum*
- Convener: Christine Gudorf, Florida International University
- Moderator: Charles Curran, Southern Methodist University
- Presenters: Patricia Jung, Loyola University of Chicago  
Christine Gudorf, Florida International University  
Barbara Andolsen, Monmouth University

This panel focused not on critique of the arguments informing the series of documents culminating in the *Responsum*, but rather on the practical consequences of a definitive teaching that the church cannot ordain women to the priesthood. Jung insisted that as theologians we must take some responsibility for the imposition of a rule of silence if we opt to collaborate with those trying to establish it. She argued that the *Responsum* seeks to squash theological investigation, even in academic forums such as scholarly publications and classrooms, of lines of argument which might contradict or illuminate ambiguities in Church teaching. She explored the practical implications of this for the nurture of student theological voices, for the survival of theologians in Catholic contexts, and for the integrity of those who opt to closet their authentic convictions on the matter.

Gudorf divided sentimental pedestalization of women in John Paul II's thought from his central argument that men and women are sufficiently different that they need not be treated the same in order to be treated equally, and noted extensive support for this position in the international women's movement. While one might thus justify the exclusion of women from priesthood on grounds of sexual difference, she argued from mission encyclicals and social teaching that sexual difference cannot be used to exclude women from decision making in the Church: if women cannot be priests, then governance cannot be reserved for the ordained, nor will opening the diaconate to women empower women as equals in the Church.

Andolsen focused on women as scholars. First she discussed the changes necessary for women as theologians working in major Catholic universities and in seminaries to experience the full equality that John Paul II advocates. She mentioned a range of changes, such as (1) designing and advertising openings that truly invite qualified female candidates to apply, (2) instituting "family friendly" policies, such as parental leaves that allow young scholars to meet family responsibilities while making progress towards tenure, and (3) providing strong (not token) representation of women in the most senior administrative levels of major Catholic universities. She suggested that Catholic feminist scholars pursue a broad scholarly agenda, that many important areas of feminist research were completely consistent with present Catholic social teaching on women's equality. She also urged attention to social justice issues in the lives of Hispanic women.

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