

## PROGRAM GROUPS

### WOMEN'S SEMINAR IN CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY

- Topic: Sexual Ethics: Here and Now  
Conveners: Gaile M. Pohlhaus, Villanova University  
Jane Carol Redmont, Graduate Theological Union  
Moderator: Jane Russell, Belmont Abbey College  
Presenter: Christine Gudorf, Florida International University

The effect of the collapse of the sexual dimorphism paradigm on the understanding of ethical sexual behavior and suggestions for how the church should deal with this data was the central theme of Dr. Gudorf's presentation. What follows is a summation of her presentation. Dr. Gudorf started by pointing out that while the division into male and female has been the paradigm for interpreting human sexuality, anything else has been interpreted with this division understood as clear and universal. Throughout the last half of the twentieth century it became apparent that this division (maleness understood as entailing sexual attraction to females, and femaleness as sexual attraction to males) eroded. Not only had the questioning of universal norms caused this erosion, but also the results of scientific investigation. Sex no longer can be determined by simply sexual orientation, nor genitalia, nor chromosomal evidence. For a while sex was restricted to biology and was considered innate while gender was considered socially constructed and social construction was also considered to have some influence on sexual orientation.

In the 1990s when biologists studied the concept of sex and what determined the sex of an individual "they found there were six physiological traits, not one, which affected what has been known as maleness or femaleness: chromosomal sex, gonadal sex, hormonal sex, sex of the brain, sex of the reproductive tract, and sex of the genitalia." There are a significant number of persons for whom the varied determinants of sex are not completely aligned. There also exists in our society transgendered persons who accept the sex assigned to them on the basis of genitalia but not the roles assigned culturally. It is clear that dimorphism, while perhaps an adequate paradigm in the past (due to our lack of knowledge), no longer serves as such a paradigm. There is evidence for the existence of historic third-sex and third-gender roles, which includes Europe, the Americas, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and a sparse amount in Africa.

The end of sexual dimorphism presents challenges to our understanding of sexual morality and a challenge to both feminism and the Church. With regard to feminism the question of whom or what is a woman and who or what is a

man is enlarged when we move from the dimorphic paradigm. Nongender specific language will solve some of this problem but the move towards this is slow.

Even in the present the Church has been slow to acknowledge the evidence critiquing the dimorphic model. Complementarity and feminine and masculine qualities still are the models in Church documents. With regard to sexual orientation the Church also clings to the heterosexist dimorphic model. The Church has neglected its pastoral responsibility towards those who do not fit into its prejudged model of dimorphism. While sticking to the past the Church becomes more and more irrelevant to human sexual relations. There are four principles the Church is called to accept. (1) The dimorphic pattern does not account for the great variation in human sexuality. (2) Sexual desire is influenced by biology, environment, and experience, not by genitalia. (3) Shared sexual pleasure is a life giving grace. (4) Reproduction is only one, and not the essential, function of human sexual activity.

The principles enunciated show that the understanding of human sexuality as a casual, uncommitted recreational activity is harmful to human beings and their potential for full growth. The church must recognize that human sexuality is not something that makes us less than human but something that is sacramental of what it means to be human.

Questions and comments following Dr. Gudorf's presentation focused on how the replacement of dimorphism by a new paradigm would change existing Church teaching on sexual ethics.

Following the lecture Dr. Monika Hellwig was presented with the Ann O'Hara Graff award for outstanding contributions as both model and mentor to women in the field of theology.

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#### BLACK CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

- Topic: The Vocation of the Black Scholar  
 and the Struggle of the Black Catholic Community
- Convener: Bryan N. Massingale, Saint Francis Seminary
- Moderator: Stephanie Mitchem, University of Detroit-Mercy
- Presenter: Bryan N. Massingale, Saint Francis Seminary

(Due to medical emergencies and last-minute schedule conflicts, Diana Hayes and Cyprian Davis were unable to present papers as originally planned.)

Bryan Massingale titled his paper, "The Vocation of the Black Scholar and the Struggle of the Black Catholic Community: Speaking the Truth to—and from—Dual Traditions." He structured his reflection by first considering the