

WOMEN'S SEMINAR IN CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY

- Topic: Are the CTSA and Feminist Theologies Reconciled?
Is there a Continuing Role for the Women's Seminar
in Constructive Theology in the CTSA?
- Conveners: Gaile Pohlhaus, Villanova University
Elaine Catherine MacMillan, University of San Diego
- Moderator: Dawn Nothwehr, OSF, Catholic Theological Union
- Presenters: Susan Ross, Loyola University Chicago
Cynthia Crysdale, The Catholic University of America
Mary Doak, University of Notre Dame
Meghan Sweeney, Emory University

At the 2003 business meeting of the Women's Seminar the question of the Seminar's future was raised. The topic for this year's Seminar grew out of that discussion. Four panelists were chosen to represent different eras in the Seminar's life and to address the topic questions from these perspectives. All four gave resounding support to the Women's Seminar as did those attending the session. A summary of the Seminar presentations follows.

Susan Ross recounted the origins of the Women's Seminar. A group of women participating in the Theological Anthropology Section of the CTSA envisioned a CTSA seminar with a specifically feminist focus. Since its inception, the Women's Seminar, which was born out of that vision, has provided an important forum for a wide range of feminist theological scholarship. The Seminar, in Ross's estimation, remains one of the few settings at the CTSA where feminist theory and praxis are discussed annually. To illustrate her point, she noted that of the forty four sessions offered at the 2004 CTSA only three addressed women's issues specifically. Despite the increased presence and participation of women at all levels in the CTSA, the Women's Seminar remains an important forum for women's voices and feminist scholarship at the CTSA. Also, because it is scheduled prior to the conference, it does not compete with any other program items. Thus, women are able to attend, and they do, in numbers. This "sacred time" needs to continue.

Like Ross, Cynthia Crysdale argued that the Women's Seminar played, and continues to play, an important role at the CTSA and in the Academy at large. One of the strengths of the Seminar is that it provides a forum for scholars to claim both their Christianity and their feminism. She recounted the challenges that she and other women encountered as they struggled to negotiate a male-dominated Academy during the 1970s and 1980s and, at the same time, also struggled to find a place where they could combine their faith and their feminism. The Women's Seminar at the CTSA was one of the few places in the Academy where it was possible to be a feminist and a woman of faith. Just as it provided a safe haven for her and other women in the 1980s to discuss

feminist issues openly, she contends that it provides a similar haven for feminist scholars today.

Mary Doak, echoing Ross and Crysedale, also celebrated the fact that feminist scholarship is the central focus of the Seminar. It is the one place at the CTSA where participants can be assured of being exposed to recent currents in feminist thought and can participate in serious theological debate about them. With respect to the question about reconciliation she observed that feminist theory and praxis are not well integrated into our theological institutions and that far too many students can complete a graduate education in theology without encountering either. The Women's Seminar renders service to those who experience this lack in theological education for it is a forum for serious feminist debate. Doak supports the Seminar as an important forum for feminist scholarship and as a place for networking at the CTSA.

Meghan Sweeney, the most recent member of the Seminar, observed that there has not been any reconciliation between feminist theology and patriarchal theology. 'Mainstream' theology continues to be 'male stream' theology and she questions whether reconciliation between feminist and patriarchal theology is possible. Because of this, she, too, endorsed the ongoing need for the Women's Seminar in Constructive Theology.

All four panelists raised thought-provoking questions which launched us into an animated discussion. Some of these questions included: How have things changed in the Roman Catholic Church? Even when feminist texts are added to reading lists, has theology, as a discipline, changed? What did God call us to when we began our theological studies and what does God call us to now in our theological vocations? How have feminist theory and praxis been integrated into graduate theological education? How can curricula be transformed? How are alternative voices heard? Is there a future for feminism in a hierarchical system?

Prior to the business meeting, the Women's Seminar in Constructive Theology presented Dr. Ellen Leonard, CSJ with the Ann O'Hara Graff Memorial Award. Dr. Leonard is the first Canadian recipient of the award.

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