



COMMENTARY

Weaving our theologies together

by GAIL ALLAN

Women Doing Theology in Canada was the culmination of a dream. Women have long sought space to speak of our relationships to the Divine in the context of the histories and struggles, visions and values, differences and connections that constitute the specificity of our life in Canada. Gathered in Winnipeg were women who were among those who first claimed a place for feminist theologies in Canada, and younger women asking new questions (along with some enduring ones) out of new experiences of struggle and new visions for the future. We were women formed in diverse contexts of what constitutes “Canada,” meeting across differences of language, race, culture, sexual orientation, faith tradition, regional and global definitions of “home.” To be together was harder, more complex, and infinitely richer than some of us could have predicted from our first ventures into feminist theology 25 or more years ago.

As we worked together Sunday afternoon to gather the strands of our experiences from the plenary sessions, workshops and worship, it became clear that the challenges of speaking and acting within the tension of difference and connection was a common and vital theme. We spoke of the need for deconstruction and reconstruction of theologies bearing the legacies of colonialism, racism and heterosexist privilege, of moving beyond the hierarchical dualisms which have shaped our patterns of thought and ways of life. In our attempts to engage difference in more than theory, we discovered painful evidence of how deeply inculcated within us are these dichotomies and the structural sin which comes to life among us as exclusion, misrepresentation, and unexamined assumptions, power and privilege.

What we moved toward in Winnipeg was the willingness to claim disruption as a gift, to explore gaps and contradictions, and to be, like the Canaanite woman, “exhaustingly willing” to wear down barriers to justice and well-being for all. As we seek ways to live in tension and ambiguity, we are learning to be more multi-vocal in our theologies and the truths we

tell, without relinquishing common claims for justice, mutuality, compassion and well-being.

In Winnipeg, we identified as elements in the theologies of women in Canada multi-cultural and multi-faith perspectives, connected to the land and to our histories within and outside Canada, but willing to risk and challenge the myths created about Canadian community. These were named as theologies of transformation, courage, integration, diversity, interaction, healing and reconciliation – inviting a “radical inclusion” that honours personal and political, theory and praxis, voices from the margins and the complexity of the contexts we represent. Multiple, too, are our modes of doing theology: in storytelling, art and ritual, in new, cross-textual readings of scripture and tradition, in historical and social analysis, we seek “ongoing communal revelation.”

“Energized, graced, formed and awakened” by the stories shared, we affirmed that theology is created in “being and doing,” together weaving webs of fragility and strength which hold in creative tension connection and disruption, brokenness and reconciliation. In one of several musical reflections on the weekend, we were invited to sing “we’ve got tension and harmony in our hands; we’ve got struggle and hope in our hands.”

Weaving new life together from these contrasting threads will continue to be a challenge for women doing theology. We can no longer assume a common vision, community or sisterhood as women. We need to work at change in ways that confront the harm we do each other, and contest the history of relations of power in which women have been differently located – privileged and oppressed – in intersections of gender, race, class, religion, sexuality, age and ability.

Theology as an exercise in “sacred, active listening, prayer, presence and passion” compels us into a process of “resisting, thinking, feeling, doing” in which the possibilities of mutuality, respect, justice, and transformation are glimpsed within the multiplicities, differences and complexities of our lives. We gathered in Winnipeg to create such a Spirit-filled space of justice and hope, and departed with energy and commitment to continue to challenge, affirm, and empower one another.



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