



BOSTON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

# Anna Howard Shaw Center

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## Women's wounds focus of conference

Healing the Hurting Heart was the theme of this year's Women in the World conference that kicked off on Wednesday night, March 15, with a dinner and the first of two presentations dealing with the story of the hemorrhaging woman found in Matthew 9.

Dr. Jennifer Knust, Assistant Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at Boston University, talked about the struggles of retranslating the Bible to fit into the feminist perspective.

"Bible is androcentric and I'm not convinced that any amount of feminist biblical interpretation will make it better," Knust said.

In her wrestling with the story of the hemorrhaging woman Knust turned to feminist literary criticism and how the story can be about a bold woman and a male rescuer.

Thursday morning got under-



Photo by Adam Randazzo

Dr. Shelly Rambo, Dr. Jennifer Knust and Dr. Karen Westerfield Tucker were the guest speakers at the Women in the World conference hosted by the Anna Howard Shaw Center on March 15-16, 2006.

way at Marsh Chapel where more than 30 students, faculty and alums participated in a worship service designed by Dr. Grace Cajiuaat in honor of the 50 year anniversary of

women's ordination in the United Methodist Church. The service was originally designed as part of an assignment for a class taught by

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## 'Engaging the Bible' to be in stores this fall

The twentieth anniversary Women and the Word conference has raised the consciousness of those of us here at the Anna Howard Shaw Center in terms of how we

envision the twenty-first century ministry. As a result, we worked hard to put our thoughts into action. We began with the title, transforming Women and the Word into Women in the World to reflect how we embrace

**From the  
director**

our vision and reach out for the world more intentionally and consciously. We shifted our emphasis from women's preaching to women's multicultural ministry, taking serious steps toward dealing with our multicultural multiracial ministerial issues.

To support this commitment, the Shaw Center has established a self-care and resource group for female ministers who do their ministry in multicultural multiracial

congregations or with cross-cultural appointments. This group's members have found their own ways to support each other and share the complexities of this ministry.

Another joyous accomplishment is that, this fall, we will see the fruits of our labor in our first multicultural ministry commitment, a multicultural biblical lecture and study series, "A Mosaic of Voices." From the

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Photo by Adam Randazzo

Sarah McQueen, Sam Johnson, Septemmy Lakawa, Katherine Mitchell, Susan Feurzeig, Liz Whitlinger and Katherine House perform during the Thursday morning worship service at Marsh Chapel.

## CONFERENCE

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Dr. Shelly Rambo and was one of two student contributions to the conference. Susan Forshey provided paintings and a meditation that participants could look at independently.

After the worship service, Dr. Karen Westerfield Tucker, Professor of Worship at Boston University, spoke about designing infertility rituals when out of her own need discovered that none existed in the UMC Book of Worship.

Westerfield Tucker said there was a notable lack of texts in official, feminist and grassroots theolo-

gy that deal with infertility. Since that time a ritual written by Westerfield Tucker and her husband has been included in the Book of Worship.

Rambo, Assistant Professor of Theology, returned to the hemorrhaging woman but looked at the story from the trauma perspective.

Rambo emphasized that the exchange between the woman and Jesus is a bodily encounter; Jesus is portrayed as witness, not a healer; and "witness takes place at the critical intersection of death and life, revealing how death and life are inextricably linked."



Photo by Adam Randazzo

Dr. Grace Cajiuaat sings during the worship service that she designed for the conference.



Photo by Jonathan Bailey

Student Susan Forshey displayed paintings at the conference, which included a meditation that was available to attendees.

## Turning to literary criticism for clues

Dr. Jennifer Knust, Assistant Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at Boston University, opened up the conference by looking at the story of the hemorrhaging woman and the way that the Bible challenges, inspires and heals but sometimes hurts those who turn to it for guidance.

“What I’m trying to do here is to just sort of take my temperature as to where I am right now as a feminist biblical scholar. And the kinds of things I’m struggling with as I look to this Bible to, in a sense, heal me, which is what I was taught to do growing up.”

Knust began by tackling the way that women have to retranslate the Bible in order to find themselves within the text.

“In whatever language one reads (the Bible) the result is the same: hostility toward women,” Elizabeth Cady Stanton said in the

nineteenth century.

Knust quoted Elizabeth Costelli, who said: “Many women who are grounded in the Christian tradition have spent much of their religious lives in radical acts of translation of the tradition. One might ask at what cost.”

“Quite frankly, I agree with the Elizabeths. The Bible is androcentric and I’m not the least bit confident that any amount of woman-centered, Christian feminist interpretation can ever make it better,” Knust said.

“How can I as a self-professed pastor and scholar find and celebrate what is liberating and healing in this Bible without involuntarily reinstating what I know has been hurtful and harmful to me and to so many others?”

Turning to the story of Jesus and the hemorrhaging woman in Mark, Knust tackled the traditional

feminist interpretation of Jesus as challenging patriarchal authority.

“Finally a guy, need I say a divine healing guy, who doesn’t seem to have a problem with menstruating women. In fact, Jesus doesn’t even register their potentially defiling state. He isn’t angry with the woman for boldly touching him. When she falls down before him trembling he simply proclaims: ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well.’ He doesn’t say anything about the little girl’s age or her gender. That’s the author of Mark who makes these points. Jesus isn’t disgusted, he isn’t ashamed and he doesn’t hesitate to welcome either the woman or the girl.”

“Though this an attractive reading ... It is not, I now think, without problems. It is a hazardous reading. No matter how useful or exciting it may seem within certain contexts.”

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# Infertility rituals designed to fill the gaps

Dr. Karen Westerfield Tucker, Professor of Worship, spoke Thursday morning about the need for rituals dealing with infertility because of the overlooked people who are dealing with the issue and rituals that typically only apply to stillbirth situations.

Tucker noted that news media often leaves the human reality related to reproductive issues at the clinical, scientific presentation.

“But there is in the area of human reproduction a matter that invariably puts before us the human face because without exception it is found within every Christian congregation. ... It rarely makes the national or international news and though it might be newsworthy at the local level often times the subject is left unspoken, either because of embarrassment or grief or fear of inappropriateness. This concern has been felt in each succeeding generation as women and men take up the lament of the biblical matriarch Rachel who cried: Give me children or I shall die.”

There are three categories or conditions associated with reproductive loss: infertility, which affects women and men equally where reproductive ability is impaired for a variety of reasons; miscarriage or spontaneous abortion, which is defined as loss of pregnancy up to 24 weeks; and stillbirth or fetal death from the twenty-fourth week until term or shortly after delivery.

Where are the churches and their pastoral rites at the time of need?

Loss through stillbirth most often addressed through ritual because funeral liturgy can be adapted. Particularly since physical



Photo by Adam Randazzo

Dr. Hee An Choi, director of the Anna Howard Shaw Center, and Dr. Simon Parker, professor of Hebrew Bible, listen to Dr. Karen Westerfield Tucker talk about creating rituals to fill the gaps.

remains may be available for interment or burial. Roman Catholic order of Christian funerals includes rites for children and those who die before baptism.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America suggests using Psalm 130, Romans 14:7-9 and three prayers. The United Methodist’s “Service for Hope After Loss of Pregnancy” was designed along the lines of the funeral rite, but placed in healing section. Written by Tucker.

There are several resources that can be found on the Internet or various ecumenical sources, but theological scrutiny must be applied and tweaking is often necessary to fit the occasion.

When it comes to infertility there is a notable absence of ritual texts in official, ecumenical, feminist and grassroots theology.

“Does this mean there is no interest? Certainly not,” Tucker said remarking that she had often been approached to write rituals for those experiencing infertility.

According to Tucker, there is room for self-generated ritual and newly emergent rituals in absence of churchly rites. But the church also has grounds to reclaim rituals for reasons of pastoral care and claims of an incarnational faith.

Prior to the 17th century, the church addressed the issues of infertility but later became ritually mute on the topic. But with new understandings of marriage and women’s roles the rituals cannot be reused.

But what of the woman who had failed to become a joyous mother? The unfortunate woman might be forced to do penance for her part in the loss of the child.

# Integrating trauma on the healing road

In the final presentation on Thursday afternoon Dr. Shelly Rambo, assistant professor of theology, focused on the story of the hemorrhaging woman as interpreted through the dynamics of trauma, what she refers to as a traumatic hermeneutic.

Recognizing the trauma is a contested term, Rambo defined it as cutting “through a person’s capacity to understand and to function in the world and one of the distinctive marks of it is that the person feels continually threatened but is, in many cases, unable to identify the origin of that threat.”

The reliving of that event is a continual threat to the survivor because they are unable to fully integrate the experience when it occurred.

“The force and extremity of trauma results in a crisis of reintegration in which the human person, in Bessel van der Kolk’s words, is unable to reset herself.”

Rambo focused on three aspects around trauma: time, reliving vs. remembering and narrative.

Because our bodies and mind are unable to prepare for a trauma it can overwhelm, which causes integration to have a temporal dimension. At the time of the event, it is impossible to know the full impact of the event and survivors may repress memories or dissociated themselves from the event.

The symptom most people are aware of with trauma is the flashback. War veterans were studied and it was noticed that the past seemed to be invading the present. The veterans were reliving “in vivid and visual ways” not remembering the past event. The body was exper-



Photo by Jonathan Bailey

Students watch as Septemmy Lakawa performs a ritual that she designed to remember military action in her home country: the Philippines.

riencing what the mind could not grasp.

“Traumatized people suffer speechless terror,” Judith Hermann writes. People who have been traumatized are unable to find the words to express the trauma, which is why talk therapy is important.

However, citing Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, Rambo talked about the bodily memory of trauma and how “It is critical to reestablish a sense of physical safety.”

And how does this relate to the hemorrhaging woman?

“I want to emphasize three things about the story of the hemorrhaging woman. First, the exchange between the woman and Jesus is a bodily encounter. Second, Jesus is witness, not healer, in the story. Third, witness takes place at the critical intersection of death and life, revealing how death and life are inextricably linked,” Rambo said.

The exchange between Jesus and the woman emphasizes healing power and energy transferred through touch. At the touch, she is immediately healed and Jesus immediately notices something has happened. The profound moment is not in Jesus’ knowledge of what happened but recognition that something happened.

Jesus is in an unusual situation because he is not the healer in this story it is the woman’s faith that has healed her. The woman assumes a posture not of guilt, but one that is ecstatic and energized.

Rambo suggests that Jesus is not witnessing a penitent woman, but one whose bleeding body is coming back to life. She is reconnect through the bodily presence of Jesus. Jesus is witnessing the divine in her.

“A life is emerging from death but the nature of that life is never the same as it was before.”

## KNUST

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Knust pointed out that it can be dangerous because it presents a serious misreading of Mark and preserves Jesus as a divine hero.

In an attempt to wrestle with this Knust turned to feminist literary criticism and the work of Judith Ruth, who defined narrative as requiring a male (active) role and a female (passive) role that in the end will unite, saying that narrative as an idea already conforms to a metaphorically gendered, hetero-

sexual arrangement.

This dilemma remains despite switching of gender because the woman becomes the active (male woman) character and Jesus becomes the passive (female man) character.

“All the ethical imperatives that this interpretation demands can be and will be achieved once and for all. It is only here in this place of ambiguity where I allow myself to love and hate - and be indifferent - I love and hate my tradition all at the

same time that I have been able to find some semblance of the healing that I have needed.”

“As pastors and scholars this, in the end, is where our greatest responsibility lies. Conveying that our interpretations and our solutions are partial, not final. Even as we pursue them passionately; as we pursue liberation passionately as we are able living in an already, not yet world. ... Where the cure will not be final, but our passions will not be squelched.”

## BOOK

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spring of 2004 to the fall of 2004, we, in conjunction with the Center for Congregational Research and Development, sponsored and developed this amazing program which brought a range of speakers to campus. In order to hear African-American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian/Asian-American, gay/lesbian, and Caucasian feminist voices, we invited five prominent scholars: Dr. Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, Dr. Carter Heyward, Dr. Aida Irizarry-Fernandez, Dr. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and Dr. Kwok Pui-lan. In a one-day workshop, each shared their particular experiences, working to engage participants in a new way of thinking. As a support community, we increasingly needed these distinctive perspectives to diversify the Christian tradition to all aspects of the Christian community no matter the race, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Through this one-year program, we helped to strengthen the dialogue among women in the field of theology and ministry. Many students, ministers, and professors

participated in lectures and small group discussions, and, as a result, we have all learned how better to listen to each other and also how to understand our differences and uniqueness in various ways. By the end of the lecture series, we began to imagine our future of multicultural multiethnic ministry.

After receiving great evaluations and wonderful feedback, we decided to publish these important lectures so that we could share our experience with a wider audience who could benefit from our commitment. This new book, *Engaging the Bible*, is coming out this fall (2006) from Augsburg Fortress Press. In April 2006, two co-editors, Dr. Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, professor of Hebrew Bible at Boston University and chairperson of the Anna Howard Shaw Center Board, and Dr. Hee An Choi, director of the Anna Howard Shaw Center at Boston University, finished the final draft.

*Engaging the Bible* is comprised of five chapters, one for each of the lecturers in the “A Mosaic of Voices” series. In the first part of

each chapter, the contributors explain how they see their own traditions and circumstances and how they reflect on their struggles in those contexts. Using specific biblical texts, the second part of each chapter illustrates how the contributors understand a particular Bible passage and interpret it through their own perspectives. After each chapter, this book also provides several Bible study questions that can be used for self-study or for church Bible study groups in local church settings.

This book is a significant product of our own vision for multicultural ministry and shows our serious commitment to the real world. It is our sincere hope that this book can help many churches and ministers to understand the diverse lives that people live and empower our understanding of the Bible in abundant and amazing ways. The year of 2006 marks the twenty-eighth anniversary of the Anna Howard Shaw Center, and we will continue to renew our visions and support our communities and churches. Thanks be to God!

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