

Report from the Central and Eastern Europe Conference 2010

"Dignity of the Woman as Dignity of the Human Being. Relationships of Theology and Anthropology of the Central and East-European View" (Budapest, 26–29th August 2010)

Background

The Hungarian section of the Society has denoted its readiness for organizing of the regional conference ESWTR 2010 at the regional conference in Cluj/Klausenburg (Romania) in September 2008. The work about the conception has begun a month later already.

Targets were set, in which the members of Hungarian section decided to cooperate. All agreed, that they are able to build and enrich the Central and East-European contacts heavily loaded of historical reasons through humane, real and in the same time objective encounters.

There was a new association established with the name „Magyarországi Teológusnők Ökumenikus Egyesülete” (Ecumenical Association of the Female Theologians in Hungary) in order to coordinate of the preparation. The theologian women made efforts to build up communication with “Male Theology” and cooperation with all levels of the Hungarian society from the beginning. That’s why men, who were sympathetic to the society’s goals, were invited to a meeting to share thoughts and opinions with the members.

Many-sided common work has begun to allow both the ecumenical dialogue among Christian churches and the communication between Christians and not-Christian communities in Hungary. Woman were induced and encouraged by the association to make further researches in ethnical-religional area in the same time. During these activities, it would be clear, that this proposition can gain neither new members nor sympathetic people or sponsors without real openness. So the main task of the association – sub serving of getting better the society – can be heavily fulfilled without the help of the official press or cannot be fulfilled at all.

A general trial: a workshop took place to aid the effective preparation in winter 2010. Woman from Romania und Hungary reported about their newest local researches.

About the Participants and Sponsors of the Regional Conference

The Evangelical-Lutheran Theological University of Budapest served as the location of the Central- and East-European theological workshop between 26-29th of August. The topic of the conference was: "Dignity of the Woman as Dignity of the Human Being. Relationships of Theology and Anthropology of the Central and East-European View."

The presenters and the participants, beyond the Hungarian organizers, were coming from Albania, Croatia, Czech Republic, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, The conference was honoured with the presence of Prof. Angela Berlis (Germany), president of ESWTR, who not only took part tirelessly in each program, but also held a topical presentation about ordination of women. Lot of people were waiting for this lecture with special interest – among them the Hungarian press.

The Association of Female Theologians in Hungary was requested to give an interview to the Radio Vaticana next before the conference. Three women – representatives of the Roman Catholic, the Evangelical-Lutheran, and that of the Jewish Theology as well – took part in this occasion. Other women, with the president of ESWTR, Prof. Dr. Angela Berlis among them, were asked about the topical subjects of the female theology by the Hungarian television programme „Catholic Chronicle” during the conference.

Lot of newspapers (e.g. the Hungarian daily press) reported the conference to be a positive social event. Thanks to these efforts for openness, the conference was also visited and supported by private persons. We are hoping that the voices of the press give an echo that will be alive after the conference as well.

Women from different religious communities of Central and East-Europe took part in the conference. Lectures and minilectures were presented by Catholic, Evangelical-Lutheran, Reformed, Old Catholic and Orthodox women as well, and so by a representative of the Jewish Theology, too. You could greet 45-50 women during the conference altogether.

The main sponsors of the conference were: The Ministry of Culture and Education of Hungary, and the Foundation Renovabis (Germany). Further supporters: Communicantes, Weltgebetstag der Frauen; Evangelischen Frauenhilfe in Westfalen; Schweizerischer Katholischer Frauenbund, furthermore advocating members and private persons who find the cause important.

Some Examples and Topics of Lectures and Minilectures:

- Dignity of Woman is a Precondition to the Dignity of Man – Thoughts based on Gen 12,12-20 and its parallels (Prof. Dr. Jutta Hausmann)
- Anthropology-Feminism: Hermeneutical considerations on theology which is necessarily contextual (Dr. Ferenc Patsch SJ)
- Anthropological Arguments to the Ordination of Women in the History of Church (Prof. Dr. Angela Berlis)
- Dignity of the Woman according to St. Cyril of Alexandria (Prof. Dr. Lucretia Vasilescu);
- Dignity of Woman and Book of Ezekiel (Dr. Gyöngyi Varga)
- Sexual Identity Consciousness Based Theological Anthropology (Prof. Dr. Elzbieta Adamiak)
- The One and Indivisible Human Dignity in Thought of István Bibó (Dr. Andras Csepregi)
- The Dignity of Women in the New Testament „Household Codes” (Dr. Márta Cserhádi)
- John Paul II’s Concept of Feminity. Philosophical vs. theological aspects
- Towards an East-European Religious Gender Anthropology...
- Changing Female Roles in the Church and in the World
- Siberia: Female and Children’s Lots - Banishment of Polish Women in the World War II.
- JHWH as Parent: Image of God as Father and Mother in the Book of Psalms
- Problem of Sin in the Relationship to Each Other Among the Main Characters in Tolstoy’s Resurrection
- Social Legitimation of Jewish Women in the Jewish Community of Pest at the Beginning of the 19. century
- Everyday life of Women in a Restricted Area in Albania
- etc.

Alternative Forms of Communication during the Conference

Women could enrich each other not only through their lectures and minilectures, but also through common spiritual experiences by the means of well prepared, emotionally touching morning liturgies. The picture meditation of the Transsylvanian women, brought as a sign of female solidarity, was impressing especially. The participants could unfold their creativity and emotions in the common cultural evening events as well. They did not seat there only as passive viewers, but took part actively in folkdances and music events.

Women shared their experiences in small teams as far as the work and personal development possibilities in the area of theology and cultural anthropology were concerned. They stated, that there was not any positive change in this area until that time.

About the Scientific Results

There were two short summaries made about the scientific results of the conference in the last morning. The participants tried to formulate their expectations about the female theology and its special language as well.

It was recognized as follows:

- the lectures covered a wide range of scientific areas, so it was impossible to unfold a detached discussion to the several lectures;
- the liturgies should match the main subject of the conference in the future
- the dignity of women was approached from a negative retrospection as women’s passion

It was pointed out to the women problem in general, that it was mentioned in positivistic- scientific context always negatively, that is, it could not be caught technologically. So the dignity of women could be treated only as a part of women problem from theological, ethnic-religious or anthropologic

point of view. Only a scientific perspective would be able to describe a women problem like dignity of women positively. It is the feministic aspect that considers the specific circumstances of being a woman. The technology applying nowadays science is standing for general-purpose and manifests itself in androgyny. The universality of the scientific language featured the lectures held by the male presenters of the conference, while the female lectures handled specific female situations. This point of view is not or only marginally taught in Central and East-Europe. It is not easy to unchain ourselves from fetters of male theology or similar disciplines, and to search for feministic methods of research and for feministic language of description as well.

Experiences of our own and specific female approach should feature the interpretations of bible topics, that are even of that reason very important because they can affect adjustments and behaviours also among secularised living conditions.

History and instruction of church – if they will be analysed critical-feministic and consider what being a woman in the church and in the society currently means – could build further research area of female science.

Feministic language of analysis always seems to be critical. It criticizes patriarchal behaviour, classic theology and queries values such as marriage and myth of dignity of women in the form interpreted by the official church. Ina Praetorius was quoted in this connection: „... women can gain a lot if they recognize that the values they had accepted without question for a long time and thought as being true and right, these values represent the truth of an order that is not their own.” (Quotation from “Sketches to the feministic Ethic”)

There are parallels between feministic theology and not-theological feministic approaches. It could mean that you could build on common bases e.g. remembering historical method or criticism of the existing ethnic norms in an ethnic-religious community. You could also work together in certain circumstances; however there are a lot of differences between the two directions of feminism nowadays.

Women take over researches in archaeology and that of sexual relations of the biblical language and other relevant texts more and more self-consciously. They show basic knowledge not only in the area of theology but in the area of philology, philosophy, anthropology, psychology at the same time. Their knowledge should not be panned, to be contrary; we should work further on our way of expression and didactic methods.

Feministic theology was described as a contextual science once (Elzbieta Adamiak, 2003). Surely, female theologians of Eastern Europe have the context of their own, both with its advantages and disadvantages, but lectures showed at the same time that we have common eastern-middle-western-European roots and have to live out of them, and this fact should mean a continuous scientific communication.

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