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Site Visit 2: Faith Meets Faith: Women in Abrahamic Religions Seminar

On Thursday, April 23rd, an interfaith dialogue was held on the Lorain County Community College Campus in the Spitzer Conference Center's Grand Room. The seminar's panel included three women of different faiths: Rabbi Lauren Werber (Judaism), Reverend Mary C. Carson (Christianity), and Ms. Julia Shearson (Islam). Although I'm currently indecisive in regards to my own religious beliefs, this comparative seminar involving women's significance was very informative and intriguing. In different times throughout history, as well as in religious affiliations, women were marginalized in numerous ways. These three speakers presented points in time that prove otherwise, and/or that women were/are still an essential part of society.

Rabbi Werber, of the Temple B'nai Abraham, started off her contribution to the seminar by mentioning how battle and sacrifices were only intended for men while women were seen as property. Despite that, plenty of significant female individuals were discussed, such as Hebrew midwives who were helping young boys, preventing their drownings and saving them from such fates, then lying to the pharaoh. Although the courage to display such acts were admirable enough, nobody is sure whether the midwives were Egyptian or Israelite. Regardless of their ancestral background, the act itself, from my perspective, is considered extremely honorable. Additionally, Rabbi Werber explained how women were inferior to men, but worked around the law in different ways and found power. Due to differing gender roles, women were not ordered to exercise time bound commandments, such as praying, due to the other responsibilities such as raising children. Women were responsible for family purity, food purity, and the lighting of the holiday candles. An excellent example of women's significant influences would be how, like a respected first lady, Burea advised her rabbi husband. Nowadays, women in Judaism are also involved with secular life, like Sarah Conan (doctor) and Sarah Bernhardt (actress).

Reverend Mary C. Carson, of the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer, informed the audience about Christianity within the “Western World.” Her presentation involved Mary Magdalene, who was the first Apostle. She informed us of her religious affiliation’s beliefs about how women went on Easter morning to the tomb and participated in other crucial occurrences that were part of the foundation of Christianity. In the New Testament, Paul, the author, doesn’t even mention the women. In scripture writings 1 Corinthians 13:34 and 1 Timothy 2:12, women are openly marginalized:

“Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law.”

“But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.”

Reverend Carson mentioned a plethora of significant Christian women throughout history: Hildegard von Bingen, Harriett Ross Tubman, Isabella Thoburn, as well as Reverend Antoinette Brown Blackwell.

Ms. Julia Shearson, the Executive Director of Cleveland & Northern Ohio Chapter Council on American-Islamic Relations, displayed Quranic verses that displayed equality:

“Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has faith, verify them (him). We give a new life that is good and pure, and We will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their actions.” (16:97)

Rather than proposing that women brought sin into the world, Islam suggests that in the story of Adam and Eve, both sexes sinned and both are responsible. Despite modern stereotypes, the encouragement of modesty involving behavior and dress in order to value individuals based on their abilities and character rather than whether or not they are physically appealing or desirable.

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Although my previous site visit report was mostly focused on other observations, due to this being a seminar, I included some of the information that was essential to absorb the experience and seminar itself. The seminar lasted about an hour and a half, including closing questions. There were about 75 people at the event, including the speakers and professors. The male to female ratio was rather even and there were two children. Rabbi Werber wore a yamaka, while Ms. Shearson wore her head scarf. The seminar was a very informative and interesting event in which three influential women who were involved with different religious backgrounds merged together in a creative collaboration.