

Mikayla Walbom

Professor Young Ko

RELG 181-Site Visit #2

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## FAITH MEETS FAITH

### *Women in Abrahamic Religions*

I affiliate myself as an Evangelical Christian. I attended this seminar for my second site visit assignment. This took place on Thursday, April 23<sup>rd</sup> at 7:00 in the evening. It lasted just under two hours. It was held in the Spitzer Conference Center Grand Room. This is a large building on Lorain County Community College campus right next to the Stocker Arts Center. The room was modern in decoration and style. Rows of chairs were set up; there was a table with an assortment of cookies for attendees as well as a table with coffee to drink. There was a platform at the front of the room with a podium at which each woman and Professor Young Ko stood individually to speak.

I am not at all good at estimating attendance but I would have to say there were between one hundred to two hundred people at this seminar. I would also estimate there to be more college students rather than older people and men and women were about equal in attendance. I saw many older couples seated together.

Before I begin to report what I observed and what was said at the seminar, I would like to inform Professor Ko that at times I was unable to understand what the

speaker was saying. Mostly when they spoke of terms within their culture/religion, I was not able to understand the term nor could I even begin to write it down. I just wanted to say this because there is a chance that some things I report will be spelled incorrectly. The Christian woman and the Muslim woman used PowerPoint presentations to aid them while they spoke so it was easier for the audience to take notes. This did help significantly. In addition, before the women spoke, Professor Young Ko made a very nice introduction for each one, informing the audience of the woman's work in the past and current work. Now, I will begin to give an explanation of each woman and what they presented.

The first woman to speak was Rabbi Lauren Werber. She belongs to the Jewish faith and attends the Temple B'nai Abraham. She was dressed casually and wore a *yarmulke* upon her head. She first talked about Biblical Judaism and how women were very absent in the religion back then. Men were always in charge and women were marginalized. She mentioned several Biblical women such as Sarah, Rebecca, Esther, and Zolofahad's daughter (I know I spelled that name completely wrong but I tried from how she pronounced it). She then talked about the Talmud which explains the roles of men and women; "separate but equal" is what she said. She gave the audience three key points in the Talmud. The first is purity. This is about keeping the communities pure, for example when a woman is experiencing her menstrual period, she must be outside the city walls because it was seen as an impurity. The second was obligation. This explains how a woman cannot be obligated to do anything. Rabbi Werber told us how this can be used as an excuse, making it easy for women to say they cannot fulfill anything. And the third point was "Men are the problem". I thought this was humorous.

This is about how men must be separate from women during prayer so they are not distracted by the woman from God. This also includes women's clothing and their voices while speaking and singing; it must all be appropriate for the men in order to inhibit any distractions that may arise. Finally Rabbi Werber spoke about women from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to present-day. She mentioned the first female Rabbi who I believe was born in 1902 in Berlin. She became a teacher, enrolled in a seminary, and wrote a thesis on "Can Women be Rabbis". She then became ordained years later. Rabbi Lauren Werber predicts there to be even more women involvement in Judaism in years to come.

The second woman to speak was Reverend Mary Carson. She is of the Christian religion and attends the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer. Rev. Carson spoke solely on women in history. The first was Mary Magdalene who was the first Apostle. Rev. Carson addressed to the audience how Jesus first appeared to women after His resurrection. Paul does not acknowledge women even though they played a vital role as followers of Jesus. She concluded this point with how women were and still are silent in churches somewhere. The second woman was Hilda, Abbess of Whitby in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Hildegard von Bingen was an Abbess in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Harriett Ross Tubman was known as "Moses of her People", 1820-1913. Isabella Thoburn was a missionary to India in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. And finally, Rev. Antoinette Brown Blackwell, 1825-1921. Rev. Carson said that the Episcopal ordination was approved in 1976 and there are now as many women as men in leadership roles in the church.

The third and final woman to speak at the seminar was Ms. Julia Shearson from the Islamic faith. She is the Executive Director at the Cleveland & Northern Ohio

Chapter Council on American-Islamic Relations. In my opinion, Ms. Shearson was by far the most interesting speaker during the seminar. She had my undivided attention when she spoke. I learned more about the Islamic faith than the other two combined. She began by "Dispelling Stereotypes". She did not want us to have the notion that terrorists are Muslim. She stated that those people do not know their own faith and they bring disgrace to their people. One of the PowerPoint slides was "Who are the Muslims?" From this slide I learned that there are approximately 1.5 billion Muslims worldwide. Only 20% of them are Arabs and Indonesia holds the largest Muslim population. The next slide was "Basic Beliefs" in which I learned that Muslims worship one god, there were messengers, there are scriptures, angels, and there is a day of judgement. She mentioned the "Five Pillars" as well but did not go into great detail with them. The slide, "Women in Islam" made several points. Men and women are spiritual equals, women are respected and honored, they have legal rights, they have a duty to seek knowledge, they can take part in community life and politics, and they are to be modest in their attitude and dress, but this includes men also. She read a few verses from the Qur'an about equality. She talked about how in Islam, Adam and Eve are held at equal fault. They both sinned; Eve does not hold the original sin. Mary is the first woman to enter Heaven and raising girls is a way to Heaven. Something I found interesting is that women do not shake hands or hug across genders unless it is with someone they are related. There are arranged marriages but the woman can refuse to marry a man if she pleases. In Islam, it is not about physical appearance. The scarf that the women wear is an act of worship, not a sign of oppression. Motherhood is very important. Men are to treat their wives with respect. Marriage is also very important to

Muslims. Divorce is not favored but if need be, women can initiate the act. Polygamy is not a norm in Islam but it is seen more as a way to take care of widowed women or women that find themselves lost and alone in some way. Domestic violence is unacceptable. In Islam, education is very important. There are women scholars and economic rights for women. There have been four women presidents in Muslim history. She ended her presentation by saying that Muhammad, the Islamic prophet, performed housework. This was a hint to all men in the audience that they should follow Muhammad's lead.

The seminar concluded with questions from the audience for the women that spoke. There was not time for too many questions but the ones that were asked provoked interesting answers from the women. Overall, this was a great experience. It opened my eyes to what others believe and that even though I belong in an Abrahamic religion, what I believe is very different from what these women believe.