Facing Feminism

March 14th, 2012 | Edit
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http://humanitiesinstitute.wfu.edu/events/facing-feminism

Feminism
A word that too often strikes fear into the hearts of many undergraduates. Just hearing it tends to inspire a barrage of difficult questions: What does feminism even mean? Will I be made to feel angry or uncomfortable or just plain confused? Are feminist issues still relevant in the 21st century? Feminism ranks with postmodernism and Marxism as a term that Americans recognize, but often do not understand and are afraid to engage. On a sunny week in mid-March 2012, however, two different groups of scholars, students and community members gathered at Wake Forest to encounter issues of feminism and the important, if often difficult questions it examines.
The first gathering of feminist scholars brought together prominent academics from all across the world. The Lecture Series was a true celebration of feminist theory and the great strides academic pioneers have made in the world of feminist scholarship. The illustrious program featured groundbreaking figures such as Mercy Amba Oduyoye, the premier African feminist theologian, and Ivone Gebara, perhaps Brazil’s best known female theologian. These women, along with representatives from Japan and Europe, spoke on the event’s theme “The Bible and International Feminisms.” The expertise and subjects presented throughout the conference varied in their scope and approach, but all the speakers showcased the importance of addressing feminist issues and showcased the insights available to individuals who are willing to engage with feminist perspectives and frameworks.
Across a parking lot from the excitement of the Trible Lecture Series a much younger group of scholars convened to present their work to a smaller audience. Inspired in part by the Trible theme, over 20 Wake Forest students participated in a symposium addressing the topic of “International Feminisms.” The event was the First Annual Student Research Symposium on Gender and Sexuality. Throughout the afternoon, students from across the university, including representatives from the Divinity School, School of Law and eight undergraduate majors, were honored for the valuable work they are accomplishing within the realm of feminist inquiry. Although they are early in their development as scholars, the student lecturers clearly revealed that the art of complex scholarship is alive and well at Wake Forest. Perhaps in years to come some of these young people will return to their alma mater not as students, but as renowned lecturers and scholars in their own right. All predictions of future glory aside, it was an inspiring week for those fortunate enough to participate in either venue, and if attendees left with more questions than answers they were happy to ask them.

The Phyllis Trible Lecture Series is housed under the School of Divinity. Essays based on the tenth anniversary conference will be published, along with earlier series lectures, in a new book Feminism and Faith: Ecumenical Essays.

The First Annual Student Research Symposium on Gender and Sexuality was sponsored by the School of Divinity, Women’s and Gender Studies and URECA.

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