News

by Heidi Schlumpf

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Susan Ross (left), with Hille Haker, holds Loyola University Chicago's Living Tradition Award. (Courtesy of Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage)

Feminist theologian Susan Ross was honored with Loyola University Chicago's Living Tradition Award, which recognizes an emeritus faculty member who exemplifies the integration of Catholic thought into their work. The award was presented April 17 by Loyola's Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage.

In remarks at the award luncheon, colleague Hille Haker said the award was apt because Ross had been both "a defender of the tradition and, at the same time, a defender of critical interpretations when the tradition was abused to conceal power and power relations."

"Women of your generation, female, feminist and lay, had the thorniest way laid out for them in academic Catholic theology," said Haker, who holds the Richard A.

McCormick, SJ, Chair of Moral Theology at Loyola.

"My own generation, only slightly younger, would not have been able to proceed in our own way of doing theology without the group of women like you, Susan, who were as humble as they were stubbornly convinced that their own experiences and voices must have a place in the church as well as in theology," she said.

In addition to teaching in the graduate and undergraduate theology programs, Ross also taught in the women's studies program, the Institute of Pastoral Studies and the Catholic studies Program, and served as the director of the Gannon Center for Women and Leadership. Her master's and doctoral degrees were from the University of Chicago Divinity School.

Among Ross' books are *Anthropology: Seeking Light and Beauty* (2012) and *Extravagant Affections: A Feminist Sacramental Theology* (1998).

She retired in 2019 after 34 years at Loyola.

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Ross also was a former vice president and member of the Board of Editors of Concilium, the international theological journal. She co-edited, with Haker, an issue of the publication on "Women in World Religions" in 2006, in which she argued that women were still more likely to be defined by male theologians, priests, bishops and popes than being listened to as subjects of theology.

Among the questions Ross' work has wrestled with, Haker said, are:

- "Why cannot women have direct sacramental access to God but must go through a male mediator?"
- "Why do the popes love the metaphor of the bride and the bridegroom so much?"
- "What does this feminization of the church and sublimation of the beauty of women while insisting on their ontological difference to men that excludes them from ordination and participation in decision-making tell about the all-male clerical hierarchy?"

Haker quipped: "To be honest, the church could do with someone like Susan as a bishop!"

In accepting the award, Ross especially thanked the religious women who nurtured her vocation as a theologian and encouraged her, even as a high school student, to read, think about and discuss the ideas coming out of the Second Vatican Council.

"Over the years, I have often been asked by students, and sometimes other feminist scholars, how I could be both a feminist and a Catholic. It's a fair question," Ross said. "While I have given various answers over the years, they all come down in some way to the richness of this tradition and the people, especially the nuns, who have embodied this richness in their lives. I am so very fortunate to have been able to immerse myself in this, with all its complexities, and I thank you again for this honor."