

Editorial

Moral Right for the Education of Religious Women: An Instrument for Global Evangelization

Education is one of the basic human rights. Yet, it is denied to millions of people even today. Girl children and women are particularly victims of the denial of this fundamental human right. Although we can say that more girls than ever go to school today, girls continue to face discrimination based on gender and intersections with other factors like ethnicity, religion, caste, poverty, etc.¹ Right to education is of vital importance when we remember that “education is not only a right in itself, but is also the surest way to empower individuals to enjoy all of their human rights. Education paves the way out of poverty and disempowerment, and opens up access to participation in society and in political decision-making.”²

In the ecclesiastical context, the education of women religious raises concern. On the one hand, the growing number of women religious, particularly in Africa and Asia promises new possibilities for the Church and its evangelizing mission. They can serve the Church and society in ministries like education, healthcare, media, etc. On the other hand, educational level of women religious remains deficient to a great extent even today. It seems that religious superiors as well as the hierarchy do not pay sufficient attention to a systematic education of women religious. There is no doubt that there are many women religious who are working in universities, schools, healthcare institutions, etc. Congregations which run educational and healthcare institutions try to prepare their members

¹ <http://www.right-to-education.org/issue-page/marginalised-groups/girls-women>

² http://www.un.org/en/events/women/iwd/2011/pdfs/Infonote_Women_and_the_right_to_education.pdf

for such ministries. However, it has to be considered whether education, especially higher education, is provided as a basic right to all women religious even today.

This is particularly applicable in the case of theological education. For example, specific educational qualifications are expected of priests. But, similar levels of educational qualifications are not demanded of nuns. In general, theological education of women religious is limited to short term course in theology. Higher levels of education remain a privilege of a few, rather than a fundamental right of all. Lack of proper education may be one of the reasons behind the subservient roles that women religious are assigned in the Church's ministry even today. Proper education is not merely a matter of obtaining roles in the Church. Instead, it is necessary so that they may have self-esteem, a sense of self-identity in light of their specific charism, and an awareness of their identity and mission in the evangelizing mission of the Church, 'reading the signs of the times.' This has become an evermore complex task today in a globalized world, driven by technological developments, digital and social media, market economy, secularization, fundamentalist tendencies, terrorism, ecological crisis, etc. Hence, adequate education of women religious is a necessary requirement and right for them to carry out their mission.

The idea of dedicating this issue of *Asian Horizons* for the reflection on the moral right of religious women for education was proposed by James F. Keenan, a member of the editorial board *Asian Horizons*, along with Sr Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, LSOSF, and they together worked on the project. Sr Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike particularly carried forward the work, contacting possible authors. Sadly, Sr Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike died of malaria on 22 February 2018. Before her death, besides writing her own article, she had completed the major work for this issue, collecting articles from most of the authors and editing them, and sending them to me. This project was so dear to her – in fact, on 19 February, just before leaving to the hospital for treatment, she sent me the articles for publication. May God grant her eternal joy!

Articles in this issue address the issue of the education of women religious, from various contexts and perspectives. James F. Keenan, after explaining the genesis and development of this project, points out that education of women religious will considerably enhance the evangelizing mission of the Church, especially taking into account the growing number of vocations in continents like Africa and Asia. He analyses the data regarding the education of women, and argues

that education of religious women will impact the guaranteeing of the moral right of education to women. Pointing out that Africa has suffered setbacks in terms of education, Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike looks at education in East Africa during pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. More than 30% of African women are still illiterate, and women religious also come from this context. She highlights education as a human and moral right for all women as well as men. She underscores that it is imperative that women religious, who are called to proclaim the Word, are empowered through education to carry out this mission. She argues emphatically that, "Women religious need to be utilized not only for services behind the scenes, but also as co-workers and co-leaders."

Emphasising that new evangelization demands from consecrated women a thorough awareness of the theological significance of challenges of our time, Nakato Noelina shows the significance of the theological education of women religious. Theological education, according to her, is necessary for women religious to respond to the questions and issues raised by people living in today's complex world, and to strengthen them in their faith. Arguing that one of the influential factors behind educational poverty is the oppressive traditional gender norms which guide behaviour in both Church and society, Léocadie Lushombo explains the ways such norms obstruct women's education. Drawing inspiration from Catholic social teaching as well as from Martha Nussbaum's cognitive capability theory and Paulo Freire's concept of education as the practice of freedom, Lushombo develops a critical theological reflection on the education of religious women, with particular reference to the Democratic Republic of Congo. Wilhelmina Uhai Tunu discusses the necessity of moral education of religious women for the holistic transformation in Africa. Through moral education, which is a fundamental right, women religious can promote socio-moral transformation in the church and society. Thus, women religious are empowered to participate in the integral and sustainable development for humanity.

Based on Bernard Lonergan's account of cognitional structure and conversion and utilizing William G. Perry's scheme of intellectual and moral development, Ligita Ryliškytė, SJE examines the role of women religious in transformative education. She particularly highlights how women religious can contribute to an educational style that promotes an intellectual, moral, and religious conversion which will facilitate the full actualization of the human capacity for the true and good. Delfo C. Canceran discusses the importance of theological education

of women religious in the Catholic Church, and in particular in the Philippines. He underscores the need of utilizing the resources of women religious in the evangelizing mission, leaving behind our patriarchal mind-set. Thus, the liberating and empowering message of the Reign of God on earth can be communicated more effectively. Pointing out that the prophetic response is the reading of a social situation in the light of God's will and purpose Julie George, SSpS establishes the importance of legal education of women religious. According to her, legal education prepares women religious to practice the ministry of justice, as a means of liberating human beings, especially the discriminated and exploited sections including women, children and poor. Jacob Parappally discusses the importance of holistic education. Holistic education is still insufficient in the present system, and this is particularly true of women's education, since the patriarchal society considers it as a threat to the system, argues Parappally. According to him, this prevents the unfolding of the vocation of women religious as humans as well as the effective actualization of the mission flowing from their vocation as religious. Presenting St Teresa of Avila as an outstanding model for religious women today, Vimala Chenginimattam explains the unique impact women religious could make in the Church and society through their special call and mission. She asserts that it is also timely to explore more about the presence of women and their unique role in the Church.

We have two articles on other themes. Charles E. Curran discusses the Catholic Social Teaching on the Market. He examines whether the positive appreciation of the market in John Paul II is new, and gives directions for the deliberations on the market in future. Johny Thachuparamban argues that Africa, which played a remarkable role in the formation and growth of the Christian faith from its beginning, should be recognised as one of the pillars of Christian faith. His article presents Africa as a significant, living and vibrant repository of Christian faith.

Sincere thanks to James F. Keenan, our editorial board member, and Sr Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, who worked hard to realize this issue on the "Moral Right for the Education of Religious Women: An Instrument for Global Evangelization."

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