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Editorial

Asia's Women Theologians

Over the past two decades, Asian women theologians have been emerging as shapers of theology at the Asian context as well as the global realm. Their groundbreaking works and writings have addressed critical issues in a changing world. Coming from a wide range of expertise in the field of theology, and from an Asian perspective, they contribute to the conversation among women and men in the world church. They are first and second generation of women theologians from Asia who write on a variety of topics and issues, and not only on feminist theology or on women's issues or gender. Many Asian women theologians work in other continents. However, most of them are rooted in Asia in their theologizing. In this issue, we present not only women theologians working in Asia, but those working in other continents as well, who keep alive in their theological thinking their relation with and rootedness in Asia.

This issue does not carry articles on one single topic, but a variety of topics, according to the choice of the authors presented. The aim of this issue of *Asian Horizons* is to present the theological contribution of Asia's women theologians in various theological branches. However, the articles are arranged according to three themes. The first theme is "Women and Issues of Justice"; the second theme is "Religion, Spirituality, Ministry, and Women" and the third theme is "Women and Negotiations in Relationships."

Women and Issues of Justice

Gemma Tulud Cruz, in her article, "Living in the Midst of Dying: Rereading Asian Women's Hidden Transcripts" investigates Asian women's creative strategies of resistance which James Scott names "hidden transcripts" in silence, humour and laughter, stories, songs, and dance. They constitute what Scott calls "politics of disguise and

anonymity among subordinate groups." Taking a stance against the critique of these strategies as accommodating oppression, Cruz asserts that they in fact offer something valuable in articulating women's struggle toward liberation. In constructing a feminist liberation theology, and in particular an Asian feminist liberation theology, these "hidden transcripts" are to be re-read as a theology arising from culture as a site of struggle — the theology of the oppressed, those at the trenches, silenced and marginalized, but not defeated and overcome. There in this site, "there is sound in silence, anger in humour and laughter, and resistance in stories, songs, and dance. Silence speaks, humour and laughter destabilizes, while songs, stories, dance narrate, mourn, and celebrate life's triumphs and tragedies."

The article of Kochurani Abraham, "An 'Expiry Date' for Gender Inequality? A Feminist Theological Query," is premised on the fact of gender inequality in work, the reality of gender violence, and the force of religion in perpetuating gender bias. Writing in the Indian context, against the backdrop of the 2030 agenda of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, Abraham illustrates how work, violence, and religion is gendered, putting women in situations of diminishment and disempowerment. But the impact of feminist theology on women's consciousness has caused a genderquake as Indian women have begun to see themselves not as victims but as actors in shaping their identity and destiny. Unearthing deep layers of patriarchal conditioning and breaking centuries-old tradition, the women see the imperative of setting the expiry date for gender inequality, for their liberation holds strong implications for the rest of humanity and for the entire web of life.

In her article, "Woman's Body: Locus of Asian Feminist Theologizing," Mary John Mananzan, OSB, offers a new way of thinking of the body that overcomes the dualism of the Platonic philosophy. Regarding the body as "sinful" and the spirit as "pure", Platonic dualism as reflected in the writings of Augustine and other Church fathers, has cast a dark shadow on the understanding of the human body, and particularly that of woman, resulting in a long legacy of misogyny. Mananzan reflects on how the woman's body, her vagina and womb, are violated and denigrated by rape, incest, prostitution, and the denial of her reproductive rights. There where she is the bearer of sacred life, she is exploited; there where she carries the cradle of humanity,

she is oppressed. A spirituality of the body, from the perspective of Asian feminist theology and Oriental spirituality that is holistic and integral, as expressed in the synergy of body, breath, and posture in prayer, can reclaim the dignity and value of the human body, especially that of woman, in her utter greatness and glory.

The article of Anthonette Collado Mendoza, "The Feminization of Human Poverty in Asia *vis-à-vis* Integral Human Development: An Ethical Review of the Adequacy of the 'Equality' Agenda" is premised on her assertion that the human development discourse must find a broader moral basis to anchor on. A critical issue of this discourse is the feminization of poverty. Mendoza poses a critique on the reduction of the meaning of poverty to income poverty — a reduction that claims that addressing the income poverty of women is tantamount to addressing gender inequity, notwithstanding the other institutionalized inequities that violate the worth and dignity of women. Referring to *Populorum Progressio*, Mendoza states that authentic human development cannot be less than integral, involving the whole person and every person. It is not limited to material progress, but the development of the whole person, body, mind, and spirit. Citing the principle of common good in *Mater et Magistra*, Mendoza asserts that the equality agenda must seek the full human flourishing of all.

Christina Astorga, in her article, "The Triple Cries of Poor, Women, and the Earth: Interlocking Oppressions in the Asian Context," presents how feminist theology and ecological theology converge with liberation theology. Taking an Asian context, Astorga shows how in the diminishment of women, the exploitation of the poor, and the plundering of the earth, we hear triple cries. Listening to the triple cries and contemplating the rich and profound wisdom of the encyclical letter of the Holy Father Francis, *Laudato sí* (On Care for Our Common Home), Astorga offers a three-fold faith vision in response to the three cries: prophetic lament, gender resistance, and ecological kinship. Amidst the cry of the poor, prophetic lament gives rise to a deep sense of compassion; the cry of women is heard, but in the end it must be women that must let their cry be heard, as they reclaim their agency in gender resistance — the ability to limit, nullify, or overturn structures of power; and the cry of the earth is the cry for a new order of relationship, envisioned by Pope Francis as ecological kinship.

Religion, Spirituality, Ministry, and Women

Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier, in her article, "A Comparative Theology of Religious Diversity in Asian Catholic Perspective," addresses the question on how to hold in balance openness to religious diversity and fidelity to the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the Christian faith. While this question has been often raised, Tiemeier opens a new line of inquiry in the theology of religious diversity drawing broad lessons from Asian Catholic theology, with explicit reference to the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), and engaging in a comparative dialogue with John Henry Newman (1801-1890) and Rita Gross (1943-2015). Based on a critical examination of her sources, Tiemeier argues that future theologies of religious diversity must be multiple, developing in particular ways through concrete, distinct, and local dialogues. There is no place for abstract universalism in a world that is both radically networked and heartbreakingly divided. Religious dialogue must be fluid, open to the provisional, and tolerant of the ambiguous, as it is acutely attentive to the local, where religion is lived and practiced.

The article of Virginia Saldanha, "Leadership of Women: Role and Contribution of Women to Church Ministry," asserts that despite the call of Pope Francis for broader participation of women in the church, including a greater role in decision making, women continue to be corralled in stereotyped roles in the Catholic church. John Paul II's "feminine genius" understood in terms of complementarity only perpetuates the auxiliary and subordinate roles of women. Writing in the Indian context, Saldanha criticizes clericalism as the most dysfunctional aspect of the modern church. It has kept women in a position of infantile subordination to the clergy and has effectively silenced women even in cases of sexual violence by priests themselves. She, however, calls out Indian women for having perpetuated clericalism by their continued subservience to the clergy. She envisions a church that is collaborative, participatory, and inclusive, without the distinctions of caste, class, and gender, as exemplified by the SCC (Small Christian Community), where power and domination are replaced by humble and loving service.

Mary Mee-Yin Yuen, in her article, "Morality and Spirituality of Asian Lay Missionaries: An Asian Feminist Perspective," examines the relation of morality and spirituality based on the life witness of Asian lay missionaries. One of them, Lucia, who has been a lay missionary for almost 20 years, deeply believes that her missionary

journey has been guided by God all the way. Margaret, another lay missionary, lives the close relationship between her prayer life and service. Reflecting on the testimonies of these lay missionaries, Mee-Yin Yuen writes that while the traditional view of mission is one of expansion and domination, a one-way traffic model, feminist missiology views mission as a gift of welcome for all. It is an inclusive missiology of risk that re-imagines the trajectories of the Spirit as reaching out to others across boundaries of faith and race, as well as culture and generation. It is also a missiology that is grounded in the integration of contemplation and moral action. The women lay missionaries live their spirituality in their moral agency, and their moral agency is rooted in their spirituality.

In her article, "A Border Crossing Gospel: The Healing of The Hemorrhaging Woman (Mark 5:21-34), Jung Eun Sophia Park, SNJM, proposes a Border Spirituality, based on her exegetical and hermeneutical work on the story of the hemorrhaging woman. A border story, the narrative of the hemorrhaging woman is inserted between two stories, the story of the possessed man and the story of the daughter of Jairus. Like the man who is possessed by the demons, the hemorrhaging woman is poor and excluded. Like the daughter of Jairus, she is wandering between life and death. The healing of the hemorrhaging woman at the borderland is a cure of one who is ill, poor, and forsaken. And the healing is initiated not by the healer (Jesus) but by the healed (woman) who boldly believed that by touching Jesus's cloak, she would be healed. The cure was sudden and disruptive, in the sense that it radically changes a situation and brings a new burst of hope. The spirituality at the borders shows that healing is empowerment over social barriers and agency for the outcast.

Catherine Punsalan-Manlimos, in her article, "*Bahala Na* and the Filipino/a Faith in God's Providence," explores a hermeneutics of generosity for the Filipino/a *Bahala na* which has long been misconstrued to mean fatalism and indolence. For example, the *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* connects the idea of a creator God who predestines our future. Using the inculturated theology of Filipino theologian Jose de Mesa, Punsalan-Manlimos offers an alternative understanding of this Filipino/a value as expressed in acts of resilience and risk-taking by people in life-defining situations. It is an expression of profound faith shaped by the Filipino experience of the abiding presence of God through centuries of their colonization and through the devastations of their land by the onslaught of nature.

And thus, it is a faith that was born of their struggle as a people and nation. Punsalan-Manlimos concludes that what was first misconstrued of *bahala na* as resignation and powerlessness may actually be enablement and empowerment rooted in an indomitable faith in God, whose love is the final word in life.

Women and Negotiations in Relationships

The article of Cristina Lledo Gomez, "Matrescence and the Paschal Mystery: A Rahnerian Reflection on the Death and Rebirth Experiences of New Mothers of Infants," explores how the meaning of the paschal mystery can be brought to bear on the existential experience of motherhood. Gomez names the feelings of anxiety and inadequacy, as well as the mind-numbing repetitive work of caring for a baby, and the social isolation and invisibility that come with putting on hold one's career as the cross that a woman bears as a mother. But in embracing this cross, one dies to one's old self as a non-mother, and rises to one's new self as mother. Then the daily work of mothering is transformed into an adventure of grace, as one beholds in wonderment this being that is of her own flesh and blood. The moments of resurrection for a mother and child are in the moments of sheer joy in being unconditionally loved. Using Karl Rahner's theology, this article presents the author's theology of mothering.

In her article, "Reclaiming the Space Within: The Resilience, Resolution, and Resistance of Women in Constrained Shared Spaces," Patricia Santos, RJM, uses Umrigar's novel, *The Space Between Us*, to reflect on how deeply entrenched social divisions in Indian society can break the fragile human bonds of friendship and solidarity. Umrigar's narrative tells about the relationship of Sera, a middle class Parsee woman and Bhima, a slum dweller, who was Sera's domestic worker. Their divergent relationship grew not just around the physical and material space of their dwelling, but more around the emotional space of their shared pain, as they both bore in their wounded souls, the pain of their broken marriages. But this life-giving space is unable to sustain itself in the face of adversity brought by an act of deceit and betrayal of Sera's son-in-law, Viraf, who impregnated Bhima's granddaughter. Viraf schemed to get Bhima out of the way, and Sera receded from her. Not yielding to the tragic turn of her circumstances, Bhima forged forward with resistance and resilience, and with hope and courage, as she reclaimed her space within, between, and beyond, toward the space that embraces all.

As usual, there are three articles on topics other than the theme selected for the issue. Norman Tanner, SJ, in his article, "Ordination of Women Deacons," briefly outlines the history of women deacons in the early Church, highlighting their ordination described in canon 15 of the Council of Chalcedon, and concludes that the Catholic Church has been careful not to exclude women from diaconate. In his article, "Exploring the Impact of a Confucian Family-Based Virtue Ethics on Chinese Teenage Girls' Decision-Making in Case of Unplanned Pregnancy," Nsengiyumva Ladislas, SJ attempts to build up a new framework of interpersonal dynamics, exploring the basic internal dynamic framework of traditional and modern Chinese families. Charles Bertille, in his paper, "Religions and Cultures, Resources to Imagine the World," shows how Asia is characterised as a continent of the young, of the poor and of religions and cultures. He argues that the poor, and their cultures and religions can offer the world an alternative vision and model of development.

We hope that this issue on "Asia's Women Theologians," will help the readers appreciate better the theological contributions of Women in and from Asia. Evidently, we do not claim that the list of authors presented here is comprehensive. The authors you meet here are rather representative. There are many more women theologians who are contributing to theology with commitment and passion, with insight and scholarship. This brings new hope and vision on Asian theological horizons.

Christina A. Astorga & Gemma Tulud Cruz
Editors

Asian Horizons, Vol. 10, No. 4, December 2016: Call for Papers

CONSCIENCE

Conscience is a traditional, yet an ever-new theme in theology. Although we are aware of the presence and working of the conscience within us, conscience eludes a strict and clear-cut definition. Vatican II speaks of conscience as “man’s most secret core, and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depth” (GS, 16). Although we speak about the primacy, dignity and inviolability of conscience, in reality we feel constrained by laws and rules. In theological discourses, the relation between the autonomy and inviolability of the conscience and the teaching authority of the Church has been rather tensed and uneasy. Formation of conscience, the process and agents of the formation of conscience, etc. also have been important concerns. Pope Francis’ words in *Amoris Laetitia* that “We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them” (Paragraph, 37) has caught the attention of many and has given a new perspective to the concept of conscience and its formation. December 2016 issue of *Asian Horizons* is dedicated to the discussion on conscience, various issues involved in the understanding and approaches to conscience and the contemporary theological discourse on it.

Suggested Topics (only recommendations, not exhaustive):

Conscience in the Moral Tradition of the Church; Conscience in Light of Psychological Theories; Conscience in the Documents of Vatican II; Conscience in the Magisterial Teaching of the Church; Magisterial Teaching and Freedom of Conscience; Conscience in *Amoris Laetitia*; Formation of Conscience; Conscience and Moral Sense; Conscience in World Religions; Erroneous Conscience/Conscience and Error; Conscience and Social Consciousness; Conscience and Women’s Voices; Freedom of Conscience and Its Limitations; Conscience in Contemporary Theology; Conscience and Conflict Situations

As usual, we welcome other articles on any area of theological interest and research. Please send your articles (4500-5000 words, including the footnotes) at the latest by 15 November 2016. Kindly include the abstract of the article in 150-200 words, 5-7 Keywords and a summary of the CV of the author in 100-150 words.

Themes: 2016-2017

2016: Vol. 10

March: Ethics, Theology and Technology

June: Asia’s Women Theologians

September: Asian Christian Heritage

December: Conscience

2017: Vol. 11

March: *Amoris Laetitia*

June: Protestant Reformation after 500 Years

September: New Faces of Religious Fundamentalism and Violence

December: Asian Christologies