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Notice to all Subscribers/Members:

We would like to sincerely apologize to all our subscribers and members for the delay in the issues for 2014 being published. The relocation of AWRC to another country and consequent unforeseen hurdles have caused delays in printing, publishing and distribution.

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About the Cover

The cover art is by Taiwanese artist Jen-Wen Wang and is called "Telling her story under the tree". She explains her art this way: "There is a spring under the tree. This is a place of peace and encountering, and a place of rest and new beginning. The tree has seen many people and listened to many, many stories. All of us can come to the tree, and drink the fresh water from the spring. Then we will have strength to tell our story, just as who we are. May we all find this place in our life."

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Conversations with Biblical Texts

Despite the uses of new forms of communication today many are realizing that there is no substitute to having a conversation “face to face” or the power and impact of “story-telling”. The most powerful learning and knowledge-making often happens in conversations and dialogues. And throughout history some are termed “learned” when they are able to have conversations with texts of different kinds—religious texts, narratives, philosophical treatises and such.

This issue of IGI is titled “Conversations with Biblical Texts”. Our writers have chosen to converse with biblical texts or have used their own lives as texts to converse with. “Reading texts” is already a conversation with the text. We, as readers, are one partner and the text is the other partner in this “hermeneutical conversation”. As interpreters/readers, we understand and express the text through our own perspectives, understandings, life experiences, cultural and traditional contexts. The text contains an argument, opinion or answer about something. And we, as partners in conversation, try to raise critical questions about it to be able to reflect on what the text is putting forth as its share of the conversation. Our commitments/locations in life influence when we pursue a particular text’s argument, when we revise it for our lives and when we forsake the text’s argument and start a fresh one of our own. So the text becomes for us “a route or passage” that helps our minds to classify and adapt the arguments/events/stories in a text for our own lives, our faith journeys and our decisions how to live in this world. So we need to be alert that, in the process of reflective reading we do not indulge our own proclivities at the cost of the text’s own story/argument. The process of “interrupting ourselves” needs to be conscious, continuous and ongoing because we evolve and our socialised selves are also in continual process of deconstruction and renewal.

Our conversation with a text can be sustained only if we, as interpretive partners, critically and contextually reflect on two aspects: 1) what factors have gone into the text’s knowledge making, and 2) how this text becomes knowledge for us in our contexts. The reader/interpreter takes the responsibility of giving voice and life to what the text is saying. In this way the text acts on the reader and vice versa. Both have a responsibility to the other in this “hermeneutical conversation”. We need to acknowledge that in different ways and for different reasons, the complex processes and contexts that gave birth to a text labelled as “Scripture” are precluded from questioning. Throughout history often the marginalized and vulnerable have been able to break out of the shackles that preclude questioning and challenge the value of scripture or religious texts and contexts that are disempowering and slavish. IGI has tried to follow the tradition of allowing the text to be a “passage” that nurtures space for critical questioning and meaningful dialogue that can transform our lives, contexts and faiths.

In this issue of IGI, writers have conversed with texts from the perspective of their contexts and the issues that pose challenges in/to their cultural and faith contexts. One of our writers Hope Antone converses with the doctrines of “Original Sin”, “the Fall” and the characterisation of Eve as easily deceived and thereby the sinner who brought sin into the world. She laces the different interpretations of the creation story in Genesis 2-3 with challenges to such traditional characterisations that are disempowering to women. Another writer Irene Vinyard Bennett picks

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on the recognition of Eve by Adam as, “human, just like me”, in Genesis 2:23, and uses this as a prism to converse with and reflect on the macabre story of the Levite's concubine in Judges 19-21.

Yong Chi Rhie draws out resonances between the 1 Samuel 28 story of Saul and the Medium of Endor and the Korean practice of Shamanism that could be used for a meaningful engagement with the cultural Korean practice from a biblical perspective. Carolina Dionco converses with the story of Rizpah in 2 Samuel 21 to reflect about God from the perspective of suffering women. She relates to the narrative about Rizpah from the standpoint of the experiences of Filipina mothers and thousands of mourning mothers of dead and missing persons across the world.

“How to respond in the face of a violent and oppressive regime?” is the question that fuels Layang Seng Ja's exploration of Jesus' response to violence in John 18, in the hope that such a conversation will throw up some pointers for how Kachin Christians in Myanmar could respond to violence against them. James Hatun Aung tries to engage Acts 6:1-7 with the issue of care for widows in Myanmar to understand if the apostles' solution to the problem of “abandoned widows” in Acts could be helpful in today's context as well.

Catharine's poem reflects on her own life and identity that is proscribed by the society which always conspires to disempower, and yet how she as a woman finds her own agency in spite of this. Lung Ngan Ling's poem seems to continue from the strain of agency in Catharine's poem, by affirming how the invitation from life to all is to experience life in fullness, even in our vulnerability.

We are thankful to the writers who have shared their conversations and how they have made meaning for their lives from the texts they have engaged with. It is only through the reader that the conversations in IGI gains meaning for our generation. So we are also thankful to readers of IGI over the years who have used IGI as a “passage” and a means of conversation to make meaning and knowledge for their own lives.

A special word of thanks to members of the Editorial Advisory Committee (EAC) of IGI who have been patient about the delays in completing this issue, Clare Law who has laboured over copy-edits and to Chong Ton Sin and Janice Cheong who have facilitated layout and printing. We acknowledge with thanks all those who have contributed their artwork/illustrations and photographs to this issue.

We hope you will enjoy the conversations that this issue brings to you.

Jessica Richard

(For Editorial Advisory Committee (EAC))