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About the Cover

Jesus' mission was always with the marginalized, socially ostracized, and culturally discriminated people of his time. He was always a radical reformer in his ministry and he lived an anarchist life. On one occasion he had a conversation with a Canaanite woman at Tyre and Sidon; the woman changed his ministerial perspective. After that he changed his vision, and did his ministry on the boundaries, crossing boundaries to be in solidarity with the marginalized. Jesus focussed on the emancipation of vulnerable communities. It was his

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commitment. This life and ministry of Jesus inspired Jeba Singh Samuvel, who is a Bachelor of Divinity student belonging to the diocese Madurai Ramnad, Church of South India (CSI), to do this painting titled “Palm Sunday”.

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In Solidarity across Boundaries

We are witnessing a lot of so called trans-national solidarity across the globe with the spread of internet and social media. Or is it just that we are hearing more about social movements and it seems like more people are involved because we are hearing it reported more? Does this mean that boundaries—national, regional, linguistic, racial, sexual, class and caste, religious—have been transcended to some extent? Or have such categories of oppression taken more nuanced forms that have yet to be analyzed and understood?

This issue of *IGI* has brought together reports and statements on different issues in Asia and the efforts to create solidarity around these issues. The vastness of Asia means that we may not hear about many such movements of and for the oppressed. We have two statements on different justice issues in India: one on Religion and Sexuality and the other on the suicide of a young Dalit scholar Rohith Vemula. The former reflects the increasing consciousness in India about the realities and challenges sexual minorities in India face. The latter has created a lot of discussion on the role of caste in educational spaces in India and the momentum from this tragic death has translated into movements among students in college campuses in India. A new form of poetry—Cinquains—by Archana Samuel succinctly portrays the feelings, realities and struggles of being Dalit. We also have one statement from the Philippines about the human rights violations against the Lumad people who are indigenous peoples of Mindanao, Philippines. We hope these statements will give us a glimpse into the nature of these issues and the protest movements surrounding these and encourage us to extend our solidarity to such causes across national and regional boundaries

A report by Chung, Sook Ja on the preparatory meeting of the Korean, Korean-in-Japan, Japanese Feminist Theology Forum gives a brief herstory about why this forum was started in 1988 to bring together Korean and Japanese women both for recognition of past wrongs by one country to the other and to work for reconciliation across the barriers the painful history had created. This Forum itself had started primarily “for living and theologizing our experiences in our realities.” This report is a powerful testimony to how despite the difficulties and misunderstandings the spirit to stay united through feminist theologizing has brought these women together “to establish a healthy identity in East Asia, and through the peace and security given at this place,... hope and dream of working together to contribute to the lives of all human beings in the world.”

Another excluded community that we have been creating spaces for through the life and work of AWRC as well as in the *IGI* is the LGBTIQ people in Asia. *Compassion*, the first lay-initiated Roman Catholic queer mutual support group in Hong Kong, was started by a few queer Catholics who felt a need to emphasize the missing element of compassion in the discussion on homosexuality and related ministry to queer people. This group has shared their reflection on body and sexuality in this issue of *IGI* as a way to re-claim their own voice regarding faith and sexuality and to critically examine their own experience and church teachings. Another article by Yuri Horie revisits the definition of “queer theology” and widens its scope by defining it as a “perspective to reconsider the hetero-normative system and to struggle against discrimination and exclusion of non-normative lives in Christianity.” Yuri uses this perspective to analyze the mourning of the death of marginalised people who led non-normative sexual lives in Japan.

in God's image

The remarkable and disturbing story of human sacrifice—the story of Rizpah from the Old Testament, speaks to us again in this issue through Bendanglemla Longkumer's article. Rizpah's heroic vigil over the bodies makes the story hers and although she could not bring her sons back to life she did not give up her search for dignity and justice for her slain sons. Rizpah's vigil uplifts the importance for oppressed people and protest groups to keep visible the signs of brutality and culpability of the oppressors until even mighty kings have to make amends. The echoes of this can be seen in the struggle of the Lumads in the Philippines and the protests of Dalit students in campuses in India, who refuse to let the memory of Rohith Vemula's suicide be forgotten.

A reflection on Jesus' healing of the bent woman on a Sabbath from the New Testament contrasts Jesus' partnership with women in his ministry with the prevailing exclusion of women from most of religious life by his Jewish contemporaries. Jesus upheld the human dignity of women and their right to discipleship. In this reflection Pauline Chakkalakal relates the story to the "bent women" of today and highlights the necessity to learn the art of listening to the *silent* and *silenced voices* in biblical texts so that we also respond to these voices with passion and compassion. Analyzing how women's roles in customary law and tribal identity are limited and structured by patriarchy Arensenla Jamir views the denial of rights to women in religion, culture and gender as human rights violations. She highlights some empowering ways through which women can assert their gender rights, identity and citizenship.

The challenges posed for trans-national solidarity are enormous and there is the danger of taking boundaries and the multiple nuances in social identities, lightly. There is also a need for pragmatic realization that interaction among oppressed groups does not magically mean that social boundaries and structures of exclusion are altered. However, this issue of *IGI* is affirmation that both this practical caution and indomitable hope that solidarity is possible are abounding among our protest movements in Asia.

We are thankful to all the authors and groups who have shared their thoughts, reports and statements with us for widening the horizons of *IGI* readers. We are also indebted to the members of the editorial advisory committee and the team of editorial assistants for helping to bring together this issue. To all the artists who have given us permission to use their artwork, images and photos in this issue—our special word of thanks. We hope this issue will be an interesting and empowering read for all our readers.

Jessica Richard

(for Editorial Advisory Committee (EAC))