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As a matter of policy, *AWRC/iGi* respects our contributors'/writers' use of English, provided it is proper and acceptable in Asia and worldwide. From henceforth footnotes and references quoting *iGi* will use the form "*in God's image*" and not "*In God's Image*."

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About the Cover

The cover photo is from the art collection of Hanna Cheriyan Varghese (1938-2009) - a Malaysian Christian artist, and a member of AWRC who expressed her faith and experiences combined with Biblical imageries. The title of this painting, 'The Christmas Story,' depicts the joy and hope of a new life brought to us through the birth of Jesus. To see more of Hanna's creations please visit hanna-artwork.com.

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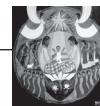
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Justice, Compassion and Resistance in Covid Times

Covid-19 seems to still be with us. The hope and even prayer when we first conceptualised the content of this issue of the *iGi*, some months ago, was that we will now be in a post-Covid world! This hope has been only partially realised. We have, to a certain extent, learnt how to live with the virus...but the threat of new strains of the virus continue to haunt the world and will live with us. The “after, during and enduring” pandemic is how Mark Bennet describes it in a review of the new book entitled *After Pestilence: an inter-religious theology of the poor* by the liberation theologian, Mario I. Aguilar. Implied is the warning that the virus is here to stay. We just have to take precautions and look forward in faith and with hope!

But what has become apparent is that this virus is not the only threat that we have to deal with. The slow and far from adequate responses from many governments around the world, especially in the countries in the South, to the virus and to the poverty it threw millions into, is in fact also a threat to the world. Its impact on the poor and on national economies will have a far reaching and debilitating impact on millions of people. Just one example is the worsening levels of hunger in the world. And on the other end of the spectrum, we witness the growing, grotesque levels of wealth, in the hands of a few which is also a threat to the world. Development priorities have inevitably got skewed as capitalist models of growth overtake any efforts to protect the poor. To give just one example, it is estimated that by the end of 2021, leading vaccine manufacturers Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech will realize at least \$70 billion in combined revenues mostly driven by Covid-19 vaccines.¹

While we ponder on these reports, we have to remember that the world has not yet been able to assess the full impact of the virus or the many new issues and challenges that it has brought on us. Health as a justice issue; the humanitarian crisis particularly faced by marginalised communities; the food crisis; climate justice; the intensification of racial and caste based discrimination; education and the digital divide; the migration crisis; trafficking in people; the aggravation of violence against women and other subaltern groups such as Dalits and Indigenous Peoples; and not least the impact of the virus on the natural world - all are major issues that we still have to deal with.

1. Dennis Sanders, “Covid-19 Vaccine Distribution is a Global Disaster,” *Countercurrents*, August 10, 2021, <https://countercurrents.org/2021/10/covid-19-vaccine-distribution-is-a-global-disaster/>.

This issue of *iGi* was initiated with the hope that the “lock-downs” in most parts of the world will be a thing of the past and that the world and particularly the churches and Christians and women would have taken the slowing down of life as a moment to pause and consider what we have done to our societies and to the earth itself. Additionally, there was the hope that this crisis would have given humanity the wisdom to begin designing a more just, healthy, and caring future for all – not just for human life but for the earth itself. Are we allowing the opportunity to develop a new and just world, slip out of our hands?

In this issue of *iGi*, we collect articles from women that reflect on the impact of the virus. **Margaretha Hendriks-Ririmasse** of Indonesia in her article, "Covid Pandemic and the Pain of Mother Earth" focuses on the close link between the Covid virus and the environmental crisis as she warns that there may be other viruses developing even now - we need to address the relationship between human beings and the earth. She uses the metaphoric term of mother earth as sacred entity underlining that the earth brings forth living beings and nurtures them.

Sarah Bacaller, Sydney, Australia – writes in poetic prose of the intimate and beautiful relationship between the Creator, creation and humanity.

Lizette Tapia in "Let Children be Children" draws attention to children and the violence done against them in the context of the Covid pandemic. Drawing attention to the plight of children who have been driven to desperation in so much of Asia, the writer reminds us that today, young girls “because of their environments and circumstances; are forced to take responsibility as women and adults.”

Athena Peralta of the Philippines in her contribution "Caring in a Time of Pandemic" points out that in many Asian nations, the “under-resourcing and neglect of public health systems has translated to weakened capacities to deal with a pandemic on the scale of the current crisis.” She calls all for investing in economies that appreciate the interdependencies among peoples and countries and between care work and market-based activities.

In Myanmar, apart from enduring the virus, what the people have experienced is a brutal military coup that overthrew the democratically formed interim government led by the Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, and the crushing of all voices of dissent and protest. **Phoo Plet**, in her article, "Women Taking Risks and Shaping a Future of Equality," speaks of how the Myanmar military, is not only one of the most brutal in the world but is deeply entrenched in sustaining patriarchal power and cultural practices that denigrate women. Youth in their call for an overthrow of the military after the coup also openly said they reject patriarchy and its power in the country! In the article, "Amay (Mother) and Abas (Fathers)," **Saw Solomon Opehtoo** also points out that Myanmar had to deal with two disasters - the first is the challenge of the pandemic and Myanmar has not escaped its impact; and along with the virus the country had to deal with the harsh conditions of a military coup.

Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro in "Reading the Story of Vashti with a New Pair of Eyes" reminds readers that while violence against women is to be exposed, women to women violence is also to be condemned. She offers a Bible Study on the less spoken of Vashti in the story where Esther is valorised, and Vashti is side-lined. Readers are invited to re-read her story so as to re-imagine women's "herstory"- by marginalising Vashti, the author of the episode in the Bible has silenced God.

In a gripping piece of poetic prose, "Dancing in the Warmth of Others," **Hyeyoung Lee** describes the numbing and debilitating experience women all over the world have experienced in the time of lock downs. Fear of the virus and fear of repercussions for breaking the strict lock down rules have had a deep impact on all our lives. The exhilarating anticipation of finally being able to reach out to each other and feel the warmth of others and slowly unfurling and singing and finally dancing together.....is the hope that has kept us alive!

Poems, prayers, pieces of poetic prose dot this issue of *iGi*, as it does all past issues. "A Prayer" by **Becca De Souza** and "God Idea" by **Sarah Bacaller** share with us a glimpse of the way poetry and art have been a way in which women have expressed their deepest concerns throughout history. In these days of lockdown and anxiety, the poetry, prayers and art of Asian women will comfort the readers of this issue of *iGi* and will inspire us to act!

Aruna Gnanadason
Guest Editor

Acknowledgement

When Aruna Gnanadason, a founding and life member of AWRC, was the co-guest editor of the 2019 Combined Issue of *iGi* she suggested we should dedicate one issue to the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore Aruna expressed her willingness to take on the tedious editing work whenever there was a need. We are very grateful for the wonderful job she has done to make this edition possible. Our sincere thanks also goes to all the contributors for their trust in us and generosity of spirit sharing provoking thoughts and reflections. We hope that readers will greatly benefit from these articles and be encouraged and enriched especially during the enduring pandemic.

Hsiu-Yin Chan
AWRC Coordinator