

Book Review

Ecclesia of Women in Asia. Gathering the Voices of the Silenced. Edited by Evelyn Monteiro, S.C and Antoinette Gutzler, MM, Delhi: ISPCK, 2005. pp. xxiv-460. ISBN: 81-7214-821-6.

The book is a dialogue among the Asian women on issues in church and society that have shaped and are shaping the life and experience of women in Asia. The issues may be social like violence against women, women trafficking, wife battery, divorce, or ecclesial such as women's role in the church's life and mission, the interpretation of the bible, spirituality, ethics, and inter-religious dialogue. They affect women's life in general. However, women's experiences, views and visions are seldom included in the discussion on these issues. Their voices are either silenced or not heard. The book is an attempt to make women's silenced voices heard, first, among themselves and, subsequently, among others.

The book is a collection of papers presented at the five-day conference of Ecclesia of Women in Asia, with the theme "Gathering the Voices of the Silence," held at Bangkok, Thailand from November 24-29, 2002. The aim of the conference was to help Catholic women to effect a "break from their silenced and obscured destiny, have their voices heard, and thoughts and reflections articulated." (xix). In line with the theme, the book offers sample voices of women from 17 different Asian countries. The voices include the voices of protest at violence and exclusion, voices of prophetic anger against injustices, as well as voices of hope and aspirations.

It is organized around six themes. The five essays in Part I on Women and Violence provide a window to the women's experience of violence in the Asian countries and call for a change in the violent situation. Part II deals with Women and Bible and it contains four essays. These essays offer biblical reflections on Junia, a silenced woman in the bible, the mystery model of the church, on divorced women in Taiwan and the patriarchal discourse in the Chinese Union version of the bible. Women and Church is the theme of Part III. From the five essays

included in this Part one gets good insights into women's experience in the Asian churches as well as their vision and hope for a participatory church.

Women and Spirituality is dealt with in Part IV. It contains four essays of which two are directly and the others remotely connected with different aspects of women's spirituality. The assortment of five essays in Part V on Eco-Feminism and Theological Method deals with such topics as ministerial formation, cosmic consciousness, empowerment and construction of sexuality. Part VI on Women and Other Religions has five essays. They offer women's views on and experiences of dialogue with women of other religions. These essays show specific features of women's understanding and approach to inter-religious dialogue.

Besides the twenty-eight essays, the book also includes the keynote address in the beginning describing the origin and aims of Ecclesia of Women in Asia (EWA) and the Reports of the Conference are placed at the end.

After going through the book, I offer the following comment as a man somewhat familiar with the literature on women's theology and other related disciplines as well as a man committed and sympathetic to the struggles of women. Women have been rightly deconstructing what 'patriarchy' has constructed over the millennia. This has given the women identified men the opportunity to hear women deconstructing the patriarchal discourse. Now, we are looking forward to hear the voices of reconstruction. The book has little to offer by way of reconstruction. I make this comment being fully aware of the fact that the Asian Catholic women are just discovering their voices. Perhaps one needs to wait a little longer for hearing a characteristic discourse of reconstruction. In any case, the time has come. Certainly the book has initiated the discourse. One can expect to hear a distinct reconstructive Asian women's discourse in the near future.

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