



Christian Conference of Asia

cca news



Women and children in asia

Volume 44 • Number 1 • March 2009

Called together



"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)

Women coming together to celebrate International Women's Month in March, church leaders in Asia coming together to a roundtable talk on self reliance, Myanmar Christians working together towards rehabilitation of their economic livelihood, Asian theologians coming together to critique mission and mission practice, and more 'coming together' are happening and are yet to happen.

Globally, women get special attention in the month of March. In almost all countries, women continue to be under-represented in decision-making positions. Women's work continues to be undervalued, underpaid, or not paid at all. Worst of all, violence against women and girls continue unabated in every continent, country and culture.

Women and men are called to end violence against women and girls. March is an occasion for all of us to work together in defence of women and girls who live with violence. It is a time to focus on the concrete actions to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls. It is a time to celebrate the courage and achievements of women who continue to struggle to expose and end violence to ensure that girls and women enjoy their full human rights.

Our journey in the land of Asia is wracked by never ending strife, grueling poverty, exclusion, calamities, legitimate dissent being crushed, invisibility, internal displacements, hushed and silenced voices ... and women and girls suffer the worst.

It is but appropriate to start the year by coming

together to find out how we in Asia can remain together in our common journey towards achieving Shalom - fullness of life for all in Asia, especially for the afflicted and the 'sinned against'.

The year 2009 will be a challenging one. We need to unite our minds, discern wisely emerging challenges, decide and firm up plans and look ahead, stay united and remain prayerful for each other. Starting today, we are enjoined to reflect together on our being 'called to prophesy, to reconcile and heal'. This is our 13th CCA assembly theme. There is no other more appropriate time than the present to be prophets, healers and reconcilers.

May your reading be challenging and fruitful one.

-Prawate Khid-arn

CCA 2010

**Called to
Prophesy
Reconcile and
Heal**

CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE OF ASIA
13TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA
APRIL 14-21, 2010

cca news

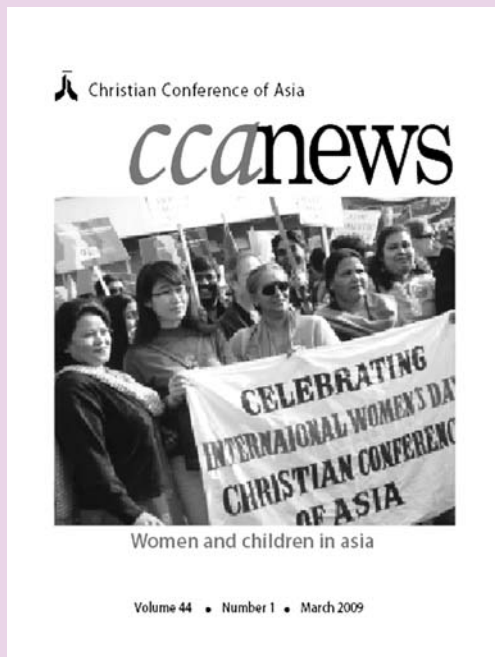
Volume 44, Number 1, March 2009

Official publication of the
Christian Conference of Asia

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Cover: CCA participants to the IWD 2009 Rally
in Nepal

Printed by: Wanida Press
Chiang Mai, Thailand

In this issue



CCA in focus

International Women's Day across Asia	4
Ending violence against women and children	6
Reviving prophetic ecumenism	8
CCA statement on International Women's Day	9
Celebrate Asia Sunday 2009	10
Crucified Christ among the Nargis victims	11
Linking Churches to eliminate HIV and AIDS	12
Accountability in God's creation	13
Feminist leadership	15
Can gays and lesbians go to heaven?	17
Quo vadis, Sri Lanka?	19

Global currents

From Tozanso to Hong Kong	20
From CONGO to CoNGO	21

Reflections

Sing it again, Mary!	22
Grace in waiting	24
The Jesus of the Gospels	26

News briefs

28

International Women's Day across Asia

A synergy of effective advocacy

CCA plays a crucial role in encouraging Asian Christian women to mark International Women's Day (IWD) every March 8th of the year in meaningful ways while retaining its human rights essence. Believing in the power of prayer and women's solidarity work, the CCA Program Area on Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment (EGY) requested the CCA members to share their advocacy and prayer concerns for women as part of the 2009 IWD celebration. Various prayer requests and news of IWD activities from around Asia were received by EGY, a modest

sign that there is a synergy of effective women's advocacy going on.

Nepal

Realizing the importance of a consolidated effort for synergy and effective advocacy, the CCA Program Area on EGY Committee members joined the 1,500 women strong rally to celebrate the 99th International Women's Day on March 8, 2009 in Kathmandu, Nepal, along with some men. The rally was organized by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Chamber Women Entrepreneurs Council



(SCWEC), Federation of Woman Entrepreneurs Associations of Nepal (FWEAN), Tewa (a non-profit and philanthropic organization), and the Association of St. Mary's Alumnae Nepal (ASMAN). Social activists, professionals, entrepreneurs, NGOs and thought-leaders across sectors joined the rally, together with women from other South Asian countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, Bangladesh, and Bhutan.

The rally bannered the theme, 'Solidarity of South Asian Women for Peace, Prosperity and Progressive Society'. March 8th was an opportunity for women from all the seven SARCC countries to come together as a unified force to celebrate past achievements and to work towards the achievement of the U.N. declared Millennium Development Goals for 2015.

East Timor

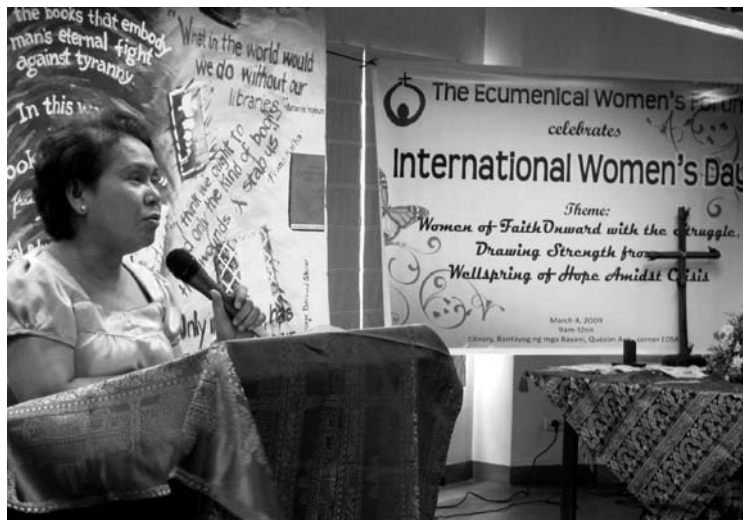
Through the Women's Ecumenical Accompaniment for Vision and Empowerment or WEAVE, EGY initiated an IWD celebration in East Timor. Part of the WEAVE program and in collaboration with IPTL (Igreja Protestante Iha Timor Loro Sae), the celebration was held at the Hosanna Church. The local church women organized and facilitated the IWD worship with help from Dominica Lagat-Faurillo, CCA ecumenical accompanier, and Nina Nayoan, intern of the Student Christian Movement. A background of the IWD celebration was shared to the congregation, as well as part of the United Nations General Secretary IWD message urging people to unite to stop violence against women in all forms.

Philippines

Filipina women of faith bonded together under the Ecumenical Women's Forum (EWF), a consortium of church women advocating for peace, justice and abundant life in celebrating International Women's Day on March 4, 2009. It was held at the Library of the Bantayog ng mga Bayani in Quezon City, with the theme, 'Women of Faith: Drawing Strength from our Wellspring of Hope Amidst Crisis'. (shared by Melinda Grace Aonan)

Bangladesh

The Women's Desk of the National Council of Churches in Bangladesh in partnership with South Asian Ecumenical Partnership Program (SAEP) for the first time organized a consultation attended by more than 100 indigenous women to commemorate IWD on March 19-21, 2009, with the theme, 'Solidarity with Indigenous Women'. The EGY Workshop participants on 'Women Human Rights and Advocacy Skills' in Delhi in November 2008 were involved in the



Arche Ligo speaking at the IWD activity in Manila

organizing and facilitation of the gathering. (shared by Gloria Kolpona Sirkar)

Australia

As IWD was celebrated globally, we remembered the indigenous people and the aboriginal women and children of Australia. Many Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia live in poverty. Their average life expectancy is seventeen years less than non-Indigenous Australians. There are many areas where there is an urgent need for work to improve the situation for Indigenous peoples, especially in education and health. However, one area that causes great concern is the high level of violence experienced by many. Indigenous women are forty-four times more likely to be hospitalized for assault than non-Indigenous women. Deaths from assault are also higher. (shared by Gabrielle Russell-Mundine)

Pakistan

We prayed for and still keep in our prayers the Talitha Kumi Welfare Society, an organization engaged in empowering women to overcome violence perpetrated on them. We continue to pray for women like Aysha who was kidnapped, forcibly converted to Islam, and raped and tortured; the Staff of Talitha Kumi Welfare Society, who apart from the threats and risks stands with women victims of violence; the future support, sustainability of Talitha Kumi Welfare Society; the women of tribal area of Pakistan, who are under the growing talibanization, denied education, health and freedom; and, for the need of affirmative initiatives by the government against atrocious customs in Pakistan, e.g. KaroKari, Vani, forced marriage, Sawara. (shared by Shunila Ruth)

- Moumita Biswas

Ending violence against women

A continuing challenge in building inclusive communities of peace

The Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empower (EGY) program cluster organized a National Consultation in Kathmandu, Nepal in partnership with YWCA Nepal on March 5, 2009, with the theme, 'Overcoming Violence Against Women and Children'. Forty-four local women leaders from churches, faith-based organizations and non governmental organizations attended the consultation.

Contextual realities in Nepal

A country of 27 million people sandwiched between China and India, Nepal is recovering from a decade-long civil war in which an estimated 13,000 people were killed. In 2008, the Maoists won the elections, abolished the 240 year old monarchy, and drafted a new constitution. But big obstacles to recovery re-

main. An estimated 50,000 to 70,000 people are still displaced from their homes, thousands of former child soldiers are held in military cantonment, basic service delivery outside of the capital Kathmandu has not resumed and recent unrest in the country's southern plains threaten to derail the still fragile peace process (www.theirc.org/where/Nepal).

Increasing violence against women and children is one of Nepal's major problems today. A situation analysis conducted by SAATHI in 1997 on violence against women in Nepal reveals that 93% were exposed to mental and emotional torture, 82% were beaten, 30% were raped, 28% were forced into prostitution, and 64% reported polygamy. A study conducted by them among 300 mothers of hospital deliveries and 50 mothers who delivered



Manu Hmangain, Maoist leader Humangain and Member of Parliament in Nepal (left), and Draupadi Rokaya of YWCA Nepal at the consultation.



Nepali mother and child

in the communities showed that domestic violence was a frequent phenomenon during pregnancy. Dalit (lower caste community) women are extremely vulnerable to sexual exploitation in Nepal. They are not only subject to discrimination by the high caste in Nepali society but also victims of violence within their own community. Human trafficking of women and children is also increasing.

Woman Maoist Leader Speaks

Ms Manu Humangain, a renowned Maoist leader, in her keynote address at the consultation shared that the journey towards liberation and democracy is not an easy process. There are tentative hopes that a more inclusive democracy will address the needs of the poor. However, the formation of the new Republic coincides with a perilous economic environment, reflected in shortages of food, long hours of power cut and other crisis.

Ms Humangain pointed out that it is important for Nepali women to make attempts to overcome the obstacles posed by patriarchal Nepali society and to be

involved in decision making processes. Nepali women should be alert and keep a vigil that their rights are protected by the constitution.

Dilemma and hopes

The consultation participants discussed the possibilities of issue-based cooperation among women of different faiths to work together to overcome violence against women and children. Some participants shared that in Nepal involvement in politics is regarded as opposed to Christian spirituality. Ecumenism is thought as opposed to evangelism.

It was strongly recommended that more efforts on capacity building and enhancement of Nepali women be done, and higher education and exposure to other cultures with similar realities be promoted. Overall, the consultation initiated between CCA and the Nepali church women a 'journeying and strategizing together' in putting an end to violence against women and children.

- Moumita Biswas

Reviving Prophetic ecumenism

Has Asian ecumenism lost its prophetic fervor?

The challenges for women and youth in Asia

Ecumenism is indeed prophetic. Why, then, in the present context we need to revive and revitalize prophetic ecumenism? Has Asian ecumenism lost its prophetic fervor? Yes, the Asian ecumenical movement, especially youth and women's movement is going through a serious crisis and is facing numerous challenges.

This is the reason why the Program Area Committee members of the Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment (EGY) cluster of CCA met in Nepal, Kathmandu on March 5 to 9, 2009 to deliberate and strategize how Asian church women and youth can engage in reviving the prophetic essence of Asia ecumenism.

Challenges in the Asian ecumenical movement

Institutionalising ecumenism

The Asian ecumenical movement is facing various challenges. External and internal factors erode the prophetic essence of the ecumenical movement. Ms Kaythi Min Din, a dynamic youth leader and General Committee member of CCA, pointed out the institutionalisation of ecumenism as a factor that jeopardises the prophetic dimension of ecumenism.

Whenever Christian youth and women hear of the word 'ecumenical movement' nowadays, the image of ecumenical bodies or organizations (e.g. CCA, WCC and NCCs) comes to mind. These ecumenical bodies and organizations are supposed to facilitate and promote local, regional and global ecumenical movements. But very often, Christians forget that it is the people who are the rudders of the ecumenical movement and the agents of transformation.



March 8 IWD rally in Kathmandu, Nepal

The ecumenical movement is also defined as people's movement for unity of the entire oikos. Dr Ninan Koshy rightly points out that the ecumenical movement is an inclusive movement, not only of all sectors in the church but of all their aspirations and struggles towards one ecumenical vision. It should not be merely governed by programs and activities of some ecumenical organizations. Many churches in Asia tend to be very institutionalized and often fail to motivate the congregation to discern their prophetic calling or to engage in prophetic ministry.

Often the youth and women's ecumenical movements get trapped in rigid structures of ecumenical organizations. Hierarchical bureaucratic structures restrict Asian youth and women's involvement in decision making processes and stifle their prophetic voices.

Narrow denominationalism

Another serious challenge is the focal shift of many local churches towards prioritizing expansion in terms of membership, programs, and projects. Little effort is spent for in-depth enriching of members to be agents of transformation. Kowk Nai Wang rightly says that, 'most local churches have become human organizations rather than the Churches of God'. Undeniably, women and youth especially in local churches are recipients of projects and programs but are not allowed to be involved in participatory decision-making.

The conspiracy of silence

Martin Luther King, Jr. rightly points out that 'We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people.' Ms Shunila Ruth, an ecumenical leader from Pakistan, observes that women and youth in Asia are victims

Celebrating March with Women

Asian churches have a very crucial role in the attainment of gender justice, an important human agenda. As the world observes March as International Women's Month, CCA calls churches to strengthen their commitment to end all forms of gender-based violence, and to uphold and promote the wellbeing of women and their children.

For the full text of CCA's letter to the churches on International Women's Day, see www.cca.org.hk



Srey Sotheavy and Kaythi Min Din

of the culture of silence and meekness advocated as a virtue by many churches. Oppression can only survive through silence. Asian churches need to admit that the major threat to the prophetic dimension of ecumenism today is silencing the prophetic voices of youth and women.

However, women and youth in Asia have immense power to break the status quo and rebel against the conspiracy of silence. Good examples worth citing are the struggle for democracy in Nepal, in Narmada Bacho Andolon (Save River Narmada) in India, and in many other people's movements in Asia.

Ms Srey Sotheavy, a youth leader from Cambodia pointed out that it is essential to nurture the prophetic voices of women and youth. 'Never be bullied into silence... Accept no one's definition of your life, but define yourself.' This should be the motto of a prophetic youth and women's ecumenical movement in Asia today.

Lack of consciousness of praxis of gender justice

Gender justice is often regarded by many church leaders as exclusively a women's agenda. This idea hampers the process of transforming men to partner with women in building inclusive and just communities. Gender justice is a human agenda, an understanding that is crucial to revitalizing the Asian ecumenical movement.

Creating space

The present Asian ecumenical movement tends to be more a club of elite English speaking church leaders from ecclesiastical ranks who decide the dynamics of ecumenism in Asia today. The contributions of grassroots youth and women leaders are not recognized. Pushing for inappropriate youth and women candidates in church leadership and ecumenical organizations prevents committed local youth and women to find space.

William Proloy Sammader, a youth leader from Bangladesh, pointed out that we need to break the 'club culture' of ecumenical elites who represent themselves in regional and global ecumenical bodies and organizations. Sammader regrets that often bureaucratic church leadership 'propagates the idea of today's youth are tomorrow's leaders. But they are supposed to recognize and nurture today's youth as today's leaders.'

EGY as a catalyst in reviving prophetic ecumenism
The Program Area Committee of EGY gave various suggestions and recommendations to nurture the Asian youth and women for the task of reviving the prophetic dimension of ecumenism. EGY, in cooperation with churches in Asia will organize:

- The Asian School for Ecumenical Formation for Gender Justice - to promote Gender Justice among men, women, and church leaders
- Grassroots Women Activists Training - a regional training of trainers program in South Korea in partnership with the Presbyterian Church of South Korea.
- The Dalit/Indigenous Women's Internship Program - for ecumenical capacity enhancement of young women from the most marginalized communities in Asia, the Dalit and the Indigenous Peoples
- Youth Empowerment Trainings - conducted in different sub-regions in Asia based on different contextual themes. A core team will be formed to organize and facilitate the trainings
- Women's Accompaniment Program - the main aim is to accompany women in conflict ridden societies and equip them with skills for peace building, presently being implemented in East Timor
- Advocacy for Conflict Transformation - mainly aimed to overcome violence against women and children in Asia, through campaigns and organizing conflict transformation skills trainings

- Moumita Biswas

Celebrate Asia Sunday 2009



Since 1974, Asia Sunday has been celebrated in Asia and among ecumenical organizations around the world on the Sunday before Pentecost. The day commemorates the founding of the East Asian Christian Conference (EACC), now the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA). This year, Asia Sunday falls on 24 May 2009. If this date is not available in your church's calendar, please choose another appropriate date to celebrate Asia Sunday.

This year the theme for Asia Sunday is "Tear Drop". It symbolizes the country of Sri Lanka, the focus of this year's celebration. As we all know, our Christian sisters and brothers in this country live and witness their faith in a "state of war" as the political conflict continues.

A liturgical material jointly prepared by the Christian Conference of Asia and the National Christian Council in Sri Lanka is available for use and can be accessed from www.cca.org.hk

CCA encourages member churches and national councils to make a special offering for the peace program of the National Christian Council in Sri Lanka (NCC SL) as it strives for peaceful solution to the conflicts. Let us remember the people of Sri Lanka in our prayers. Let us also pray for the NCC SL and its member churches in their ecumenical journey for just peace.

Crucified Christ among the Nargis victims

Ecumenical visit to Myanmar expressing solidarity

The ecumenical visit to Myanmar on 15 – 17 January 2009 organized by CCA in cooperation with the Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC) observed the rehabilitation work being done by the victims of cyclone Nargis themselves.

The Myanmar Solidarity Committee, composed of partners in CCA's rehabilitation work with the Nargis victims, visited several rehabilitation projects together with local partners in Myanmar. The visit is part of CCA's ministry of accompaniment, particularly with the people of Myanmar as they struggle to rise from the ruins of Nargis.

Although the different rehabilitation projects are carried out in fifty-two villages, the visiting team was able to go to only a few due to lack of time. As the villages are far and scattered the team had to take risky, dusty and tedious travel. Although the journey was rough and tough the team members were happy to meet the people and the people were happy to meet them too.

The call to be in mission

Nargis had taken away what they had and today they are left with 'nothing'. We saw the the pain and sense of being abandoned in the faces of the Nargis victims and survivors. The contemporary meaning of the cross carries with it brokenness and abandonment of people created in God's image. The cross, central to the Christian faith, is an ever present reality.

The image of the crucified Christ is incarnate among and within the Nargis victims and survivors. That is why we who claim to be the Church (Body of Christ) is called by God to accompany these people. This is what it means to be in mission, and to be Church.

It is sad to note that the government has failed

to serve the people in the hour of their need and has abdicated their responsibilities. Information on disaster situations and its aftereffects usually fall into confidential or incomplete hidden information for some political and economic reasons. Myanmar is no exception in this case.

The members of the Myanmar Solidarity Committee were satisfied with the reliable and documented reports done by the people responsible for the rehabilitation program. The ecumenical team visitors were: Po Kam Cheong, Rienzie Perera, Jung Hae-Sun, Jung Hae-Jun, Lee Sung-Youl, Shwe Lin, Ja Naw, Ma Kay Thi Min Din, Tar Ma Lar Gay, and Naw Dora.

The people were more than happy about CCA's commitment to be with them and to walk with them. CCA and its member churches and councils will be with them as an accompanying presence as long as they want.

- Freddy de Alwis



A housing rehabilitation project in Myanmar

Linking churches to eliminate HIV and AIDS

Churches working together to help people living with HIV

A church in Xishuang Banna (Jinhong), Yunnan Province, China, has no background in HIV and AIDS issues and is also afraid of PLWHAs (People Living With HIV and AIDS). Since Xishuang Banna is a 'gate' to enter China, the city became a tourist destination and many rural people migrated there to become sex workers. Many sex workers attend church services on Sundays and the number of churchgoers is increasing.

The three S's: sex, sin and salvation

Many Christians in Mekong countries believe that PLWHAs are people who have 'sinned' due to their sexual misbehavior, by having either sex with sex workers or sex outside marriage. The dominant Christian belief is that there is no salvation for people who are 'sinners.' No discussions are raised at all about children who are born HIV positive, and about women who received HIV from their husbands. No one questions the idea at all how women and children acquired HIV by 'misbehaving' sexually.

Sex, HIV and AIDS issues are not easy subjects to talk openly about within the churches in Mekong countries including China. But, a church also in Xishuang Banna, a Tai Lue ethnic minority, started its work on HIV and AIDS with the help of some partners as part of its integral mission.

A group of women from Xishuang Banna once visited Church of Christ in Thailand's (CCT) AIDS Ministry (CAM) to learn about CAM's work on HIV and AIDS. Challenged by these Chinese women, the Mekong Ecumenical Partnership Program (MEPP) responded by initiating a Personnel Exchange Program between churches in Xishuang Banna and Thailand. The program aimed to provide participants the opportunities for mutual learning and experience sharing, and to enhance personal and team development skills on HIV and



A young Tai Lue woman

AIDS work and related issues.

On Feb 25 to Mar 2, 2009, the MEPP Coordinator, Ms Janejinda Pawadee, led a team composed of seven CAM staff to visit churches in Xishuang Banna. A plan is for church leaders from China to visit Thailand to gain insights from CAM's long experience on AIDS ministry.

HIV and AIDS are not issues of sex, sin or salvation. Salvation comes to everyone through Jesus Christ who taught us to love one another without condition. HIV and AIDS are issues of life in all its aspects - physical, emotional, economic and spiritual. Churches have important roles to eliminate HIV and AIDS but not people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHAs).

- Janejinda Pawadee

Accountability in God's creation

Are our churches ecologically accountable?

Global warming and other environmental problems are issues that the world grapple with today, and churches are called to be ecologically accountable.

A National Consultation on Global Warming on February 12 – 14, 2009 organized by the Church of South India (CSI) in association with the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) and the South Asia Ecumenical Partnership Program (SAEPP) urged the churches in India to incorporate eco-concerns in its mission agenda.

The consultation is a follow up to an international ecumenical consultation held in Korea in May 2008 on the theme, Ecology, Economy and Accountability organized by CCA.

The earth's water is fast depleting. Currently twenty countries with over 150 million people have less than 1000 cubic meters of water annually per capita. At present twenty-five nations will be similarly displaced by 2050 and a total global population so deprived would rise to 2.5 billion i.e. 5/12ths of the present world population. In Beijing, the water table has dropped to thirty-seven meters in the past forty years.

Rates for sea-level rise of up to five metre per century are documented, and these probably do not represent an upper limit. Thus climate history shows that a much more rapid rise than that expected by the International Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) for the 21st century is possible. (WBGU, 2006)





We are accountable for the survival of creation

- Per capita water availability will decline by over 30%, primarily as a result of Himalayan glacier melt
- Substantial reductions in the yields of wheat and maize
- Increase in the incidence of disease (typhoid, malaria)
- Flooding in some areas and drought in others
- Potentially serious disruptions of the entire monsoon cycle
- Rising sea level

Dr. Sudhir Chella Rajan of the Department of Humanities and Social Science of the Indian Institute of Technology, cited the following as some of the vulnerable communities in India that have to migrate in 2100:

- West Bengal 10 million
- Coastal Maharashtra (around Mumbai) 12 million.
- Coastal Andhra Pradesh 6 million.

- Gujarat 5.5 million
- Coastal Orissa 4 million.
- Western Rajasthan 1.4 million.
- Northern Karnataka 1.3 million

In the context of global warming, depletion of scarce ground water and rising of the sea water level, the challenge is to change our values and life styles, and to rethink and redefine our understanding of development, our attitude towards nature, human freedom and accountability to one another and to God's creation.

A statement issued by participants called upon all concerned to address the grave issue of global warming with due urgency, since it is key to our global survival and relationship dynamics. The statement affirmed that evidently global warming causes profound climate changes affecting the very survival of God's creation. A recommended mission agenda for churches to follow are:

- Promote ecumenical green movements
- Adopt alternative energy sources
- Create awareness at all levels
- Review vision and mission statements from an eco-perspective
- View environmental problems from a victims' perspective
- Engage proactively on Climate Justice
- Ensure the rights of the vulnerable communities
- Associate with other faiths and religions to address ecological issues
- Liaison with government and network with movements to combat practices that perpetuate global warming, and
- Mobilise and influence public opinion on relevant policy changes

Bishop Rev Thomas Samuel, chair of the CSI Synod Ecological Concerns Committee stressed that concerns on climatic changes should have a matching action plan in a time-bound manner, apart from evolving a global and inter-religious perspective.

CCA encourages churches to tackle the issue of global warming and to use our spiritual resources in the task of transforming the world to become a place free from violence, greed and craving for material goods in the name of globalization and modernization.

- Freddy de Alwis

Feminist leadership

Is power necessary in the exercise of leadership? How is power related to authority? What is an Asian feminist perspective on power, leadership and authority?

A group of 30 women reflected on these and other questions at a workshop on Asian feminist perspective on leadership organized by the Asian Women's Resource Center for Culture and Theology (AWRC) at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Center in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 23-28 February.

After sharing stories and analysis of ways power is exercised in family and relationships, church, non-government organizations and ecumenical organizations, participants affirmed that power is inherent in everyone and we exercise power for as long as we live. However, the kinds and levels of power are not uniform, depending on one's social locations and situations.

Authority gives legitimacy to leadership. It is usually ascribed as a result of any of the following (not all will be true at all times and in all situations): one's position, age, sex/gender, experience, education, economic power and functional role at a given time or situation.

Asian feminist women theologians in the workshop affirmed that even though majority of the women in Asia may experience oppression and marginalization, they do exercise different types of power at different times and situations. These include the power against (which shows in resistance), power to do something (including overcoming a terrible situation), power over another (which is usually for domination), power with others (which is usually shared power), and power within (which is a result of one's sense of empowerment). What is important is to know what power one has and how one exercises it.



Feminist leadership workshop participants



Feminist leadership is for collective exercise of power. Filipino women during an International Women's Day in Manila.

Is the exercise of power for domination of some and the exploitation, oppression, and subjugation of the other? Or is it for the nurturance of the young, for the sustenance of the dependent, and for the empowerment of those who are vulnerable so that they will soon claim their subjecthood as moral agents and power actors themselves?

Feminist leadership is for affirming the power within, in order to have power against oppression and power to transform one's sad situations. Feminist leadership is for the exercise of power with – sharing power with each other, exercising power as shared, collective, and with the view of empowering the other. This exercise of power means that even though power may not be the same for the concerned parties or that power is not at the same level for all the concerned parties, such power cannot be exercised as the monopoly of one or at the expense of the other,

Being feminist means being specially mindful of (concerned about) the experience of those Asian women who continue to suffer the most because of their being women in families, societies, cultures and religions that look down on and treat women and girls as simply

lower than men and boys. Being feminist means having a vision and a passion to name, critique and transform such oppressive situations – which are oppressive to both women and men – so that everyone will truly live as human beings created in the very image of God.

Facilitating the workshop was Dr. Muriel Oreillo-Montenegro, dean of the Silliman University Divinity School in Dumaguete City, Philippines. Dr. Hisako Kinukawa, feminist Bible scholar from Japan, led two Bible studies.

A panel of resource persons shared their experiences and visions of feminist leadership from the following perspectives: Anna Marsiana (Indonesia), NGO; Malini Devananda (Sri Lanka), church; Hope S. Antone (CCA-FMU), family; Yorie Horie (Japan), relationships; and Lee Yee Ja (Korea), women with disability.

The workshop is part of a series of workshops conducted by AWRC with the aim of producing various modules to be used by women's groups and educational institutions. The feminist perspective on leadership will be the fourth module in the series.

- Hope S. Antone

Can gays and lesbians go to heaven?

Ecumenical lectures deal with homosexuality

This was one of the questions raised following the two lectures on gender and ethics at the Central Philippine University (CPU) in Iloilo City, Philippines, on 6 February. The lectures were held two days before the sixth Congress of Asian Theologians upon the request of the Rev. Dr. Limuel Equina, dean of the College of Theology of CPU.

The question reflects an issue that is often treated as hush-hush in many churches and communities in Asia but is in fact affecting so many young people today. For many of these young people, it is not enough or helpful to say that the church or the ecumenical movement has no official position on such a topic. Or that the church or the ecumenical movement would rather not talk about such a 'Western' issue. For some of them, it may be a matter of life or death – especially when certain people, including their own families, condemn them for their 'different' sexual orientation.

Anna May Say Pa (from Myanmar Institute of Theology) and myself (from CCA-Faith, Mission and Unity program area) were the invited ecumenical lecturers on gender and ethics. Anna May Say Pa focused on the rights of minority ethnic groups in Myanmar while I focused on the issue of gender issues in ethics.

We gave our lectures to a crowd of students and faculty that filled the University Chapel with a capacity of 1000 more or less. The students and faculty came from the religion and ethics department, the social work department, and the College of Theology.

Using the biblical creation narratives as reference, I pointed out that behind the creation story was the ethic of survival required of

a small and struggling nation. This ethic of survival was promoted through compulsory heterosexuality and the command for procreation and reproduction (go, multiply and fill the earth).

But why are there passages in the Bible that seem to condemn homosexuality?

I replied that the story in Genesis 18-19 about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is actually not about homosexuality as we know it today. It is about the lack of hospitality that the men in the city of Sodom were demonstrating towards the guests of Lot. Instead of providing hospitality to guests, these men were threatening to gang rape the guests! It was for that reason that the

"Homosexuality is not a mental disorder and thus there is no need for a cure."

—THE
AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION



"Where are the men who came to you tonight?" Gen. 19:5

destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah happened. It had nothing to do with homosexual relations of gays and lesbians. See how Ezekiel 16:48-49 describes the sin of Sodom.

I actually came back from those ecumenical lectures with the challenging questions of the students that I did a bit of research on homosexuality. In the process I have revisited a few other passages in the Bible (e.g. Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13) that are often quoted to condemn homosexuality. The book of Leviticus contains The Holiness Code (see chapters 18-22), which constitutes a list of behaviors that are said to be an 'abomination' (TO'EBAH) – i.e. something that people of faith found distasteful or offensive in their particular place and time. That code was written for the priests of Israel 3000 years ago to set them over and against the priests of other cultures. For the Jewish Scripture writers, it was an abomination for a man to sleep with another man, for a man to masturbate, or to interrupt coitus (as an act of birth control). This was because in Hebrew pre-scientific understanding, the male semen contained the whole of life, while woman only provided the incubating space. Spilling semen without the chance of having a child was therefore considered murder.

Another passage that is usually understood as condemning homosexuals is Romans 1:26-27. But this passage must be taken in the context and time of Paul where great temples were built to honor fertility gods and goddesses of sex and pleasure. In order to honor those gods, the priests and priestesses in such temples were engaged in odd sexual behaviors, including castrating themselves, doing drunken sexual orgies, and having sex with young temple prostitutes (male and female). Therefore, their sexual behaviors were not because they were lesbian or gay but because of their strong belief in the gods and goddesses of sex and pleasure.

In 1 Corinthians 6:9 and I Timothy 1:10 are two Greek words whose meaning remain mysterious: "MALOKOIS" and "ARSENOKOITAI". According to Greek scholars, malaokois probably meant "effeminate call boys" in the first century while the New Revised Standard Version says, "male prostitutes" and the Good News Bible uses, "sexual pervers" while an-



other version uses "sodomites". Greek scholars do not know exactly what arsenokoitai means while some scholars believe that Paul was coining a name to refer to the customers of "the effeminate call boys" – i.e. what we might call "dirty old men." According to scholars it was only in 1958 that the mysterious Greek word was translated into English as homosexuals. Taking all these into account, it is more possible to see Paul as condemning married men who hired hairless young boys (malakois) for sexual pleasure just as they hired smooth-skinned young girls for the same purpose.

Can homosexuals (gays and lesbians) go to heaven? Why not? Are they not children of God, created in the same image and likeness of God? Is entrance into heaven simply based on one's sexual orientation?

Judgment belongs to God. We cannot fully fathom how it actually works because as Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he/she who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21; see also 7:22-23). So let us be very careful, especially when we are so hasty in making judgments and condemnation. We may be those who always call on the Lord but we may also be those who are so condemning of the least among Christ's brothers and sisters today – the gays and lesbians whose existence we continue to deny through our homophobia and judgmental attitudes.

- Hope S. Antone

Quo Vadis, Sri Lanka?

Humanitarian crisis looms in Sri Lanka

Mullaitivu in the Vanni Region, north of Colombo, is site of the final stage of the war between the Sri Lankan military and the LTTE. 250,000 people are trapped in a 25-kilometers strip of land, denied access to food and other emergency aid. The Rajapaksa Government claims only 150,000, which is a reduced figure from what the International Committee of the Red Cross has indicated publicly.

The looming humanitarian crisis is exacerbated by the muffled voices in the media and the seeming lack of response from the international community.

The safety and humanitarian needs of the population in that strip of contested territory in Mullaitivu is of urgent concern particularly by the Methodist Church, which claims a significant number of parishioners in the area in need of support. Patients in need of medical care are rising by the day as the fighting continues. Abductions of civilians also continue unabated.

Church leaders in the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka have raised concerns about violation of human rights, the need for access to food and medicines by the population in the Vanni region, the traumatized victims of the war, the safety of those fleeing into safer government-controlled camps, and the growing division and distrust among the affected communities.

The churches and other faith communities are faced with yet another major issue, with the proposed Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion otherwise referred to as the Anti-Conversion Bill. Church groups continue to express their concern that the passage of this bill into law may curtail the social welfare and caring role of churches and other religious groups at a time when the Sri Lankan people are in desperate need

their services.

The National Christian Council of Sri Lanka has called on the World Council of Churches, the Christian Conference of Asia and its member churches in Asia to assist the victims of the on-going conflict, to call for a cessation of hostilities, and the holding of peace talks to bring about a peaceful resolution of the three-decade war between the Sri Lankan military and the LTTE forces, which has taken away more than 70,000 lives.

CCA calls on the churches in Asia to continue praying for peace in Sri Lanka and in offering emergency assistance to the victims of the current conflict. Asia Sunday will be marked by biblical reflections and worship services on Sunday, 24th of May. This year's focus is on Sri Lanka entitled, "Tear Drop", symbolizing the pain and suffering of widows, orphans, and the internally-displaced population.



wounded civilian evacuated for treatment
(courtesy: www.defence.lk)

From Tozanso to Hongkong

the journey for peace continues

In October 1984 in Tozanso, Japan, the long journey for peace and reunification in the Korean Peninsula began. The World Council of Churches, the Christian Conference of Asia, the Korean Christian Federation, the National Council of Churches in Korea, and the National Christian Council in Japan met and set up an important platform and framework for international ecumenical cooperation and reunification in the Korean Peninsula.

To implement the ecumenical tasks laid down in Tozanso, churches in the South took the lead in organizing meetings and international consultations. Churches in Europe, North America and Asia undertook visits of peace delegations to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Members of the Korean Christian Federation made return visits to churches in Europe, North America and Asia to strengthen the bonds of fellowship that has developed.

Five watershed events echoing the Tozanso message and three policy statements have been undertaken to keep the peace process alive between 1984 and 2009.

Twenty five years later in October 2009, the unfinished task of Korean unification will be commemorated in prayers, theological reflections and discussions on the way forward will be held in Hong Kong on the theme, "A Continuing Journey of Peace and Reconciliation in North East Asia". A new generation of Korean young people will meet with their ecumenical leaders who were at Tozanso to carry on the journey of peace and reconciliation into the twenty-first century. Unification Committees of NCKK member churches and their counterparts in the Korean Christian Federation will lead the deliberations, the planning of future programs, and the celebrations of the twenty five years of dialogue, humanitarian response and ecumenical solidarity.



Church leaders and representatives of the Reunification Committees of Korean churches at the meeting.

From Congo to CoNGO

UN NGOs re-imagining the future

CoNGO is not the country. CoNGO is a gathering of more than 600 non-government organizations with a consultative relationship with the United Nations.

Twenty-five Board Members, Officers and observers met at the Asian Institute of Technology in Pathumthani near Bangkok from 23rd to 25th of February 2009 to re-imagine the future, strengthen its ranks, and enlarge and protect the non-government space in the United Nations.

Addressing the gathering of NGOs, CoNGO President, the Rev. Liberato Bautista stressed that human rights work is a life-long process and learning and highlighted the role of the non-government organizations as beacons of human rights, and many members of CoNGO remain as strong trailblazers of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Article 71 of the United Nations Charter provides that the Economic and Social Commission (ECOSOC) may make suitable arrangements with international and national organizations with the United Nations based on their competencies. CoNGO members play the role of interlocutor for civil society, straddling both the United Nations and member states.

CoNGO is a membership organization sustained by its consultative process and its leadership based on accountability, transparency and responsibility. Its reach and strength derive from its collaborative style of work, the diversity and number, and its future-looking program directions. CoNGO boasts of a new and fresh web site and electronic (e-com) update service. It believes in training young people now for their roles in leading young people in diplomacy and advocacy in the future.

CoNGO plans to utilize its gathering capacity and its link with the United Nations to address the cur-

rent triad of global crises in the financial sector, climate change and the technological advances in energy consumption.

CoNGO marked its 60th anniversary in 2008 and the significant role civil society has played in the United Nations, notably the establishment of the International Criminal Court, the Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

One highlight event in 2009 will be the Durban Review Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and other Intolerances to be held in Geneva on April 20-24.

CoNGO holds offices in New York, Geneva and Vienna, with the Office of the President based in New York.

- Charlie Ocampo



CoNGO President Liberato Bautista presiding over the opening session

Sing It Again, Mary!

Ask not just why labor is exported, but ask what can be done to create jobs for all. Ask not just why many people remain homeless or lose their homes, landless or lose their lands, young people are out of schools, and mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, husbands and wives leave the country. But ask what can be done

to meet the basic needs of people. Reflections on labor migration begin from the experience of those who suffer the consequences of economic structures that exclude many. When the economic news is dire, when the advance of globalization has turned a “Made in USA” economic recession into a global one, Filipino migrants request Luke’s Mary to repeat her singing of the Magnificat.



Filipino workers' protest in Seoul

Migration is not a new thing. Its history, however, is as old as the history of humankind. Memories of the early migrations were common among the writers of the biblical stories of Cain, Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael, Esau, Jacob, Leah, Rachel and others. In the pre-colonial period of the Philippines, migration occurred because of the tribal search for good hunting grounds and fertile lands. It has reached a phenomenal level during the time of colonialism. Indeed, the history of colonialism can be traced by looking back to the forced labor and labor migration in the form of slaves along with the migration of the millions of people from Europe to the habitable regions all around the world.

During the Spanish colonial period, migration was a means to escape land grabbing, tributes, and hard labor imposed by the foreign rulers. At the beginning of the American colonial period, migration was opted to search for jobs in the plantations of big landlords and of land frontier, but in the 1920s the United States began importing Filipino workers for their agricultural plantations and industries to save on labor costs. Waves and waves of forced migrations take place since then, especially in 1990 to 2005 or during the advance of globalization.

It's a sad reality that the kind of social order designed by the rich nations principally led by

the U.S. divides the world into a few industrialized countries and the many dependent ones, like the Philippines. As neo-colony, the Philippines remains a supplier of cheap agricultural and mineral resources, an assembler of semi-processed goods, a buyer of expensive industrial and consumer goods from the capitalist countries, and a leading exporter of labor. Without genuine land reform and national industrialization, she cannot create jobs needed to give employment to everyone. Her only way of solving the unemployment problem is by sending unemployed workers abroad. She developed the Labor Export Program (LEP) turning Filipinos into export commodities.

Today as before, economic reasons prod labor migration. In a situation where conditions for living are difficult, migration is a human right, though for the majority, it becomes not a choice, but a necessity. It is to escape the poverty, unemployment and oppression. It becomes, therefore, a logical option for survival.

In the labor room of globalization, human labor has become disposable, like the disposable diapers, napkins, and plates which are meant to be thrown away after they've been used once. In this disposable nature of labor, migrants never experience any sense of permanence, no sense of finding a home. They are sojourners. Their stay abroad is only temporary; their job is provisional. Their non-citizen or alien status deprives them of so many things.

Undeniably, the migrants have contributed much to the economy of the host country. Aside from filling the needed labor in the "3-D"-- the difficult, dirty and dangerous jobs, migrants are underpaid for the labor that they invest in the productions. A survey shows that they spend a larger portion, seventy to eighty percent, of their income in the host country. Only twenty to thirty percent are sent back to their native countries. If properly accounted, the contribution of migrants to the host society is immensely high and South Korean economy finds it difficult to pull on without the economic contribution from this community of workers.

Despite the raft of benefits, migrants are viewed as people who grab the jobs of local inhabitants; they are seen as a heavy social and economic burden to the host country.

When asked what sustained her in the long years of living and working in South Korea, Cristina humbly said that it's her faith in the God of Mary shown in the kindness, love and generosity of fellow migrant workers, employers and the care of church people and organizations doing ministry with the migrants. Cristina, a Filipino mother of three, came to South Korea eleven years ago to find job. She is one of the thousands of foreign workers who have limited job choices. She hopes to be reunited with her family in few years time.

The belief of Filipino migrants in the God of Mary may suggest that it is God who is poor disposable laborer. It is God who is alien to God's own created world, and it is God who is undocumented or unauthorized to work, dehumanized, criminalized, detained and deported by the authorities of the receiving country. From their experience, the overseas Filipinos know that the poor of the world live under economies that are shaped to create more wealth to the already rich or promote the transfer of resources from the poor nations to the industrialized rich. Our overseas compatriots know poverty and they hope for change to happen in our country. So they would like to play and listen once more to Mary's song. Her singing may remind them of the importance of labor for economic justice. And her singing motivates them even more to commit themselves to the work of God to overturn the way the present world works to make all things new.

So sing it again, Mary. Sing to us of your God who adds justice and compassion to the poor and subtracts the rich. Sing, till your song becomes ours and your God be truly our God.

- Rev. Gloria de la Cruz-Hernando
UCCP Ecumenical Worker with PROK
Seoul, South Korea

Filipinos continue to be the most preferred workers by Korean employers under the Employment Permit System, according to the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration or POEA

Grace in waiting

Many women are still in journey to healing

This is Grace's (not her real name) story.

I don't remember if I was six or five, not even the face of my mother. They invited me and other children of my age to visit the boat. My mother was with me, watching as we went on board. They gave us toys and candies and we played with delight. Then we realized the boat was already at sea.

I saw my mother and many other mothers crying. 'My child, bring back my child!' We too, cried, 'Mama, Mama!' I knew there were many of us, crammed in boxes. They said if we cry, they would toss us into the sea. Frightened, we hushed our cries, trembling.

My adoptive parents had two children. I was brought up as a good Christian, going regularly to church. I forgot the painful incident at the

shore of Dili.

When I was in high school I had a close friend, Maria. One day, she came home with me. I heard my father talking to her. I was surprised when she said she came from Timor Leste. My father told me later I must not stay close to Maria because Timor people are very strong and hard-headed.

A week after that my father told me that I would visit their home province, Ujumpandang. The night before my flight, my parents told me to bring all my things. I was going to live and study in Ujumpandang!

My aunt, sister of my adoptive father, with whom I was staying reprimanded me one day for coming home late. One night, she was so angry and said many derogatory things about me. 'You are a Timorese and nothing can be done about you... You are a wayward girl!'



An East Timorese girl in English class

I went home to Jakarta and pleaded with my mother to tell me my real identity. We withheld the incident from my father for fear that he would get angry.

After graduation from High School, I worked in a noodles factory and met a man from East Timor. I felt a pang of pain in my heart. He told me stories I longed to hear, telling me that he knew me when I was a child. Without the knowledge of my adoptive parents, I went with this man to Timor Leste.

At the boat, I overheard the man saying to people, that I was his fiancé and we will marry when we arrive in Timor. I felt so very sorry for myself. I could not go back, I attempted suicide three times. I was almost successful the third time because I made it very sure that no one was around. Suddenly, a person came and explained to me that it is a sin to commit suicide. He read in the Bible how Jesus loves me and that I didn't have to think of taking my own life.

I distrusted the man who promised to help me. Upon reaching the dock, I went straight to the bus going to Maubise, his hometown. I went to the police station and told an officer about my need to look for my parents. More than twenty families came, longing for their daughter. They called me Maria, Joanna, Isabelita, many names. For fear that I end up going with the man, I decided to choose a family.

I did not know Tetun, so I just communicated by gestures and signs ... I could not stand the situation. No toilet and other necessities. I could not eat corn, the only available victuals. In two weeks I went back to the officer. This time, many more families came. More than thirty set of parents wanted to claim me as their daughter. A widow came to me and asked me to show her my back. I did not know what she saw, for she just cried aloud and hugged me saying, 'You are my daughter'. I said to myself, 'This must be the sign that God has given me.'

I stayed with my 'mother' for two years. I knew she was not my real mother but I did not want to break her heart. She lost a daughter once then she found me. When my parents knew that I was in Timor Leste, they continued to support me. I studied in a university and was granted scholarship to study Theology in Manado for three years.



Healing takes time and attention. A Filipino woman tending the hearth.

I went back to my 'family'. I was not happy. To escape from this family, I married an Indonesian to compensate the love of my adoptive parents. But it was not a solution.

I still long for real love from parents, sisters and brothers. I am a daughter of all mothers who lost their child. I am a sister to all who lost their sisters, a mother to all children longing for the embrace of a real loving mother.

Every woman assisted in her healing compensates for the pains of my real mother who is still out there crying for me, and for my mother now who is still longing that I was her real child.

As told to Dominica Faurillo, Ecumenical Accompanier in East Timor

The Jesus of the Gospels

A lenten reflection

The Jesus of the institutional church

The teachings of the church on Jesus the Christ or Christology, especially during the season of Lent, is focused on Jesus who was obedient, humble, submissive, a servant of the people, and so on. Hymns sang during Lent and Holy Week lift up and over-emphasize this picture of Jesus. I am in no way saying that Jesus was not what I have stated above. The concern I raise is the over-emphasis of these particular aspects of the personality of Jesus, in which we have failed to give equal emphasis to the historical Jesus who was also disobedient, who lost his temper or got angry, who questioned oppressive authority, who called Herod a 'fox', and so on.

This type of lop-sided teaching about Jesus by the churches over the centuries has conditioned the minds of the majority of Christians to accept such teachings as the gospel truth. We have come to a point where, if we were to question such teachings or even to interpret Jesus of the Gospels from a holistic perspective, it is looked upon not merely as a heresy but as a sin. Therefore, the lives of many people are conditioned by this lopsided version of Jesus. The spiritualities built around this Jesus of humility and obedience have shaped and conditioned most Christians to be submissive and to accept human-made suffering as God's will, and the reward for endurance of it will be received in life after death. It must be confessed that majority who suffer and get abused by this kind of Christology are women, the poor and the marginalized sectors of society.

Abuse of this Jesus by the principalities and powers

History shows and research has documented that major colonizing powers like Portugal, Spain, Britain and the USA used missionar-

ies to subjugate the so-called natives to accept colonization as an opportunity to be free from paganism and ignorance. It is the domesticated Jesus the Christ that was used to domesticate the people even to the point of giving up their land, culture, language and humanity. In reading the stories of colonized, subjugated and enslaved people one will discover how Christianity, especially Jesus the Christ has been exploited to serve the people in power or to serve empires and the ruling class. Stories of women, Dalits and colonized people, reveal how even today the domesticated image of Jesus is used to keep people trampled and subjugated. The institutional church especially the hierarchy, still perpetuate this Jesus to control women, children and the powerless people.

Jesus of the Gospels

When we read the four Gospels and the rest of the New Testament, we are confronted with a more holistic picture of Jesus the Christ. Jesus had a personality of patience, meekness, obedience and compassion, to say the least. But, we will get a distorted picture of Jesus if we neglect the Jesus who also cleaned the temple, who called the Pharisees 'whitewashed tombs', 'hypocrites' (Matthew 23), and Herod the king a 'fox' (Luke 13:32), and so on.

When Jesus who was meek and mild saw injustice he responded immediately and took action to change that situation. When Jesus saw people being abused and marginalized in the name of religion he despised it. When he saw 'sin' being abused by religious authorities to trample people and to marginalize them, Jesus associated with them and forgave their sins. Jesus of the Gospels is a person who revolted against injustice and called into question the authority of those, whether religious or political, when they abused it.



The drama of the crucifixion must be understood and interpreted in light of Jesus' encounter and confrontation with religious and political powers of his day. It was a divine revolt against principalities and powers that were not only deceptive but trying to play the role of God! In looking at the crucifixion from that historical point of view we discover that the crucifixion of Jesus is not God's will as traditionally interpreted by the church and accepted by millions of Christians.

The cross was a cruel form of death imposed by the Roman Empire against those who broke the law or those who questioned the imperial authority. It is a shame that the church has managed to tame and domesticate the crucified Jesus. The church has made it respectable by saying that the cross was God's will. The cross of Jesus was never the will of God, but the will of evil men who were prepared to do anything to remain in power and to dominate the world.

We also know it is not God's will because the Scripture says that God raised Jesus from the

dead (Acts 2:24; 3:14-15). Death is the last and most evil thing an evil person or structure can do to a human being to silence her or him. That is what the religious and political powers of Jesus' day did to him. But, they were mistaken because God over-ruled them by raising Jesus from the dead. In a sense God not only had the last laugh at those who wanted to play the role of God, but also surprised them by defeating death. Therefore, Easter is the day we celebrate not only the resurrection of Jesus the Christ, but also the day we remember God's laugh at those who think that they can compete with God and oust God from the domain of God's creation.

Although Jesus was looked upon as a criminal by those who were part and parcel of the dominant culture of his day, he was a saint and savior to those who were and are part and parcel of the marginalized cultures. It is because the Roman Empire and the institutionalized religious establishment of that day feared the Jesus Movement and wanted to crush the people of the Way (Acts 9:2; 19:23-24; 22:4), that is how they were known before being called Christians (Acts 11:26), they had to hide from the authorities and meet in catacombs. The people of the Way or the early Christians refused to confess Caesar is Lord and prepared to face martyrdom by confessing Jesus is Lord. When the Empire could not crush, kill and destroy the movement of Jesus the Way, it (Emperor Constantine), decided to buy them out by making the movement of Jesus the Way the established religion of the Empire. That was the end of Christianity and the birth of Constantianity! From this point onwards, the domestication of Jesus the Christ begins to take place and the cutting edge of Christianity begins to get tempered in the language of balance and compromise.

However, Easter is an opportune moment for us to resurrect the Jesus of the Gospels who was not only gentle and meek, but also just and non-conformist. Easter is the feast of God's laugh at human foolishness and God's challenge to death itself. "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" (I Cor. 15:55-56)

- Rienzie Perera

CCA-UN/ESCAP project ends

The CCA-UN/ESCAP (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific) partnership on the four-year program, 'Strengthening life skills for positive youth health behavior' formally ends on March 31, 2009.

Based on the recognition of the threat of HIV and AIDS especially for the poor, out of school and disadvantaged youth of Asia, its goal was to see disadvantaged young people, in particular, adolescent girls and young women, empowered and equipped with essential life skills so that they are better able to protect themselves from the threat of HIV and AIDS, drugs and other threats to their growth and

development.

The project was implemented in four countries, namely: Cambodia, China (Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region), the Philippines and Sri Lanka. In the concluding workshop held March 5 and 6, 2009, country best practices and national policy recommendations were articulated.

Rev. Noel Ilagan, CCA Consultant for UN/ESCAP, hopes 'that the momentum started by the project in these countries will continue with the same passion and commitment demonstrated in the past four years'.

Asia roundtable meeting

As stakeholders of the ecumenical movement in Asia, the CCA member churches and councils vowed to be responsible stewards by strengthening their sense of ownership of CCA and its ministry.

Twenty-two church leaders from South Korea, Taiwan, New Zealand, Thailand, Australia and Indonesia attended the Asia Round Table (ART) Meeting with Church Leaders held on March 12-13, 2009, at the Bangkok Christian Guest House, Bangkok, Thailand.

Among others, three important decisions were made at the meeting, which are: a move to increase in CCA membership dues; increase in

the number of local hospitalities (hosting) offered by national churches; and, the putting up of the CCA Emergency Fund.

The ART concluded with financial and material pledges from church leaders, and the commitment to pursue the matter further with their respective churches and constituencies. The ART clearly indicated that Asian churches take CCA seriously and they are committed to help CCA achieve its financial goals and journey towards achieving self reliance.

- Liza Lamis

Remember Palestine and Israel

CCA reiterates the call of the Churches in the Middle East for an immediate ceasefire throughout Palestine and Israel. Churches are also urged to conduct vigils and prayer services, and to raise funds in support of humanitarian and relief work for the victims of the on-going conflict.

Let us keep on praying for the Middle East Council of Churches and its work for peace and human security, and for the people of Gaza, the West Bank and Israel.

For the full text of CCA's statement on the crisis in Gaza, visit: www.cca.org.hk

EASYNET regional co-team meeting

The EASYNET Co-Team had its annual meeting in Manila, Philippines on January 12 to 14, 2009. The team, representing the youth organizations from CCA, WSCF, IYCS, IMCS, YMCA, YWCA reviewed the overall programs of EASYNET in 2008, and planned activities for 2009. The EASYNET constitution was also reviewed as the team felt that changes needed to be made in line with EASYNET's evolution as well as the changing context of the Asian youth today. The Moderatorship of the committee was passed on from WSCF to CCA this year, and will be held by the CCA Youth Consultant, Adam Anand Row. The team acknowledged Ms Necta Montes, the outgoing moderator, and her exceptional job in leading the committee through challenging times. The shortlisting for the post of EASYNET Regional Coordinator was also completed, as well as plans for the



Adam Anand Row (fourth from left), with the EasyNet team

upcoming national coordinator's training to be held in July of 2009.

- Adam Anand Row

New CCA consultant on HIV and AIDS



Dr. Erlinda Nable Senturias is a medical doctor and a member of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP). She served in various capacities as a woman lay leader of UCCP from 1985-1989, and was delegate of the UCCP in the VIth and IXth Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Vancouver (1986) and Porto Alegre (2006), respectively.

She was National Ecumenical Health Concerns Coordinator of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) from 1980-1989, and became Moderator of the WCC Christian Medical Commission from 1985-1989. Her involvement in HIV and AIDS dates back when she was appointed Program Secretary for Health and Healing of the Christian Medical Commission of the World Council of Churches in July 1989. During

her watch, she coordinated the AIDS Working Group of WCC, the Participatory Action Research on AIDS and the Community as a Source of Care and Healing in Uganda, Tanzania and Zaire, and the Consultative Group on AIDS that looked into the Pastoral, Ethical, Human Rights, Medical, and Theological dimensions of HIV and AIDS. Dr. Senturias was alternate for Europe in the Program Coordinating Board of the Joint Program of the United Nations (UNAIDS) and one of the members and supporters of the International Christian AIDS Network (ICAN).

Dr. Senturias has been a resource person for consultations on HIV and AIDS of CCA for the past seven years and a member of the Strategic Task Force on HIV and AIDS of CCA since three years ago. Recently selected as one of the members of the HIV and AIDS Strategy Group of the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance based in Geneva, Dr. Senturias is also a member of the Commission on Education and Ecumenical Formation of the World Council of Churches.

Dr. Senturias replaced Fr. Philip Kuruvilla as Consultant on HIV and AIDS of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) for two years, effective January 1, 2009.

Farewell, Naveen and Fr. Philip



CCA said farewell to Naveen Qayyum who served as communication consultant for CCA for a year since June 2007.

She is still based in Chiang Mai, Thailand, working on a documentary film, "Building Bridges," which is supported by the World Youth Programme of the World Council of Churches. This film is a follow-up to an earlier documentary film, "Talking Faith," which she produced during her internship with WCC.

Produced with 9/11 as background, "Talking Faith" has been screened in several countries in America, Europe, Africa and Asia. It narrates stories of interreligious dialogue through youth perspectives in Pakistan.

Naveen hails from Pakistan and is a member of the Church of Pakistan.



Fr. Philip Kuruvilla finished his term as Consultant for the CCA HIV and AIDS program on December 31, 2008. Bringing a rich experience in international AIDS related work, Fr. Philip was instrumental in revitalising the AIDS ministry of CCA.

A priest of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church in India, he holds a strong bias for people living with AIDS, and strongly pushes for an urgent and inter-faith response to AIDS phenomenon in Asia.

CCA is immensely thankful to Fr. Philip for his important contribution to the ecumenical AIDS ministry in Asia.

ECOT on CSR in tourism

Meaningful or just jargon? The Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism (ECOT) questions whether corporate social responsibility (CSR) in tourism is good news for communities in the third world.

ECOT) acknowledges that a growing awareness of CSR has taken place at some levels in the tourism industry within recent years. The inclusion of a Corporate Social Responsibility Day in the 2009 ITB Convention program in Berlin, Germany in March 2009 attests to this.

While commending the efforts to incorporate CSR principles in the tourism industry, ECOT views the effectiveness of CSR application in

terms of positive outcomes engendered. Do these outcomes reduce if not eliminate the negative effects of tourism in the lives of communities which are tourist destinations?

"Corporate Social Responsibility, with an emphasis on responsibility to the planet and its inhabitants beyond the profit basis of industry, can play an important role in making tourism an agent of service to humanity and not one that damages."

For further details on CSR and the ECOT statement, contact Caesar D'Mello at caesar@ecotonline.org.

Young Indigenous / Dalit Women Internship Program

To promote leadership development, the CCA Program Area on Ecumenical Formation Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment (EGY) has initiated an internship program especially for indigenous and Dalit women in Asia. In 2009, CCA welcomes a young indigenous or a Dalit woman 24-34 years of age, to serve as CCA intern in Chiang Mai for a period of nine months from April to December 2009. The indigenous or Dalit intern will be assigned a task within EGY and will be supervised by the EGY Joint Executive Secretary. For further information, contact egy@cca.org.hk



Yip Kok Choong

Mr. Yip Kok Choong, former general Secretary of YMCA in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and later, General Secretary of Asia Pacific Alliance of YMCAs based in Hong Kong, passed away on October 31, 2008, after a debilitating illness.

As the general secretary of the Asia Pacific Alliance of YMCAs, Mr. Yip Kok Choong contributed substantially to strengthen the relationship of APAY with CCA, churches and ecumenical organizations in Asia and around the world. As an ecumenical leader, he adequately showed a way on how churches and communities reach out to the grassroots people and become the voice of the voiceless and marginalized people of Asia.

Larry Cheah

Dr. Larry Cheah passed away on January 29, 2009, after a lingering illness.

An ordained minister of the Methodist Church in Malaysia, Dr. Cheah was CCA Executive Secretary of Youth in 1968 to 1973. He later joined the UN-ESCAP and was stationed in Bangkok.

He was instrumental in paving the way for greater collaboration between the UN and ecumenical organizations in Asia. He also mentored many young people to serve in various capacities in development programmes.

CCA thanks God and the family of Dr. Cheah, for his life and service to the ecumenical youth movement in Asia.

(source: CCM website)



Bishop Julius Paul

Bishop Julius Paul, 63, of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia (ELCM) passed away on November 22, 2008. He had just chaired a very successful committee meeting of the Lutheran World Federation Department for World Service in Guatemala when the accident happened. Three, including Bishop Paul, of the fifteen on board the ferry drowned while travelling across Lake Atitlan in Solola, western Guatemala.

Bishop Paul was born on 14 July 1945. He had served as ELCM bishop since April 1988, and was due to retire in July 2010. He had been a Council member on the Program Committee for World Service since 2003, the same year he was appointed chairperson of the Standing Committee. In the early 1980s he served as a youth intern in the then LWF Department of Church Cooperation.



I have a dream

I dream of a world
Where men respect women
Where men protect children
Where men promote life

I have this vision of another world
A world that exudes these qualities
Justice
Peace
Compassion
I yearn for a world
Where men are strong enough to care
Tender enough to care
Loving enough to protect
I have glimpses of another world
Faithful men
Caring men

Sensitive men

Dear God, work with us to bring this world
Dear men, work with us to bring this world
Dear women, work with us to bring this world

Dear men: are we men enough to embrace this
dream and world?

Ezra Chitando
Anglophone Theology Consultant
Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa
(EHAIA)

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