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Review

Kwok Pui-lan, editor,
Hope Abundant:
Third World and Indigenous Women's Theology
(Orbis Books, 2010; 304 pages; \$34)

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There are anthologies that are pieced together and there are anthologies that are woven into a strong fabric, making them more like a single-author volume even though they include diverse and spirited voices. *Hope Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women's Theology*, intelligently edited by Kwok Pui-lan, is of the strong fabric type.

It is a welcome resource for teaching and for anyone who wants to know what Christian women from around the world are thinking theologically. I predict it will rapidly become a

classic after the fashion of Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye's *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology* (Orbis, 1988), which inspired it. In fact, the book is dedicated to those pioneers who made such an impact with their collection that they created space for many more colleagues to have their voices heard.

Nearly twenty-five years later, the world has become a globalized place with new economic powers (India and China), new religious constellations (the rise of Islam), new diseases (HIV/AIDS), and new breakthroughs in medicine (in vitro fertilization and genetic medicine). There is as a new social and economic order that leaves the Cold War behind. Terrorism is the new name for conflict.

One of the greatest changes in these decades has been the education and integration into society of women and girls. In development circles, this emphasis on women and girls has long been seen as the lynchpin in national and regional progress even without always acknowledging directly the stunning sexism that prevented foresisters from taking public roles.

Religion was one of the worst offenders when it came to women. Very few other than indigenous religious groups included women in leadership and in the articulation of values and customs until the last several decades. This volume makes clear that women around the world, especially women from so-called Third World countries and from indigenous groups, have begun to make inroads in a previously almost all male field.

This collection of Protestant and Catholic women from several continents includes native or indigenous women whose voices have been absent from earlier such feminist collections. That was either because they were unknown or because they were passed over by white (and perhaps also by women of color) feminists in the same way that women in general were ignored by male cultural shapers. The women in this volume bring profoundly helpful insights and represent still more voices unheard.

The book includes a range of essays that are fundamental to understanding recent developments in Third World and indigenous women's theological work. It emerges from groups as much as from individuals, for example, from the Concerned Circle of African Women Theologians, the Conspirando Collective in Santiago, Chile, the Asian Women's Resource Center, as well as from the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians. So it reflects many more voices than the authors' alone.

The authors are a veritable "who's who" in feminist work in religion, including Ivone Gebara, Musa Dube, and Mercy Oyuyoye, to name just a few. I have already put this book on one bibliography and look forward to using it on many others as groups around the world look at the big picture and find their places in it. They take up the questions of economic justice in a globalized world, of violence and colonialism, of genocide and women's resilience. They do so with the lives, and, I might add, the deaths, of women and dependent children right before their eyes. What makes this such an important discussion is the complicated roles that various religions play in an increasingly complicated world.

Each section of the book is prefaced by a poem or prayer, the editor's acknowledgement of the fact that the essays that follow are used by real people, often real believers, whose faith life is important to them. Kwok Pui-lan is a spiritually creative theologian who infuses her own work with such liturgical components that add flesh and bones, trees and rocks to the texts.

The sections are Context and Theology; Scripture, Christology, and Body; Sexuality and Spirituality. Mention of just two essays from each section will only whet the reader's appetite to read the whole book.

Wong Wai Ching Angela from Hong Kong describes one context in her essay "Women Doing Theology with the Asian Ecumenical Movement." The sheer size and complexity of Asia render any generalizations unhelpful. But her very specific references to tireless work by groups like the World Student Christian Federation Asia-Pacific Women's Desk, the YMCA, the Asian

Women's Resource Center and others demonstrate that this work is not all done in the academy. To the contrary, in some parts of Asia it appears that feminist theology is really a grassroots activity. This does not take away from the important theological production in Asia, but it does emphasize that the work is done in community and with the express purpose of enriching the faith life of the adherents.

Andrea Smith, a Cherokee for the USA, writes from another context in "Dismantling the Master's House with the Master's Tool: Native Feminist Liberation Theologies." She brings a wealth of activism and scholarship to her analysis of how even liberation theologies can be "complicit in the missionization and genocide of Native peoples in the Americas" (p. 74). Her moves toward native feminist theologies are creative and challenging.

In the Scripture section, Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon from India describes "Dalit Women and the Bible: Hermeneutical and Methodological Reflections." Like the work of Surekha Nelavala, this Dalit perspective includes both story telling and role-playing as methods for involving lots of people in breaking open the scriptures.

Palestinian Quaker Jean Zaru demonstrates how "Biblical Teachings and the Hard Realities of Life" come together in that troubled part of the world. Her peace-making efforts are legendary and it is clear from this piece how deeply rooted they are in scripture.

In the Christology section, Sharon A. Bong from Malaysia lays out "The Suffering Christ and the Asian Body" which includes focus on suffering, resistance, and healing. She concludes: "A theology that matters is a theology that is embodied." (p. 191).

Clara Luz Ajo Lazaro of Cuba writes "Jesus and Mary Dance with the Orishas: Theological Elements of Interreligious Dialogue." This is but the tip of the iceberg of a very compelling theological project that gives new content to interreligious work. The combination of Anglican Christianity and Afro-Cuban Santeria pushes many boundaries and results in provocative thinking.

In the final section, body, sexuality and spirituality, Isabel Apawo Phiri from Malawi looks at “HIV/AIDS: An African Theological Response in Mission.” She argues for church as “sent by God to bring wholeness to a broken world” (p. 223). Here is where “hope abundant” is needed badly as human suffering continues and deepens because of socially correctable problems.

One more substantive piece on bodies is by Maria Jose Rosado-Nunes on “Catholicism and Women’s Rights as Human Rights” from a Brazilian perspective. This work is the foundation of pioneering work done by Catholics for Choice in Brazil to try to change that country’s laws and culture on reproductive health. Even though the piece was published in 2002, many of the same problems remain to be solved.

I predict that this very useful, very readable, and very necessary collection will see a lot of printings as it becomes a benchmark in the field. I worry a little that some of the essays are 10 years old (some first published in 1997 and 1999 though most date from the mid-2000s) because the world has changed so decisively in a decade. But in no case did I find the work “dated” and in virtually every instance I only wished the work has gotten this kind of promotion much earlier.

There is a question about how to teach such materials. There has been a tendency in some earlier liberation theologies to have impressions created by publishers of the material that have then been taken as “how it is” even though any such publication is but a snapshot of the field. Nonetheless, what becomes of the larger theological conversation, in this case, the work of women from the two-thirds world and indigenous groups, is shaped by one editor and/or one publisher’s choices. Plus, it is in English, which further skews the matter. Happily, Kwok Pui-lan is an impeccable judge of what is important and Orbis has a long history of publishing such materials. But it is a caution to the reader not to reify what is given but to use it as a springboard to read more, especially in the original languages.

This book will accomplish its purpose if (a) it results in much broader knowledge about the multiple ways women around the world are doing theology, (b) it is replicated in many regions and in many languages as women increasingly take seriously their own work, and (c) it replaces some of the “classics” in theology that are single-authored books in favor of this choral approach. Let the voices sing and the dancing begin. Then we will know we are doing theology.