



Review of

Kwok Pui-lan, editor,
Hope Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women's Theology
(Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2010).

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There are very few books that strike a good balance between the viewpoints of academicians and of activists on aspirations of feminists of the two-thirds world. Kwok Pui-lan's edited work, *Hope Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2010), is one such exceptional combination. Kwok draws inspiration from *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*, published in 1988, and it is very apt that the book is dedicated to Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, co-editors of that earlier book. Though "third world" is a contested term in contemporary

scholarship, Kwok retains it with the most convincing argument apart from others that this term resonates “Third Space,” a famous discursive term proposed by Homi Bhabha, now widely used in postcolonial discourses. Kwok reiterates that “the in-between space... questions established categorizations of culture and identity and opens up the possibilities of renegotiating power and creating new cultural meanings” (p. 2). Truly, this work captures hybridization of multiple experiences that create trans-cultural spaces by which women in two-third world confront the hegemonic powers in various forms as sexism, colonialism, racism, classism, casteism... and the list goes on! This work has taken the binaries head-on that retain women as the “other” in epistemological conjectures in mainline theologies.

The collection of essays is anchored to four major themes: Context and Theology, Scripture, Christology, and Body, Sexuality, and Spirituality from among the indigenous women of Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Pacific regions. All these themes are very pertinent to the experiences of indigenous women in two-thirds world. In that sense, the book does justice in presenting a very basic understanding of human relationships unique to their cultural contexts. The theological expressions of indigenous women in two-third world have combined the postulations of feminist theologies, eco-theologies and postcolonial theologies in their quest for creating alternative creative spaces. They are issues concerning women in their powerless, marginalized locations especially after political colonization in a neo-colonial globalized world.

The first section on *Context and Theology* arouses the curiosity of the reader as to how the colonial entanglements of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Native America determine theological manifestations of women. All the four articles in the first section time and again address the close nexus among (patriarchal) culture, women’s experiences, and colonialism be it Euro-centric or North American imperialism. Whether it is Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro’s engendered communal theology or Wong Wai Ching Angela’s inclusive community of partnership between women and men or Ivone Gebara’s just community of individuals and peoples or Andrea Smith’s decolonizing community, all point to how feminist liberation theologies try to challenge and overcome the lopsided patriarchal cultural and theological articulations and envision a possibility of an alternative world with hope abundant!!

Kanyoro's proposal for an engendered communal theology to bridge the gap between feminism and African culture finds parallel with the inclusive community of partnership between men and women proposed by Angela. Feminism itself could be colonial if it fails to address in Asian context the romanticized victimhood. Treating women as mere victims in the patriarchal societies, I am afraid, will only tend to reiterate stereotypic images of women and feminism. Women continue to resist and build feminist consciousness to create alternative spaces to exercise their personhood as victors too. While Gebara's article alerts the reader of the tempting trap of assuming patriarchal attitudes, it leaves a vacuum for any realistic pointers to weigh feminist aspirations stronger than the patriarchal entanglements. Smith is bold in critiquing Christian imperialism in Churches and dominant theologies where victimization of women and identification of victimized women with Christ the suffering servant distorts the progress of liberation theologies among native people in North America. Heteropatriarchy-based nation building of U. S. empire sanctions nation-state's functioning through dominance, violence and control which, she feels, needs to be challenged by native communities' vision for another possible world in the future. This is indeed a great challenge to the white supremacy!

As a progression to the first section, the second section on *Scripture* critically analyses how Bible has been a tool in the hands of the perpetrators of colonialism, casteism, ethnic domination, patriarchy, and white supremacy. Here the writers innovatively engage with their indigenous cultures of Africa (Musa W. Dube), Dalit India (Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon), Palestine (Jean Zaru), the Cherokee Nation (Laura E. Donaldson), or Mexico (Elsa Tamez) to create liberation hermeneutics of the Scriptures to ensure a life for all over-against the power-notions embedded in treating the 'other' as of no existence. For feminists, liberating Bible from the clutches of such dense matrices of dominant ideologies remains a greater challenge across the geographical boundaries. What really amazes the reader about their engagement with the Bible is the homogeneity in hoping for liberation even though their respective cultural contexts are heterogeneous and complex!! Whether it is a postcolonial reading of Mt. 10:5–6, 15:24, and 28:18–20, or a Dalit woman's reading or a Palestinian Christian reading of Exodus story or a Cherokee reading of Ruth or a sociological reading of domestic codes in 1 Timothy, the authors

use their potential language to inspire the readers to travel beyond the literal Biblical texts, to grapple with the enslaving imperial and patriarchal ideologies, and to unravel the hidden life-affirming egalitarian ideologies.

Christology gains serious attention in the third section as it forms an essential aspect of theologizing in the feminist circles. The cultural struggles to make Jesus Christ a liberationist is well captured by the writers in this section with a critical analysis of how feminist-use of cultural paradigms are more liberationist than the male selection of respective cultural concepts, as Mercy Amba Oduyoye suggests (p. 168). In articulating Christologies from once colonized countries, authors agree with others invariably on their postcolonial approach of critiquing missiology of imperialism. The Christological language based on the death of patriarchal God could overcome the victim language into victory language of feminist theologizing. Jesus Christ as the author of *Talitha Qumi* (“Christ Restores to Life”) portrays a global Christological metaphor which rises above the women’s common experiences of fear, uncertainty, sickness, illiteracy, hunger, spousal aggression, and distortion of the image of their humanity.

In a similar note of concern, Sharon A. Bong sets Embodied theologies as problematizing dualisms such as “mind/body, spirit/matter, abstract/concrete, objective/subjective, theory/praxis, universal/particular, observer/observed, and male/female” (p. 191). By expressing discomfort over negotiating bodies and sexualities in embodied theologies, she lays down limits of the centrality of bodies that are *pathologized* (bodies that suffer), *politicized* (bodies that resist), and *spiritualized* (bodies that heal) in Asian theologies. The close nexus between colonial mindset and patriarchal culture could not come out more strongly than this: “Women’s bodies are on the one hand homogenously constructed as victimized to justify colonial intervention in the form of civilizing missions; on the other hand, they are propped up as barometers of national essence to preserve tradition and to fortify resistance. Within a postcolonial identity politics, woman is thus doubly colonized: denigrated as “poor woman” and idealized as “superwoman” (p. 189).

Lee Miena Skye, an Australian aboriginal feminist, feels that their Christologies agree with those of black women and women of colour on the “humanity” and “saving power” of Christ than the gender of Christ as white Christian feminists do. Her “creation/identity”

methodology envisions a Christology that does away with the binarism of spirit and nature. However her exclusive claim of treating nature as sacred and reiterating aboriginal women's unflinching claim to land/nature/creation may have already been articulated in the other feminist christologies such as tribal women theology in India for instance. The "quadric-dimensional" oppression (of racism, classism, sexism, and naturism) that women experience can be related to any woman in a colonized two-third world. Cuban transculturation between the Rule of Ocha or Santeria and Christian belief as exposed by Clara Luz Ajo Lázaro does it vividly. It is "an interesting discussion of interfaith dialogue and hybridization between cultures" (introduction, p. 11) so that the role of feminist consciousness as tool or religious harmony in an imperial set-up is not sidelined in the book!

In an attempt to answer the questions on why and how feminist interrogations of body and sexuality could be included in the spirituality discourses, all four essays in the culminating section deal with fundamental feminist issues of women's autonomy over their bodies and how family, religion, culture and society have controlled them to keep the patriarchal status quo. It could be African andro-centric culture against HIV/AIDS and female bodies or Chinese patriarchal familial norms or Brazilian Catholic ecclesial control of women's reproductive rights or the imperial foreign powers and Native elites in Philippines that these write-ups deal with, the authors are unanimous in liberating women's bodies from the patriarchal and colonial entanglements. When Carmelita Usog echoes Spirituality as a life lived to the full, she recognizes that one's spirituality ought to be integrated with people's lives and struggles (p. 262), here women's. For Maria José Rosado-Nunes, women's rights are human rights, which need to be reflected in family, religion and culture/tradition, That the global consensus to deal with human rights in terms such as 'man' and 'the rights of man' does only push women's rights to the private sphere and their cry for autonomy and human dignity to the unheard margins of the society. MengYanling resonates with the same notion of sexuality and spirituality primarily by identifying the tension between Chinese culture and the biblical culture. It was striking to observe how the Chinese Book of Rites resembles Indian Manusmriti in keeping women in subjugation under man: The former says, "As children, women obey their fathers and brothers.

Married, obey husbands and as widows obey their sons.” Similarly Manusmriti upholds that a young girl is protected by her father, a married woman by her husband and an old woman by her son. This only reveals how the patriarchal culture controls women’s lives in two-thirds world contexts! HIV/AIDS and female body in African cultural context is just yet another reiterating example in the whole power game of patriarchy.

Any bibliophile who explores the deeper intricacies that form the “third world” feminist theologies and activism would certainly credit scholarship to Kwok’s edited volume as it does justice in presenting a wide array of voices represented by different people- groups of the two-third world. One striking aspect of this book is that it has succeeded in bridging the gap between feminist theology and postcolonial theories in dealing with women’s protest against hegemonic powers in various forms in the world today. Invariably all the authors have unearthed the close nexus between colonialism and sexism and feminist theories, and theologies cannot help but interacting with them. Various perspectives such as Catholic and Protestant, and academic and activist, established and emerging voices have been captured in this volume by the editor’s careful selection. This collection could have sought some fresher unpublished insights on the issues that would have led the readers through newer trajectories. It may not comprise all the eligible unheard voices from the two-thirds world in a 270-page monograph though! I wish similar projects published in two-thirds world gain distribution in Western academia. The fact remains that Kwok’s edition is a delight to the bibliophiles on indigenous women and “third world” theologies.