

## Invitation to Join EWA 7 Videoconferencing

On Friday, January 19, 2018 there will be an interactive video conference featuring one of the paper sessions of the biennial conference of the **Ecclesia of Women in Asia (EWA)**, which will be taking place in Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam. EWA is a forum of Catholic women doing theology in Asia. EWA's vision is the development of theologizing from Asian women's perspectives and the recognition of Asian Catholic women theologians as equal partners in theological discussions within the Church and Academe. This is the 4<sup>th</sup> videoconferencing that EWA is holding in collaboration with partners from the Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church.

The theme of the conference is "Foodscapes: Gastronomy, Theologies, and Spiritualities." A *foodscape* connotes a "plate-full" of issues connected to food, such as the abundance of food in some places of the world and hunger in others, industrial farming, food trade, the politics of food vis-à-vis caste, religion, and gender, within the larger context of global capitalism and climate change. Given the social expectation of women in Asian cultures as "the mother-nurturer," and therefore often regarded as "cooks" and "helpers," food-related concerns impact women in a very central way. The conference reflects on these food issues from various Asian perspectives on ethics, theologies, or spiritualities.

The two papers that will be presented in the video conference session are:

### **Sappia-Christ: Rice of Life**

*Rachel Joyce Marie Sanchez (Philippines)*

For many Filipinos, a meal is not a meal without rice. A study by the Food and Nutrition Research Institute also shows that, "When the going gets tough, mothers go hungry." In response to hunger experienced in an urban poor community, the women of one parish initiated "*Isang Dakot ng Pagmamahal*" (One Handful of Love), a practice wherein members of BECs (Basic Ecclesial Communities) contribute rice grains for members of the community in dire need. This turns out to have life-giving effects for the BEC.

This essay explores stories and insights from these women BEC leaders and how they interpret a Philippine rice myth about Sappia, a goddess who, moved by compassion for the poor, used an insignificant weed, and squeezed both her breasts upon it for milk until blood came out to produce rice grains. Sappia is explored as a Christ-figure by bringing out Christological themes from her story, specifically sacrifice, compassion for the poor, and faith. This Christological image can be liberating, but may lead to reinforcing social expectations of the "martyr mother." Instead of "giving until it hurts", women from the BECs show that sharing can be done by everyone creatively. From this discussion on the story of Sappia we explored further the image of Christ as the Rice of Life, which avoids the association of the female Christ image with the self-sacrificing mother, and instead highlights sharing and nurturing communal and ecological relationships.

**Rachel Joyce Marie O. Sanchez** is 2016 2<sup>nd</sup> place winner of the Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza New Scholar Award. She teaches Theology at the Ateneo de Manila University while currently working on her PhD dissertation on Philippine feminist theologies at the Loyola School of Theology.

### **You Are What You Eat: Exploring the Politics of Food in India**

*Astrid Lobo Gajiwala (India)*

In India, people are characterized by what they eat. People will identify themselves as “vegetarian” or “non-vegetarian”, thereby not just admitting to a particular dietary preference, but to a specific religion, caste, region, culture and worldview. This classification determines whom one marries, where one lives, whose house one can enter, and where and with whom one dines. It is a culture that reflects the fastidiousness of the Jews of the Old Testament with regard to the eating of “unclean food” and the mingling with those who ate such food.

A new development in recent years is the manipulation of food habits by political parties to gain votes. Vegetarianism is a trait usually shared by the upper castes who are its traditional vote banks. Most Hindus revere the cow as a symbol of the Divine’s generosity to humankind. A number of States have banned the slaughter of cows and the serving of beef with severe penalties, indicating the hegemony of the Hindu majority over the beef eating lower castes and the Muslim minority, both of whose livelihoods depend on the cow trade. All of this has led to “othering” even of the Christian minority. How can the Church respond to this changing political scenario that seeks to destroy diversity and impose a uniform Hindu nation? How does this turn of event affect the self-understanding of the Church?

**Astrid Lobo Gajiwala** has a PhD in Medicine, and Post Graduate Diplomas in Tissue Banking, Bioethics, and Theology. She received the 1996 Best Christian Journalist Award of the *New Leader*, a Catholic biweekly in Madras, and the Golden Pen Award from *The Examiner*. A former Assistant Coordinator for the EWA, she is currently on the advisory bodies of a few international reform groups as well as the Jesuit Conference of South Asia (JCSA) and the Jesuit Faculties’ Forum for South Asia (JFFSA).

The venues, local times, and contact persons are as follows:

- Boston College, Boston, USA 10:00 am Mary Jo Iozzio (mary.jo.iozzio@bc.edu)
- Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, USA 9:00 am Gina Wolfe ([rwolfe@ctu.edu](mailto:rwolfe@ctu.edu))
- St. Augustine College, South Africa, 4:00 pm, Nontando Hadebe (noehadebe@gmail.com)

If you are interested in hosting a viewing at your institution please contact Gina Wolfe [rwolfe@ctu.edu](mailto:rwolfe@ctu.edu) or Mary Jo Iozzio [mary.jo.iozzio@bc.edu](mailto:mary.jo.iozzio@bc.edu) or Agnes M. Brazal [agnesmbrazal@gmail.com](mailto:agnesmbrazal@gmail.com) to see if there is still a slot available. The **70** minute session will be held on Friday, January 19 at 10:00 pm local time in Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam.

We are very excited about this project and hope that CTEWC members who reside near the host venues will participate in what promises to be a rich opportunity to engage in dialogue with these two Asian women theologians.