

# Manila Women's Forum

A Cross-cultural Network for Women

MWF Newsletter

Manila, Philippines

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*A passionate and compassionate spirituality*

## Asian Feminist Theology

By Suzy Roxas

**S**ister Mary John Mananzan, a Missionary Benedictine sister, was our guest speaker at the July 20, 2015 Manila Women's Forum meeting. Sr. Mary John is known internationally for her work on feminist theology, and in 2011 she was named one of the top 100 inspiring people in the world, alongside US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, by Women Deliver, the leading global advocate fighting for women's rights and maternal health.

Although Sr. Mary John's topic was profound and complicated, her well-versed and charismatic interpretation allowed her to translate the topic beautifully into an understandable, impactful discourse—making it evident to all how necessary it is to approach religion from a perspective that integrates both the feminine and masculine, and demonstrating how much richer and full of new insights, reflections, and realities a holistic approach can be.

Modern day theology is written and interpreted from a male perspective.

This perspective is harmful for two reasons. First, it is biased against women—therefore, either putting women in a subordinate position, or discriminating against women by treating them as less than equal or as lesser human beings. Second, it significantly constricts the understanding and power of the word of God. As the Bible was written from a male perspective, its ability to present the female perspective, and the nurturing nature, compassion, and tenderness of the woman, is limited. As religion is a

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*Sr. Mary John Mananzan (sixth from left) with MWF Chair Lisa Lumbao (extreme left) and MWF members, last July 20.*



(*Asian ... from p. 1*) critical part of culture, the Catholic Church's elevating of the male perspective through its teachings has many repercussions. The use of the male perspective impacts laws, the judiciary, and workplace equality, and colors the values, beliefs, and behaviors of people—identifying what is wrong, right, how people should think, act, and behave. This gendered thinking is unconscious and therefore insidious, marginalizing women even before they are born.

Enter the need for feminist theology. To embark on this means to re-think, reinterpret, and reformulate Biblical theological concepts from the feminine point of view.

Feminist theology has several characteristics, including the following.

**Contextualization:** As women begin to understand and come to terms with their experiences in a male-dominated world, they begin to understand themselves and their reality better. In the Philippines, for example, it is important for women to realize that discrimination makes them susceptible to hazardous working situations in factories, through the threat of prostitution and sex tourism, and through rape and torture in the military. Women in India also face hazards through the dowry system, bride burning, and forced sterilization.

With the reorientation of theology, there is an active search to find equality

between men and women. The goal is not to place women above men or to debunk all male-centered ideas, but instead to seek to restore an inclusive, full humanity approach.

**Recovery of authentic value of women's experience and reinterpretation and reformulation of religion:**

Most often cited as proof of male dominance is the theological premise of the maleness of God. In addition, throughout the Bible, teachings have trumped the superiority of men and dictated the character traits and attitudes "a good woman should have." First, for example, within the Bible there is the focus on the maleness of Jesus—which is used to discriminate against women in church and society.

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*"Some of the goals of feminist theology include increasing the role of women among the clergy and religious authorities, reinterpreting male-dominated imagery and language about God, determining women's place in relation to career and motherhood, and studying images of women in the religion's sacred texts and matriarchal religion."*

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From Wikipedia

Second, there is the propagation of the "Mary cult" which minimizes Mary's role in the history of salvation and misappropriates her example of subservience as being docile or servile.

By critiquing the Bible in the context of equality, women see themselves as individuals with personal value, having a right to life, as God's co-workers and agents of life. As women understand their religious traditions in a deeper sense, they create new translations, and new interpretations. New religious insights are thus expressed in ways that are relevant, current, and reflect their innate value.

**Religious and Cultural Critique:**

It is important to have a deeper understanding of both the liberating and oppressive forces of culture and religion that legitimize and perpetuate the oppression of women. By understanding the root of the oppression, changes can be made.

**New Vision:** As women see new possibilities, they challenge themselves to meet new goals. The desire to grow and stretch gives them power, strength, and hope and allows them to create social transformation from the ground up.

Listening to the enigmatic and animated Sr. Mary John was like having a front-row seat to a TED talk. She exudes so much fire, warmth, and wisdom in championing all of humanity for the Glory of the God she loves. ■

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**Manila Women's Forum**

**Manila Women's Forum (MWF)** is a cross-cultural network for women. It provides opportunities to build friendships, talk to women of various cultures, and share information about resources. Our meetings are intended to provide intellectual stimulation and lead to personal and professional development. All women are welcome to join. ■ The current officers are: **Lisa Lumbao**, Chair; **Julia Holz**, Treasurer and Membership; **Beulah P. Taguivalo**, Newsletter; **Lisa Stuart**, Message Board Moderator; **Evelyn Mendiola**, Membership; **Shari Virjee Tañada**, Message Board; **Camille Dalmacio**, Message Board. ■ Cost of membership is P300 per year. Members receive a copy of the current mailing list, and the newsletter which is also sent to non-members. A contribution of P50 is collected from non-members at each monthly meeting. For more information about MWF, please contact Lisa Lumbao at Tel. 275-8886 or at [lisa.lumbao@gmail.com](mailto:lisa.lumbao@gmail.com).