

**Program for Theology and Cultures in Asia  
Workshop on Re-Reading of the Bible in Mekong Region  
(Sponsored by FTEAP)**

**Report**



A workshop on Re-Reading of the Bible in Mekong Region was held at the Bangkok Institute of Theology (BIT), Bangkok, Thailand on 21-22 November, 2024. Rev. Dr. Ira Mangililo, Ph.D., was the keynote speaker. A professor in Old Testament and Feminist Theology at the Universitas Kristen Artha Wacana, Fakultas Teologi, Kupang, Indonesia, a pastor at Gereja Masehi Injili di Timor (GMIT) and editor of Indonesian Journal of Theology, Dr. Mangililo, gave an engaging guide for the participants to read the bible in *its* context and the local particular context. To demonstrate this task of reading the bible in context, Dr. Mangililo presented the history of Christianity and the experience of Christians in Indonesia. The Bible came as an imperialistic text, intertwined with Dutch colonial power, and therefore the bible influenced the Indonesian's cultural reception, wherein local interpretations felt inadequate. One of the issues highlighted in re-reading the bible is the empowerment of marginalized groups, such as women. Describing the mass murder of Gerwani women in 1965-1966, Dr. Mangililo, interpreted Judges 19:1-30, from a post-colonial feminist perspective to demonstrate, how “in the formation of an androcentric national unity, women were forgotten and marginalized.”

Dr. Fides del Castillo professor at De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines, and a committee member of PTCA gave the keynote lecture that mapped the Asian context. Titled, “*Context of Asia and the Mekong Region: Opportunities and Challenges of Theology and Mission*” Dr. del Castillo brought her expertise on *laylayan* theology (a Filipino theology of voice from the margins), mission history and spirituality in presenting diversities of Asia. Dr. del Castillo emphasized the need to enculturate Christianity to Asian contexts to make Christianity relevant to people in Asia, facing challenges such as climate change, poverty, and human trafficking, among others.

Apart from the two keynote lectures, there were panel presentation sessions and group discussions, categorized by country-wise and issue-wise, based on scripture texts. The panelists comprised of PTCA committee members, Dr. MC Marlar, professor of New Testament and academic dean at the Tahan Theological Seminary, Myanmar, Dr. Phoo Phlet, professor of Old Testament at the Karen Theological College, Yangon, Myanmar, and Rev. Dr. Bright Myeong Seok Lee, professor of Ecotheology at ACTS University International Graduate School. The panel topics were, “Women and Bible”, “Christian Mission and Bible” and “Environment and Bible”. Following presentations, groups discussed on selected scripture texts and reported to the whole participants.

Each day of the workshop began and closed with worship led by the faculty and students of BIT. Participants included from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam with a balanced gender participation. A highlight was the visit of ELCA members. Dr. Franklin Ishida, ELCA program director for Asia Pacific shared what his Buddhist convert father, said about missing his Asian/Buddhist culture, as a Christian. Dr. Ishida encouraged the participants to appreciate the dynamics of diverse expressions of Christianity in Asia and strive to “being church across cultures, being people of God.”

During the reporting sessions and the concluding evaluation, the participants shared their thoughts. The challenges Christians in particular and the larger society in general face across the Mekong region are common, such as being religious minorities, climate change, economic inequalities, gender discrimination, and challenges within the church etc. All the participants expressed their delight in having the opportunity to learn from Asian biblical scholars new ways of looking at the bible, not just the literal reading most commonly held. A participant who came from Cambodia with a conservative Christian background, expressed, that he has learnt to read the bible with more critical eyes and he was looking forward to share what he has learned with his colleagues.

BIT hostel and provided very good hospitality and the participants expressed appreciation to the president Rev. Dr. Pongsak Limthongviratn and the BIT community.

The statement of Dr. Mangililo, “[t]he Bible’s interpretation must consider its colonial history and the current context of readers” is significant in re-reading the bible in the context of Mekong region in Asia. It is crucial to understand the bible in its context and the context of reception to empower present-day readers to discover the God of liberation and justice that the bible records, with all its contextual realities. The workshop was a step for the participants in acquiring skills to make their interpretations of biblical texts relevant and purposeful in their contexts for faithfulness to the God of freedom and justice.

The committee members also expressed appreciation to the Foundation of Theological Education in Asia and the Pacific for its support in organizing the workshop.

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