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Maryknoller: 'good theology leads to prophetic action'

Joyce Meyer | Nov. 15, 2013

Tagaytay City, Philippines ? Evoking the memories of four women, two of them Maryknollers, who were murdered in El Salvador nearly 33-years-ago, Maryknoll Sister Helen Graham today stressed here the importance of solid theological education as the key to unlocking the prophetic future for Asia?s religious congregations.

She spoke at a gathering of some 80 women religious leaders who have gathered under the auspices of AMOR in its 16th gathering since its foundation in the early 1970s. AMOR stands for Asia-Oceania Meeting of Religious. The conference theme is on prophecy and mysticism.

Graham said solid theology would continue to lead to prophetic ministry and service for the poor and marginalized of Asia.

Graham has taught theology in the Philippines for 46 years and has seen the way theological training leads to solid footing for what she called ?prophetic? outreach to the needy.

She linked some of the conditions in Asia today with the miseries and sufferings of Old Testament prophets, both women and men, ?who were grasped by God's word of warning for the people to let go of greed and desire for power that keep people poor and disenfranchised.? Other prophets, she said, were called ?to comfort those who are suffering from oppression and abuse.?

However these prophets, she went on, were not excited about God's relentless pursuit of them. They resisted because they feared the wrath and retaliation of those in power.

Following her talk, conference participants conversed with one another about how they, as Asian women and members of AMOR, they can unite to form networks to take action against the common issues plaguing Asia. Among those they found in common are:

· corruption that has infiltrated all strata of their societies,

· land grabbing by multi-nationals for mining and logging that provide short term economic gain, but displace thousands of families annually

· environment degradation by deforestation with consequent erosion of good soil that then is washed into the sea killing fish and destroying wildlife habitat.

Their reflections about actions the women might take to confront these issues were brought into sobering relief by two speakers who followed Graham.

One, a Filipino, Jun Lozada, told of being a whistle blower about government corruption. Allowing himself to become vulnerable, he sought the protection of religious. He told the gathering that although he and his family no longer need the protection of sanctuary provided by members of the national conference of women and men

religious, there are still cases against him.

"This call to truth never ends,? he said. What helps him and his family endure, he said, is the sisters' support.

Then Benedictine Sister Stella Matutina, working in the southern Philippines Mindanao area shared the story of her and other members of a regional sisters organization's harassment by the military for activities to stop land grabbing by American and Asian investors who, she said, through mining and big agri-business farming are destroying land needed for food production.

She said that 38 environmental activists have been murdered for their work.

Both speakers said they experienced a sense of betrayal by some priests and bishops who do not support them in the truth telling.

Finally, Graham reminded the sisters that in their planning as an organization, they need ?to be wise as serpents and guileless as doves.? Old Testament prophets and Jesus, too, she said, imaginatively discerned what their roles would be in confronting the issues of their day, ?but no matter what action the took, being prophetic is not simple or easy or without suffering and even death.?

Presentation Sister Joyce Meyer, the former director of the Conrad N. Hilton Fund for Sisters, is currently working with the Leadership Conference of Women Religious as a consultant ,and attended the conference in that capacity.

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