

Women on the move: Her story!



Picture taken at the 3rd international hermeneutics conference in Chicago, 2014 by Iris Benesh, LWF

Name: Monica Melanchthon
Country of origin: India
Date of Birth: 1962
Church: Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church in India
Period of Mandate: xxx

Short biography: The oldest of four daughters, she began her education in the Gulabi Girls High School in Bangalore, Karnataka and subsequently studied at the Northfield Secondary School, Birmingham, United Kingdom (1973-1975). She then continued her studies in Bangalore at St John's High School (1975-1976) and the Goodwill Girls High School (1976-1977) from where she received her "Secondary School Leaving Certificate". Over the next five years (1977-1982), she completed her preuniversity course and a BA degree in psychology, economics and sociology at Mount Carmel college, Bangalore. Encouraged and driven by the dreams, and aspirations of her father, she then pursued a BD at the United Theological College, Bangalore and graduated at the top of her class in 1986. Melanchthon then worked as a media assistant for the then Karnataka Baptist Sabeyagala Samaikya for about six months before interning at the All India Council of Christian Women, a unit of the National Council of Churches in India, to work on a 10 month study project on "the status and role of women in the Indian church".

In December 1988, Melanchthon left for advanced studies in Old Testament at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC), USA. Melanchthon received a ThM in 1991 and a PhD in June 1995. She then returned to India to join the faculty of the Gurukul Lutheran Theological college and Research Institute, Chennai, South India, and has been there ever since.

She now heads the Department of Old Testament/Hebrew Bible and has held several administrative positions, including the dean of graduate studies (2001-2005) and dean of doctoral studies and convener of the research committee (2007-2009). At the Senate of Serampore College (University) level, she has served as chair of the Board of Studies, women's Studies (1998-2005) member of its research committee (2000-2003), a senator (2003-2008) and a member of its executive committee (2005-2008). She continues to serve on the doctoral evaluation committees of several universities and theological institutions both in India and beyond. Melanchthon has been active in many organizations and ecumenical bodies. As a youth, she was active in the student Christian Movement of India and was on its executive committee (1984-1988). She was a member of the Women's commission of the World Student Christian Federation-Asia Pacific region (1984-1987) and the advisor to the Women's Commission of the WSCF (1990-1995). She has contributed to various study projects of the Lutheran World Federation and has participated regionally and internationally in various programs related to gender, interfaith dialogue, Bible, mission, theology, development, and theological education initiated by the LWF, the World Council of Churches, Council of World Mission, Christian Conference of Asia, and Asian women's resource centre for culture and theology. Besides mentoring students at the GLTCRI, she has lectured in institutions abroad.

She is also known for training lay people, youth, women and social activists in India and abroad, particularly in equipping them with tools for social analysis and the critical study of sacred texts. In 2009, LSTC recognized her work by awarding her the Distinguished alumna award for theological education in the Global Church. Her publications attest to her global profile among biblical scholars who engage in contextual biblical interpretations. She is an active member of the Society of Biblical Literature and sits on the advisory board of its international cooperation initiative. She is currently the coeditor general of one of its online publication series, namely the International Voices in Biblical studies. She is an editorial board member of several journals including Dialog. Closer to home she is the secretary of the Society of Asian Biblical studies committed to fostering biblical studies in Asia.

Melanchthon and her work are in large measure a product of ideas and friendships sparked in these academic and faith communities. She is also influenced to a large extent by her faith, her experiences as a woman, her ecumenical upbringing, and the multicultural context of Asia, its culture and the pervasive situation of violence and poverty. Her involvements are driven by the conviction that the Christian gospel should meet people at the point of their needs and struggles. She has strong commitments to people who have been marginalized politically, socially, economically, and environmentally. She has contributed toward developing Dalit and Indian feminist hermeneutics, theologies and interpretation of biblical texts, drawing on insights from the social biographies of these communities, their perspectives and their lived experiences.

In 2005, she married Jione Havea, a minister of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga currently serving as senior lecturer of Old Testament at the United Theological College, North Parramatta, Australia. In November 2009, she was ordained into the ministry of the World and Sacrament by the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Written by Esther Suhasini Williams, from the book: Abundant Harvest: stories of Asian Lutherans, Edmond Yee and P. Paul Rajashekar, editors and compilers, p.306-308