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## *Editorial*

### **TOWARDS ASIAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIES**

#### **Reflections on *Fides et Ratio*, article 72**

In this issue of *Asian Horizons* we continue the discussion on "Towards Asian Christian Theologies. Reflections on *Fides et Ratio*, art. 72." The response that we received from scholars around the world was so enthusiastic that we decided to dedicate two consecutive issues to this theme. This fervent response itself shows the relevance of and theological interest in building up inter-cultural and Asian theologies, making theology more meaningful responding to the context. In this issue we have eight articles on the theme selected and three articles on other themes.

In his article "The Wisdom of Learning Interreligiously after *Fides et Ratio*," Francis X. Clooney, in light of his personal, cultural, intellectual and spiritual encounter with Hinduism and other religions for more than three decades, reflects on the meaning and implications of learning interreligiously. According to Clooney, it will not be right to consider certain theologies as "theology" and others as "local"; "all Christian theologies are local and all matter to the universal Church." Theologies may differ because their contexts are different. They have much to teach one another; cross-cultural learning is intrinsic to Christian mission. Through this learning the Christian doctrine is enriched not by changes in truth, rather the doctrine itself gains a new, local richness that is not merely external. This new learning, based on the common ground of universal human nature, gives us the possibility of multiple theologies, "all of them intertwined with a common Christian heritage, but none of them the sole privileged expression of that history for today." Clooney underscores that none of the local theologies should become a closed system, considering itself as fixed forever. Various Christian

theologies have a “shared future history, learning from and challenging one another.” Learning across religious boundaries, according to Clooney, requires virtues like humility, taking seriously the current politics, desire to learn, and spiritual practices on the basis of the new interreligious and intercultural encounters.

In his article, “The *Sangam* of Religions in the *Unknown Christ*,” Cheriyan Menacherry, summarises the contributions of Raymond Panikkar, especially his concept of “Unknown Christ” presented mainly in his *Unknown Christ of Hinduism. Towards an Ecumenical Christophany*.” Paying tribute to Panikkar, a great champion of intercultural and interreligious theology, Menacherry underscores that Panikkar’s involvement in other religions was so deep that he could rightly say that, “I am at the confluence (*sangam*) of the four rivers: the Hindu, the Christian, the Buddhist and the Secular traditions.” It is the mediating mystery in God, CHRIST, that makes religions possible, and hence, Christ, “known or unknown,” is the meeting point of religions. CHRIST is the common mediator, not a monopoly of Christians. Based on this principle, Panikkar tried to show that there is a presence of CHRIST in Hinduism. The CHRIST present in Hinduism is the unknown Christ; but, he is not a stranger to Hinduism, since He is the real light that illumines everyone in the world. On the other hand, Christians also must find the full and real face of CHRIST. Menacherry points out that Panikkar has given a unique momentum for interreligious dialogue, respecting unity in plurality.

Tord Fornberg, in his article, “Towards Asian Christian Theologies, Reflections on *Fides et Ratio*, art. 72,” underlines that the real question today is whether it is possible in our times to use interpretative patterns and approaches other than those used by the early Church during the first centuries. Referring to the New Testament, he shows that the first generation of Christians used different interpretative patterns in dealing with the events and sayings related to the ministry of Jesus. As attempts of inculturation in the ancient Hellenistic world and in India, Fornberg describes the initiatives taken by Alexander the Great and Asoka, and argues that the “encounter between East and West in the centuries before and after Christ proves the adaptability of philosophical and theological terminology to function outside of their original cultural context.” Enumerating a few concrete examples, Fornberg argues that in Asia it is necessary to use the non-Western categories in the service of the Church and that this process will help us to see to what degree we can share the faith of each other as believers in a divine reality. Fornberg asserts that theology, to be meaningful, must address problems of people, living in a particular historical, cultural and

religious context. Though inculturation needs great care and attention in order that misunderstanding and backlash may be avoided, it helps the Gospel shine in new ways.

Kees de Jong in his article, "Unity in Diversity? Intercultural and Interreligious Relations in Indonesia," describes how Churches in Indonesia try to respond to the challenge of cultural and religious diversity and to put into practice the national motto, "Unity in Diversity." Though at times there are clashes, in general there is a harmonious relation among religions and tribes, and the Churches give importance to the local original cultures. The Indonesian Church has issued different statements acknowledging the presence of God in different cultures. The author argues that dialogue with different cultures makes the meaning of the Gospel more evident and that people of different cultures can help each other to strengthen the relation between the Gospel and culture. This is a process of confrontation and confirmation. Kees de Jong gives an overview of the history of the initiatives taken by the government and non-governmental organizations to promote harmony among religions. According to him, one of the hindrances to harmony and peaceful co-existence is the conflicting ideologies within different religions. On the one hand, there are movements which adopt the line of fundamentalism and radicalism; on the other hand, there is a firm conviction that the Churches need to be more sensitive to the indigenous cultures.

Ana Bajzelj Bevelacqua's article, "The Ontological Aspects of Jain Soteriology, with a Particular Reference to the Bonded and Liberated States of the soul," is an investigation into the Jain understanding of the mechanisms of bondage and liberation. Beginning with the Jain notion of a living substance in a broader framework of Jain metaphysics, the author analyses the Jain view of the soul and its liberation from the endless journey through the cycle of innumerable possible birth-states. According to Ana Bajzelj Bevelacqua, amongst all the Indian philosophical and religious traditions, the Jains took the state of our bondage most literally, namely, according to them, our souls are actually trapped in the continuous cycle of existences from old, being weighed down by our bodily forms, despite their natural movement being upward. After having described the Jain concept of the soul and its bondage and liberation, the author attempts to show how this concept is echoed in early Christian ontology, especially that of early Christian Gnosticism, the influence of which continues to interest scholarly research; some of the differences and similarities between the Jain and Christian approaches are pointed out. Although the main concern of the article is not a comparative study, it helps

understand the Jain approach and thus invites us to enter into a deeper dialogue.

Though *Fides et Ratio*, art. 72 directly addresses the task of enriching Christian thought with the rich heritage of the ancient East, the present context of globalization poses an added challenge to inculturation. Satish Joseph and Benedict C. Nwachukwu-Udaku analyse the changed context in India and Africa due to globalization and delineate the task of inculturation. Satish Joseph analyses globalization and inculturation in the Indian theological context. His article, "'New Tasks of Inculturation' in a Globalized India" argues that globalization gives the Indian Church an opportunity to renew its efforts at inculturation. Satish Joseph begins with a discussion on the effects of globalization on local cultures, focussing on the problem of identity. Following that he considers the role of religion in local cultures, especially religion as a tool to regain identity. Subsequently he makes a critique of the attempts at Christian inculturation in India in the past, which, according to him, had serious weaknesses, and recommends intercultural communication between the Gospel and Indian culture so that inculturation may become a contextual project. Only in this way we can address the identity of local cultures in a globalized world, without losing the Christian identity. The importance with which the Asian Synod (1998) deliberated upon globalization itself shows the urgency of taking into account the globalized world in the Church's attempts at inculturation. Satish Joseph holds that inculturation should not be limited to the use of some symbolic gestures in liturgy. Similarly, it is not Hinduization. Instead, "inculturation must be seen as a dialogue between the local cultures (Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, etc.), in all its intercultural complexity." The author acknowledges that it is not easy to find perfect models of inculturation. However, he suggests the interaction between Christianity and other cultural and religious traditions in the pre-colonial India as an invaluable resource for a renewed theology of inculturation.

Benedict C. Nwachukwu-Udaku emphasizes the need of a shift from the dominating model of globalization to a paradigm that considers the identity and social context of the people. In his essay, "From Globalization to Inculturation. A Paradigm Shift in Negotiating the HIV/AIDS Dilemma in the African Context within the Framework of *Fides et Ratio*, art. 72," he situates the local as a veritable site of empowerment for communities dealing with HIV/AIDS, and holds that inculturation as a new paradigm with its social and religious implications will lead to a change of mentality and perspectives among individuals, communities and social groups with respect to

HIV/AIDS. Considering that Africa is the continent most affected by HIV/AIDS, and that most of the solutions adopted during the first decades of the existence of HIV/AIDS were not sensitive to people's culture and their social context, the author argues that the uniqueness of this epidemic among a particular people demands us to engage in a contextual understanding of this problem within the cultural, political, religious and social situation of the African continent. Collective action should be regulated by the principle of solidarity, which calls for compassion for the needy, and principle of subsidiarity, which objects to any solution that does not respect the autonomy of a particular people. According to Benedict C. Nwachukwu-Udaku solutions such as the use of condoms promote a kind of *ad hoc* solution to a problem that needs a holistic attention. He underscores that the relationship between globalization and inculturation is crucial in determining the role of the Church in Africa in facing HIV/AIDS. The author highlights various elements of the African wisdom, especially the concept of virtues in some cultures, which shall help to contain more effectively the epidemic. As examples, he shows the virtues of *dimkpa* and *ekwuene* among the Igbos of Nigeria. Similarly, the author underlines the need of helping the women regain their lost traditional values that empowered them, so that they may become powerful agents of fighting the epidemic.

In his article, "Human Rights, the Church's Mission and Inculturation," Robert Gascoigne says that although a concern for human rights has become an important part of the Church's mission, to be effective, this concern must be communicated taking into account the national and cultural context of each community. Focussing mainly on the Australian context, he analyses how the inculturation process can reveal some of the features of the Church's mission on behalf of human rights and make it more explicit. The Christian conception of human dignity and rights has its basis in the vision of the Gospel, was first developed into the form of human rights language in the medieval Catholic thought, and was developed into a systematic teaching in the second half of the twentieth century. Gascoigne says that the Catholic Church can be said to be the most significant defender of human rights today. The proclamation of human rights by the Church, according to him, can be summed up in terms of witness and service. Growing recognition given to human rights can be seen in the international community as well. The author argues that the Church, though its basic inspiration is the Gospel, should also respect the secular dimensions of human rights language and advocacy. Narrating briefly the Church's attempts at ensuring human rights, Gascoigne points out that the generally secular tenor of

Australian public communication means that the best hope of communicating the Church's concern for human rights is through secular language. For Gascoigne, what is essential in the inculturation of human rights by a local Church is to communicate human rights in all their dimensions. Without inculturation, the Church's message of human rights and true needs of humanity may not become intelligible.

Besides the reflections on *Fides et Ratio*, art. 72, we have three articles on three different themes. Reflecting on "Monasticism and Church Renewal," Naiju Jose Kalambukattu says that monasticism, which began as a counter-cultural movement demanding a radical following of Jesus, has been always lively in the Eastern Churches. Drawing inspiration from the spirituality of the first Christian community, monasticism has been a spiritual movement in the Church. From the beginning, two important characteristics of monasticism were its close relation with the Gospel and its ecclesial nature. The monastic community embodies the values of the Kingdom, and the monk is a living 'symbol of salvation' in this world. Kalambukattu enumerates the differences of the Western and Eastern monasticism, but underlines that both in the East and in the West they have been instrumental in the renewal of the Church. In the last section of his article, Kalambukattu gives a brief account of the recently begun monastic community in the Syro-Malabar Church. The author concludes by saying that, in the East, "monasticism was not conceived as a separate condition meant for a particular group of people but was an ecclesial expression of all the baptized."

In spite of contrary evidence, many continue to consider sexual abuse of minors by the clergy as a problem of the Church in the West. Consequently, although in the West much have been discussed and debated on this moral 'epidemic' that continues to harm the Church, it has not yet received adequate attention from theologians elsewhere. "The Terror of the Sexual Abuse by the Roman Catholic Clergy and the Philippine Context," by Aloysius Lopez Cartagenas boldly addresses this issue, especially in the context of Philippines. Based on the premise that culture both from within and outside the Church is a significant factor to understand and resolve the problem, the author begins by saying that sexual abuse of minors is to be considered more in terms of an abuse of power than a professional-ethical problem. While linking the abuse of power to the Church culture, particularly the ethos of clericalism, the author analyses the elements in the Filipino culture that facilitate the conditions of clergy sexual abuse and its concealment and invites others in other cultural contexts to make similar analyses. The Church organised on the hierarchical

model seems to be a fertile ground for the occurrence and concealment of power abuse, and hence the author says that it should be considered also as a structural sin. Cartagena points out that it will be unfair to say that the Church has not done anything to address the sexual abuse crisis, but it is necessary to evaluate whether the measures taken are appropriate to arrest the crisis. Much has been done, but much remains to be done. The Church as a community of faith needs the courage to examine and purify the inner contradictions deeply embedded in its tradition and ethos. While emphasising the need of taking care of the victims, the author calls for a profound critical reflection on the structures of the Church as well as those of the particular cultural milieu.

The 'signs of the times' is an important source of theological reflection. "Grievances and Groaning. A Theological Reflection on the Uprising and Tsunami," by Jojo M. Fung tries to read the signs of two important contemporary happenings, namely, the recent tsunami in Japan and the unrest in the Middle East. According to Jojo M. Fung, these are signs of the times calling for a theological reflection on the need for dialogical relationship with others and with the earth, based on a respect for their sacredness. Profit-driven development and economics lead to a rupture of the harmonious relationship between the earth and humankind. Failure from the part of the political authority to respect the genuine aspirations of the human hearts means the failure of the dialogical relationship. The author reflects on this dialogical relationship mainly on the basis of the social teachings of the Church and the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, and invites our attention to the encyclical's teaching that, "when 'human ecology' is respected within society, environmental ecology also benefits." According to Jojo M. Fung, the 'grievances of the hearts' and the 'groaning of the earth' are theological moments of God's intervention, revealing to us more profoundly the mysteries of our relationship with one another and with the earth.

Inculturation/inter-culturation is an ongoing process. The context and the meaning of the text and the tradition for the context evolve continuously. Let our theological reflection on Asian Theologies in light of *Fides et Ratio* make us more sensitive to the demands of the different contexts and traditions, so that we may be able to respond more creatively and meaningfully to the signs of the times, learning and communicating interreligiously!

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