

Editorial

Moral Theology in Asia

Moral theology reflects on the human person and his/her relationships with God, with other human beings and with the nature in the light of the life and teachings of Jesus, as understood by the Christian community down through the centuries and reading the signs of the times.¹ God is the same and the metaphysical nature of the human person is the same. But, how the nature of the human person and the meaning of his/her life are understood changes from time to time and from place to place.

Cultures, religions, socio-economic conditions, scientific and technological developments, social sciences, art and literature, etc. play their role in the renewed understanding of the human person and in the changes in attitudes, value perception and life-style. Moral theologian has the task of listening to and learning from these different sources of human experience and knowledge, as well as evaluating them in the background of the vision of life preached and lived by Jesus Christ,² the ultimate norm of morality.³ Thus, on the one hand, Christian morality is the same at any time and place and on the other it changes or develops as the understanding of the human person develops and according to the specific historical and social contexts of the place and time. This is an ongoing process of dialogue.

So, to the question "Is there an Asian moral theology?" or "Should moral theology be Asian?" the answer may differ. Why should we think about an Asian moral theology instead of a "catholic" moral theology? Will such initiatives be detrimental to the catholic theology

¹ Cfr Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, 4.

² Cfr Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, 22; John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 8.

³ Cfr Richard M. Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith*, New York: Paulist Press, 1989, 185-189.

and to the concept of perennial moral norms, leading to relativism and situation ethics? But, is there such a conflict in reality? That is, is there any incongruity in moral theology being "catholic"/universal and being Asian/African/European/American/Australian at the same time? Catholic moral theology becomes really "catholic" when it responds to different contexts and each context recognizes it as its own, instead of demanding different contexts to identify as 'catholic' the theology that developed in a particular context. This is not only with regard to the differences in the socio-economic and cultural contexts, but also with regard to the historical context and the unique context of the person.

This is not something new in moral theological reflection. Though universal moral principles and norms cannot be questioned, when it comes to concrete applications, moral theology has accepted a variety of responses. That is why moral theology did not remain at the level of Penitentials which had the system of applying the particular penance to the particular sin/action, without any regard for the context of the person. And from the concern for sin only, moral theology has developed into a branch of theology concerned with the full realization of the human person.

Asia, with 60% of the world population, with a variety of religious and cultural traditions, languages, political systems presents a complex scenario. Though some Asian countries have achieved political and economic stability, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, wars, civil wars, terrorism, religious fundamentalism, political instability, corruption, denial of basic human rights, uncontrolled population growth, etc., continue to be unresolved problems for Asia. On the other hand, most of the Asian countries have entered the process of globalization and economic development. This has also raised other issues like widening gap between the poor and the rich, threat to the indigenous cultures, traditional religious values and the resistance from their part and so on.

Christianity, though began in Asia, remains a minority religion in Asia, except in a couple of countries. At the same time, the numerical strength cannot be considered the criterion for measuring the significance of Christianity in Asia. The question is pertinent: What contribution Asia has made to moral theology? The indigenous Churches in Asia had their own system of theology, liturgy and moral theology. The missionary movement from the sixteenth century helped in the evangelization of many of the Asian countries. But, Asia is still in the initial stages of developing a contextual theology. Though

initiatives like interreligious theology, intercultural theology and liberation theology began to develop in Asian countries in the second half of the twentieth century (especially since the Second Vatican Council), this was not reflected much in moral theology. Moral theology was taught on the basis of books by Western theologians or by Asian moral theologians who just followed the Western patterns; to a great extent this continues to be so. Even if there were studies by Christian theologians on the ethics of other Asian religions, often these were subjects only of the philosophy courses. In general, for a long time, even the processes of inculturation and interreligious dialogue were practically kept away from moral theological reflection. This does not mean that Asian moral theologians were insensitive to the religious, cultural, social, economic contexts of Asia and the problems like poverty, injustice, inequality, exploitation and denial of human rights. There are many factors that blocked the process of indigenous reflection in moral theology and theology in general. Most of the Asian countries were under the colonial powers and only by the twentieth century – mostly only by the middle of the twentieth century – these countries attained freedom. Together with other negative effects, the foreign rule became an obstacle to the process of developing an indigenous theology as well. Moreover, the emphasis on the ‘catholic’ nature of the Church and identifying the catholic nature with some uniform patterns became another obstacle to the development of a contextual moral theology. Apprehensions about liberation theology and interreligious theology slowed down moral theologians’ attempts to develop contextual theology. Moreover, not only in Asia, but in other continents also, the development of a contextual moral theology was discouraged by the insistence on moral absolutes, the concept of natural law as the same for everywhere at all times.

In the recent decades Asian moral theologians are trying to respond to the concrete situations of their countries, keeping in mind, at the same time, the ‘catholic’ and global nature of moral theology. We have dedicated this issue to “Moral Theology in Asia” to bring to the attention of those engaging in theologizing this new direction that moral theology in Asia is taking and to promote this welcome development. Evidently, we could not include voices from many Asian countries. That would be beyond the scope of an issue of the *Asian Horizons*. This is only a modest attempt to facilitate more communication among moral theologians in Asia and to reflect together to respond to the varied and complex life situations in Asia making moral theology more contextual.

We thought of including articles on Asian moral theology by moral theologians from other continents as well, because, although the particular situations in different countries/continents are different, the same situations appear in different forms in different countries. That is, together with differences, there are also similarities. The contextualization of moral theology takes place in the overall context of the Catholic community. Moreover, compared to moral theology in Europe and the United States of America, in many Asian countries, moral theology is still in the beginning stages. Hence, a dialogue with moral theologians from other continents will be helpful to those in Asia. In other words, together with reflecting on the particular context, the moral theologians in Asia need to listen to the experience of moral theologians from other continents. This will help them to keep a balance between the particular context and the 'catholic/global' character of moral theology, and to avoid repeating/committing mistakes, learning from the experience of other contexts. Thus, it will be an occasion for a dialogue between moral theologians in Asia and in other continents. Moreover, most of the moral theologians in Asia had their specialization in Europe or the United States and even today the formation of the majority of the future moral theologians of Asia takes place in these continents. That is, Europe and the United States have been playing an active role in the development of moral theology in Asia. Hence it is of vital importance to listen to the vision of European and American moral theologians about Asian moral theology. We have included also the reflection of an Asian moral theologian teaching in Africa, a continent that shares many characteristics of Asia.

An immediate context that prompted us to dedicate this issue to moral theology is the great event that is going to take place in Trento, Italy, from 24-27 July 2010, that is, an international conference of Catholic moral theologians on the theme, "In the Currents of History: From Trent to Future," organised by "Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church" under the leadership of James F. Keenan. This is the second conference of its kind in which more than 600 moral theologians from around the world will take part. The first conference, which took place in Padua in July 2006, gave a new impetus for moral theologians around the globe to engage in moral theological reflection with renewed enthusiasm and for cross-cultural communication. The process of 'moral theology becoming global and local'⁴ has been

⁴ For a discussion on moral theology going local and global, see James F. Keenan, *Toward a Global vision of Catholic Moral Theology. Reflections on the Twentieth Century*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2007, 101-145.

accelerated by these conferences and *Asian Horizons* wants to join this process and contribute to it in its own humble way.

We have fourteen articles, of which twelve are on Asian moral theology. **James F. Keenan** (USA), in his **“Theological Ethics out of Latin America, Africa, and Asia,”** shows how in the second half of the twentieth century, the Eurocentric dimension of moral theology began to diminish and the contextual type of investigation has begun to develop in each continent. As the title indicates, he analyses the development of moral theology in Latin America, Africa and Asia and, thus, sets the stage for our discussion on moral theology in Asia. Suffering, injustice and thirst for justice can be said to be the background of moral theological reflection in these continents. Specific to Asia is the consciousness of the interreligious context, ecological concerns, discrimination on the basis of caste, creed and gender. This effort to respond to suffering and “to develop identity through resonating with local cultural and religious resources” is specific to Asia, but this can be seen also in other continents. In this way, moral theology develops distinctively in Asia, but in consonance with moral theology in other continents. Keenan, with his profound scholarship and unparalleled experience of cross-cultural communication and dialogue with moral theologians from different contexts, in fact, introduces us to a reflection on Asian moral theology, setting it in the local context as well as in the global scenario.⁵

“A Few Ethical Contours that Emerge from the FABC Teachings for an Asian Moral Theology” by **Vimal Tirimanna** (Sri Lanka) discusses how the Asian bishops, reading the signs of the times, respond to the ethical challenges that Asia faces “in consonance with the problems of the universal Church.” After giving an overview of the history of the FABC and its documents, Tirimanna presents the ethical concerns in the teachings of the FABC under six topics: harmony, pluralism, the sanctity of human life, family and marriage, interfaith marriages and globalization. The FABC documents, according to the author, keep a balance between the universal nature of Catholic ethics and an awareness of the lived realities.

Agnes M. Brazal (Philippines), in **“Redeeming the Vernacular: Doing Postcolonial-Intercultural Theological Ethics,”** shows how postmodern discourses have led to the problematizing of cultural

⁵ Keenan has agreed to write an article for the next issue of *Asian Horizons* on the historical development of moral theology in the United States and its implications of the global moral theological scenario.

identity and, thus, the project of inculturation. Vernacular hermeneutics prioritizes the indigenous and it is postmodern as well as postcolonial. Vernacular hermeneutics made culture an important site for hermeneutics. Brazal argues that vernacular is an important source of energy for marginalized communities for solidarity. She advocates the employment of discourse analysis both on the vernacular and the Judaeo-Christian tradition and speaks about the Gawad Kalinga, a faith-based community, to show how to make use of the vernacular for social transformation. To theorise the theological praxis of Gawad Kalinga and, thus, to illustrate the use of discourse analysis, Brazal makes use of the Postcolonial view of culture, language, articulation and discourse analysis, especially the one proposed by Stuart Hall. It is further explained how the vernacular discourses on *padugo* and *bayanihan* are used by Gawada Kalinga to articulate in a more culturally intelligible manner the Judaeo-Christian tradition, namely, Jesus' passion and death/heroism in bleeding for the cause, the spirit of sharing with others and solidarity, and so on. Thus Brazal successfully shows how discourse analysis can be used to do postcolonial-intercultural theological ethics.

The following four articles are from India. In **“Community, Celebration, and Communion: The Future of Christian Ethics in India,”** Paulachan Kochappilly argues that “the future of Christian ethics in India is to be conceived and worked out in the framework of the way” or the *mārga*. He organises his reflections in three steps, namely, the way to community, the way to celebration and the way to communion. He argues that in future there will be a greater emphasis on the community and that moral theology should be sensitive to this. Ecological concerns, awareness of the context and the belongingness to the covenant community/the Church are set in the background of the community. Christian ethics, according to the author, is the way of celebrating life in Christ. Communion ensures joy and peace. The future of Christian ethics in India is promising, concludes Kochappilly. Lucese Chamakala, in **“Bio-Medical Ethics: Challenges Ahead,”** affirms that, “Respect for the life of all citizens and ensuring basic health for all citizens should be the primary concern of every nation.” Health and healthcare, according to him, constitute the fundamental right of every person. Indian moral theologians respond critically and creatively to the complex situation of healthcare in India and try to defend the sacredness of life. Chamakala gives an overview of the important contributions by Indian moral theologians in the field of bio-medical ethics. While India has made remarkable progress in keeping pace with the latest

developments in medical science, millions of Indians still do not have the basic requirements for health and healthcare. Fighting this glaring inequality and injustice is the major challenge that bio-medical ethics faces today. Chamakala proposes two important tasks for bio-medical ethics in India, namely, developing a committed public health movement and a well-integrated training programme for the health professionals, focussing on ethical practice and social commitment.

Shaji George Kochuthara's "Sexuality, Love, Marital Life: The Indian Scenario Today – Changing Perspectives and Ethical Challenges" portrays the changing patterns in India in the attitudes towards sexuality, man-woman love and family and their impact in the life-style. These rapid changes are similar to those that took place in the West in the 1960s, which is often called the Sexual Revolution. Behind this we identify a quest for meaning in living one's sexuality in a more profound manner, being liberated from oppressive norms and taboos. To resist the ideologies and market interests that promote disintegrating attitudes and life-styles, we need to affirm the goodness of sexuality and implement a systematic sex education. For the stability of the Indian family, a growing awareness of the equal dignity of man and woman and gender justice is essential. Moreover, it is essential to chalk out a plan for the ongoing pastoral care of the family, underscores Kochuthara. In her article, **"Gender Ethics in India,"** **Vimala Chenginimattam** depicts the continuing patterns of gender inequality and injustice and argues for the urgent need of becoming more sensitive to gender justice in our moral theological reflection. Instead of reducing man and woman to sexual differences or gender roles, we should begin with considering both man and woman as human persons of equal dignity. Together with this, women need to overcome the internalized inferior self-image and men the objectification of women. In India the gender question has progressed to a good stature, but a lot of violence on women continues to take place. Chenginimattam, reflecting on the Indian context, invites our attention to three important areas: 1. Often gender question is the concern only of women, 2. In the Indian context, can we have a uniform view of gender or should we think about a plural view of gender?, and 3. The denied aspects of womanhood are in the public spaces and this makes women see themselves as sexual beings existing for men. In the Indian Catholic Church, adding to imbibing the existing cultural view of gender, the patriarchal patterns further affirm gender insensitivity. A "culture of silence" is imbibed by the women religious. The challenging task for the Indian Church is to become more gender sensitive, says Vimala Chenginimattam.

“The Heart of *Wa* and Christian Ethics,” by **Osamu Takeuchi** poses the thought-provoking question, “For Japanese people what is the meaning of being a Christian or living the Gospel? Or, is it possible to live as Christians here in Japan?” He answers this question from the perspective of “virtues,” which are central to Japanese ethics as well as Christian ethics. Takeuchi analyses the different levels of meanings of the virtue of “*Wa*” which is one of the most important virtues in Japanese ethics, which can be mainly understood as “harmony”. Depicting the importance of virtue in the Gospels and in the Christian tradition, Takeuchi points out that, “the more one can cultivate and master the heart of *wa*, the more one can embody the Gospel of Jesus here in Japan.”

Paul Chummar Chittilappilly, whose primary roots are Asian (India), secondary roots European and now becoming rooted in the ‘humus of Africa,’ reflects on, **“Which Theological Ethics Should We to Teach: Indigenized or Recycled? Some Reflections on an Inculturated Theological Ethical Education.”** His experience in Africa convinces him of the necessity of inculturating theological ethics instead of conditioning the students to “collect scraps of western theological ethical material from the different lecture halls.” Second Vatican Council gave an impetus for inculturation in theology and the institutes of theological education in Africa envisage an inculturated theological formation. But, the pattern of courses gives the impression that it is a continuation of theological colonialism. However, thanks to the work of some African theologians for the last half a century, different paradigms of inculturated theology are emerging, though they are still in their infancy. Chittilappilly points out that inculturation is at the heart of the Church and the process of inculturation can be seen from the beginning of the Church. By emphasising the need of inculturation in African theological ethics and the challenges to be faced, Chittilappilly indicates the way that Asian theological ethics must follow, though “indigenous problems must be solved by indigenous solutions.”

After listening to the voices of these theologians committed to moral theological reflection in their contexts, we listen to three great European moral theologians who are noted for their scholarship and long experience of forming hundreds of moral theologians.

“From a standard and generally accepted univocal methodology sixty years ago in Europe, we now have a plurality of methodologies,” points out **Raphael Gallagher** (Rome) in his **“Moral Theology from a European Perspective: Emerging Methodologies. Attentive to**

tradition and learning from Asia.” He beautifully shows how moral theology in Europe has moved from a univocal casuistic method written in manual form, to weighing the choices inherent in different methodological choices. From the univocal method of the moral manuals, with the directions given to moral theology by the Second Vatican Council, there developed new and diverse methodologies in moral theology. Though *Veritatis Splendor* did not consider some methodologies compatible with the tradition of the Church, it did not try to impose a single methodology on moral theologians, observes Gallagher. The author identifies four ‘systems (*methodologies*) of moral theology’ that have emerged in the post-conciliar period. Learning from another context presupposes respect for that particular context. This also implies overcoming ignorance, bias and suspicion. Gallagher suggests the notion of ‘culture’ for a more fruitful dialogue between European and Asian moral theologians. He lists some of the preconditions for this dialogue and opines that Asian moral theologians have made greater progress in these preconditions and European moral theologians can learn this from them.

Roger Burggraeve (Louvain) speaks about the passion for justice and mercy in the contemporary moral theology in his **“A Christian Inter-human Ethics with Two Pillars: Mercy and Justice.”** Since this double passion is in the heart of Christian faith, he begins his analysis from Jesus’ proclamation. Jesus preached about a passionate God who involved with the humans; God is not a metaphysical principle, instead a loving person. This passionate God is the alpha and omega of the Christian-inspired inter-human ethics. As the story of the Good Samaritan shows, Christian ethics should be sensitive to what befalls the other. The basis for a Christian ethics is the responsibility for the other, argues Burggraeve. In fact, this is a challenge to develop an ethics of mercy. On the other hand, resistance against evil is also the responsibility of Christian ethics – God is also an ‘angry’ God, that is, He becomes angry about evil. “The track of mercy” and the “track of justice” are to be developed simultaneously. That is, the passion for mercy and the passion for justice are not contradictory but complementary. Balancing of justice and mercy in its particular context is a challenging task for Asian moral theology, underscores Burggraeve.

Philippe Bordeyne (Paris) addresses the moral theological formation of Asian students. **“Forming Moral Theologians For Asia: A Challenge and a Responsibility”** narrates Bordeyne’s experience and the methodology that he follows to form the future moral theologians for Asia, evidently this article sheds light on the formation of moral

theologians for Asia, taking place elsewhere. The French context, unique due to the separation between the Church and the State, has turned into an advantage in the formation of moral theologians for today's pluralistic globalised world. The task of forming moral theologians is not just imparting skills to speak with intellectual knowledge, but also to help them "develop their capability to self-commitment, in a spirit of service and reconciliation," affirms Bordeyne. Referring to the teaching given in *Gaudium et spes*, the author points out that it demands "a theological hermeneutic of the contemporary approach to ethical responsibility" and that Christian communities are challenged to become instruments of social transformation. Today, the teaching of the Council needs to be put to the test of diverse cultures. Moral theologians should be helped to search for the universal morality, but starting from the Christian particularity which, in fact, is immersed in culturally diverse particularities. Bordeyne narrates how the courses are designed in such a way that the students may be prepared to respond to the challenge of multiculturalism, keeping in mind the richness of the Christian tradition and, thus, to respond to the moral dilemmas of today.

Following this discussion on Moral Theology in Asia, we have two articles. The recurring debate over the clergy sexual abuse cases invites theologians to reflect on its theological implications for the structure of the Church, the system of administering justice within the Church, the credibility of the ecclesiastical system, the participation of the laity in the Church and so on. **Aaron Milavec**, in his article, "**Reflections on the Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests**" critically analyses the theological implications of the clergy sexual abuse cases, referring back to the system of administering justice in the tradition of the Church. "**The Saint Thomas Christians and their Catholic Communion in the Pre-Diamper Period**," by **Naiju Jose Kalambukattu** shows how the St. Thomas Christians (Syro-Malabar Church) of the Pre-Diamper period remain a model of inculturation and communion in the multi-religious context of Asia in general and India in particular.

Let these essays facilitate more cross-cultural exchange among theologians, respecting and understanding each other, learning from each other and promoting the sincere efforts to be sensitive to the context, rooted in the richness of the Catholic tradition!

Shaji George Kochuthara

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