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Editorial

500 Years of Reformation

Ecclesia Semper Reformanda is a classical dictum in theology. The Church is guided by the Spirit, but it has also the tendency to identify with a particular culture or thought pattern or structure and forget the mission entrusted to her. Since the Church is a divine-human institution, it is subject to human limitations and hence it needs constant renewal. However, the plea for reforms in the Church from the part of the members of the Church was most often in history met with repression and elimination of those people who raised their voice for reform.

Various theological disputes, misunderstandings, thirst for power and positions, etc. have led to divisions in the Church. The Eastern Schism of 1054 was the most important among the divisions. In 1498 the Dominican Friar Savonarola's plea for a reform in the Church of France ended up in his excommunication and burning at stake. In the German Church the fate of the Augustinian friar Martin Luther (1483-1546) was almost the same. He was excommunicated by the Roman Pontiff owing to his 95 theses against the doctrine of indulgence and the aberrations in the Church of his time. His life was actually saved due to the protection and support he received from the German Princes. Although Luther never wanted to have a division in the church, his reform attempts led the whole Europe into a division on the question of religion.

Along with the divisions in the Church, we can find that there is a continuous attempt for renewal as well. 2000 years of the history of the Church shows also this constant cry for reformation. We can see this process of retrospection and introspection in the Church from the Jerusalem Council itself. This process is guided by the conviction that renewal and unity are integral to the mission of the Church. As the Second Vatican Council's decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio* (no. 6) has rightly pointed out, "a permanent renewal of the Church

(is) in greater fidelity to her vocation: such renewal is the driving-force of the movement towards unity.”

Today all the Churches, the Ecumenical Movement and almost the entire world are celebrating the 500th anniversary of Protestant Reformation. Pope Francis participated in such an ecumenical celebration at the Lutheran Cathedral at Lund in Sweden. *Asian Horizons* would like to join this celebration by dedicating this issue to Reformation.

Joachim Schmiedl reviews the 20th century research on reformation by Catholics. He points out that until the 20th century, the Catholic view of Martin Luther had been marked by polemics. Moreover, until recently research focused on the development of religious denominations in the 16th century. In recent decades, there are attempts to study Luther in his spiritual dimensions. Schmiedl emphasises that since there are different accents in theology, there are accents in ethics and life-style, in prayer and worship, in ecclesiastical structures and offices, and that these are important in ecumenical cooperation. In his opinion, it is crucial that the person of Martin Luther is honoured in his spiritual dimension by the Catholic side.

Next three articles deal with the historical context and Catholic response to the Reformation. Analysing the historical context of the Reformation, Patrick Dolan argues that the reason behind the success of the Reformation was not merely the corruption in the Catholic Church, but rather a lack of confidence in the authority and ability of the clergy. Factors like the Black Death and the Great Western Schism also contributed to this. Dolan also indicates the relevance of this analysis for today in the context of post-modern philosophies which question the ‘authority’ and common standards. Joseph Mattam offers a critical evaluation of the Council of Trent by posing the question whether the Council was open to the Spirit of God. Describing many instances and examples, he argues that the Church had become very much corrupt and hence the call for Reform was really the work of the Spirit of God. He is of the opinion that the Council of Trent was very defensive and that if the Council was open to the Spirit, a division in the Church could be avoided. Norman Tanner considers the impact of the two most important councils of the Catholic Church which followed the Reformation, namely, Trent (1545-1563) and Vatican II (1962-1965), on Catholic-Protestant relations. According to him, the Council of Trent addressed most major issues raised by the Protestant Reformation and listened to Protestant concerns more than that is usually recognized. Vatican II led to a new era in the relationship between the Catholic Church and

the Church of the Reformation. Tanner points out that the Catholic Church also benefited from the Reformation, as it was forced to explain a number of issues related to its teaching and practice. He also holds that credit must be given to both Trent and Vatican II for keeping alive the worldwide nature, of the Church.

Subhash Anand reflects on Reformation as a return to the God of revelation, with a special focus on the Indian significance of Martin Luther, and thus shows how theological understanding of Luther's writings can help the ecumenical movement. Examining Luther's understanding of revelation, he proceeds to discussing the role of creation and history as channels of divine self-revelation. Linking Luther's concept to the Indian context, he makes critical reflection on some of the present day challenges. Georg Kirchberger presents the historical event of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification signed by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Lutheran World Federation on 31st October 1999 in Augsburg, Germany. Kirchberger summarises the history of the formulation of this joint declaration, examines its theology, evaluates its strengths and weaknesses, and then discusses its possible role in ecumenism and in the life of the churches in the future.

Regina Heyder and Ute Leimgruber discuss the legacy of Reformation, based on their research into the confessional identities and ecumenism in the testimonies of German-speaking women. The authors show how these stories speak about denominational identities serving as a means for discrimination, as well as a model for transgressing boundaries in today's increasingly multi-religious society. On the basis of these testimonies, the authors proceed to theological reflection, especially taking into consideration the context of secularization, religious pluralism and migration. Axel Siegemund argues that synthetic biology offers a new chance for an ecumenical approach. According to him, the Reformation argued for a God humiliating himself and for the intercommunication of divine and human nature in Christ as the true God and the true Man. In his opinion, today, the question is whether we speak about an interconnectedness of the religious coverage and the technological accomplishment of our world or about a separate development. Lap-Yan Kung identifies in the experience of the house churches in China a situation similar to that of the Reformation. This discussion invites us to see how historical situations are repeated in new contexts and forms. The author describes how these two experiences are correlated and what theological and spiritual significance of their witnesses contribute to ecumenicity. Kung underscores that both the heritage of

Reformation and the experience of house churches in China enrich our commitment to and imagination of ecumenicity.

Joseph Xavier presents the ecumenical vision of Pope Francis, who holds that the unity of Christians is an important element of our Christian witnessing. The author identifies four principles in the Pope's vision that enhance unity. Based on this vision, Joseph Xavier emphasises that ecumenism is a journey, not a destination with predetermined objectives, and that ecumenical dialogue must seek unity-in-diversity, not uniformity. For Pope Francis, ecumenical engagement is not just a matter of in-house debate among experts; it is important to recognize the role of the faithful. A faith-centred ecumenism presupposes serious introspection by all stakeholders. Willingness to learn from others is integral to the ecumenical process.

Discussing the ecumenical trajectories, Kuncheria Pathil acknowledges that today the movement faces a crisis and its future cannot be predicted. Beginning with the historical journey of the ecumenical movement, Pathil highlights some of the problems and challenges it faces today. He opines that the ecumenical movement has arrived at a point of stalemate in our Postcolonial and Postmodern cultural and religious context. Emergence of indigenous Christianities and Post-Denominational Churches have to be understood in this context. Pathil then proceeds to search for the emerging trajectories and observes that the emphasis on the visible and institutional unity is more and more replaced by the prophetic and mystical orientations. The local seems to have precedence over the universal and in the postmodern cultural scenario plurality has become the irreversible law of the future.

There is also one article on another theme, namely, Science and Christian Hope, in which Wilson Angelo G. Espiritu attempts a dialogue and integration of their end-time narratives. He argues that while the scientific and the Christian end-time narratives are not identical, they do not essentially contradict each other.

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