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Editorial

After 50 Years: A Vision for the Church of the Future

We human beings live in the continuity of past, present and future. Though living in the present, we are shaped by the past — both individual and collective — and are formed by hopes and aspirations for the future. This is true about the Church as a community. The Church gives great importance to the past, which we often name as the tradition. We believe that our present is formed by the tradition, and in our journey towards future, we should keep fidelity to the past and the present. Even in our talk of 'continuity and discontinuity' there is a continuity. This does not mean that the Church cannot or should not change; there can be even radical changes. Fidelity to the past should not become a burden in the journey forward, resisting the ever-renewing and ever-challenging inspirations of the Spirit.

While visualizing the future of the Church, we should never forget the truth that it is God who shapes the future of the Church. It is God who guided the Church in the past, who continues to guide it to the future through the present. In spite of human limitations God has guided his Church. This does not mean that God does not need humans. The Church consists of human beings who are limited, and it is in and through their limitations that the Spirit guides the Church. What is important is how we discern the Spirit and how we are open to his ways.

From 2012 *Asian Horizons* has been dedicating a few issues for the reflection on the documents of Second Vatican Council. This is the final issue in that series. In this issue, we try to visualize the Church of the future, mainly based on the Second Vatican documents. However, this visualization of the future will reflect also the developments after the Council and the present day issues and

problems, following the invitation of the Council to read the 'signs of the times'. The Church as a whole experiences a new enthusiasm under the leadership of Pope Francis, who is committed to include all the faithful in the loving and merciful embrace of the Church. He is very attentive that the marginalized and the discriminated should feel the mercy and compassion of God, and this has given a new vitality and hope for the Church in its march forward. This vision of Pope Francis is specially reflected in many articles in this issue.

Hans Waldenfels shows how the vision of the Second Vatican Council for a decentralized and participatory Church is carried on by Pope Francis. Referring to Francis, he underscores the importance of dialogue and of redefining power in terms of service. Waldenfels argues that collegiality, synodality and subsidiarity should become the style of functioning in the Church. Moreover, the Church of the future must be a Church of the poor, helping them and learning from them. Virginia Saldanha also holds that Pope Francis has brought a ray of hope in the Church. She discusses how the FABC vision of promoting the role of the People of God, and promoting communion and solidarity with the poor and marginalized can shape the future of the Church. She underscores the role of Small/Basic Christian Communities in making the Church more participatory in future, and emphasises that the equal dignity and participation of women should be recognised more and more in the Church. Delfo Cortina Cancera evaluates the tension between different models of the Church found in *Lumen Gentium*. He points out that the mystical body of Christ and the people of God models, the people of God and the hierarchical institution perspectives are prominent in LG. Cancera defends the democratization models that address the main problem of the church, which is power. According to him, these democratic models side with the poor and the women, the victims of unilateral power, and thus show the right path for the Church of the future.

Rene Sanchez attempts to show how the Church has to engage the contemporary society, responding to Vatican II's call to 'read the signs of the times'. Drawing inspiration from George Ritzer, Sanchez evaluates a social phenomenon called the McDonalidized society and its degenerating effects on human society. Following this, in light of the theology of Metz and Bruggemann, he discusses how the Church can be a prophetic Church in today's society. Roman Míčka discusses how *Gaudium et Spes* and subsequent documents can help the Church in facilitating and building up international relations. After briefly presenting the historical context and the debate at the Second Vatican

Council, he focuses on changes in the situation in the following 50 years and the response of Catholic Social Teaching. Referring to various issues and situations he emphasises that the Church should engage in creative dialogue with the political power in the international level and this is an essential part of the mission of the Church at present and in future.

Christian Weisner is optimistic of the paradigm shift that we are witnessing today in the Church, especially with the leadership of Pope Francis. He is hopeful that in spite of resistances, Francis will follow the course set by Vatican II. He emphasises that following the teaching of the Council, collegiality and subsidiarity should be actually lived in the Church. According to him, the Synodal style of Francis will strengthen the Church and will revitalize it in future. Shaji George Kochuthara, presenting an overview of the pre-Vatican II ecclesiology, shows how Vatican II brought about revolutionary changes in the theology of the Church, and how this vision still inspires us to build up a more participatory Church. For a more participatory Church, we should get rid of clericalism and every form of discrimination. Moreover, the Church of the future should ensure equal discipleship of men and women. Frederick Wanjala says that the success of the mission of the Church depends on the constant adaptation of her teachings to the changing global contexts. The Good News is to be communicated through the categories of thought relevant to specific peoples. Basing on the African situation, Wanjala argues that the contemporary mission of evangelization has to be anchored on the values inherent in the cultures of the various peoples and that this is necessary for the future of the Church.

There are two articles on other relevant themes. In his article, raising the question, "how would I express the nature of the divine self-manifestation, above all, God's revelation in Jesus Christ?," Gerald O'Collins formulates seventeen theses about the nature and purpose of the divine revelation given in Christ and through his Spirit. Pointing out the need of engaging dialogue with secular ethical systems, Roderick O'Brien presents China's socialist ethics. O'Brien delineates the characteristic features as well as the weakness of this secular ethics, but points out that it is an ethical system which is constantly developing. He argues that it is necessary to engage in a fruitful dialogue with this ethical system.

We cannot expect a uniform vision for the Church of the future. There are different visions, and tensions among these various visions

and perspectives. But, differences are not negative. They can rather become blessings, if there is the willingness to enter into dialogue with each other, and thus to discern together what God wants from the Church. For this, dialogue within the Church as well as with the wider world should become the style of functioning in the Church. As Pope Francis has made clear through his words and actions, the Church should adopt a 'Synodal' way of functioning. Only if the Church becomes a participatory Church, where every member of the Church feels that she/he is fully a member of the Church, its existence will be meaningful in the future.

Shaji George Kochuthara, CMI
Editor-in-Chief