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Editorial

“The wind blows where it chooses...” (Jn 3:8)

NEW ECCLESIAL MOVEMENTS

Post-modern, post-religious, post-Christian, post-moral, secular, neo-liberal, relativist, anarchist, valueless, value-indifferent, consumerist... These are some of the words used to describe the society in which we live today. Many have claimed that the ‘Christian’ West cannot be and will not be any more called Christian and that all over the world, Christianity, and religion in general have become outdated, superfluous and irrelevant. The sharp decline in the past few decades in the number of people regularly attending the Church or those seeking sacramental ministry or the steady growth in the number of those who officially leave the Church may seem to confirm those claims.

On the other hand, in spite of the growing tendencies of secularization and disinterest in and indifference to the Church, a number of new ecclesial movements are visible in the Church. This new phenomenon, already begun before the Second Vatican Council, has become widespread after the Council. Challenging the claims of a post-modern, post-Christian world, these new ecclesial movements attract millions of people both in the West and the East. Besides the regular religious practices, they promote a deepening of the Christian spirituality, commitment to the cause of the Church and service to the needy and a sense of the community. They have revived the Christian life and have given a new face to the Church. In the homily of the mass for Pentecost on 31st May, 1998, addressing the representatives of more than 50 ecclesial movements who had gathered in Rome for the First World Congress of the ecclesial movements (May 27-29, 1998), Pope John Paul II praised them saying that they had brought a new life to the Church: “The movements and new communities,

providential expressions of the new springtime brought forth by the Spirit with the Second Vatican Council, announce the power of God's love which in overcoming divisions and barriers of every kind, renews the face of the earth to build the civilization of love."¹

Though the new ecclesial movements are hailed as giving a new vigor and vitality to the Church, this does not mean that everyone is happy with everything. There have been apprehensions about the way they function, their fidelity to the tradition of the Church, the directions that they sometimes take, their administrative structure, etc. In the recent years some ecclesial movements came under sharp criticism from within the Church and from outside. There are reservations whether some of these movements are encouraging conservative and fundamentalist approaches.

The directory of the international associations of the faithful, published by the Pontifical Council for the Laity, lists 122 ecclesial movements.² Though all of these are not new, a considerable number among them are new, begun shortly before the Second Vatican Council and in the decades following it. Here, we are not limiting our consideration to the movements of and for the laity alone. However, a noteworthy feature of these movements is the active involvement of the laity.

There is a wide variety of these movements, considering not only their spirituality, but also their organizational and administrative structures, nature of membership, number of members, the ministry undertaken, etc. There are movements like the Charismatic Movement which do not require a formal membership and others who require a formal membership, regular participation and contribution. Some movements have different types of members, including perpetually professed celibates. Some movements have only a particular section of the faithful as members, for example, the married or the youth.

December 2010 issue of the *Asian Horizons* attempts a theological understanding of these movements and the emerging face of the Church through this working of the Spirit.

We have included thirteen short articles on the ecclesial movements, written by their leaders or active members – Catholic Charismatic

¹http://www.vatican.va/jubilee_2000/magazine/documents/ju_mag_01061998_p-04_en.html

²Pontifical Commission for the Laity, *International Association of the Faithful: Directory*: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/laity/laity_en/publicazioni/repertorio_en.htm#PREFACE

Movement (two articles), Opus Dei, Legion of Christ, Neo-Catechumenal Way, The Community of Sant'Egidio, The Focolare Movement, Institute of Christ the Redeemer, Institute for Worldwide Evangelization, Jesus Youth, Fondacio, Equipes Notre Dame and Worldwide Marriage Encounter. These articles provide us with an overview of their original vision, historical development, the way the vision is put into practice through regular programmes and ministry, the way it is situated in the Christian tradition and integrated into the Christian community, the organizational structure, and the adaptation to the local contexts. In short, the focus is not providing us with some statistical details, but to present the original charism, the theological vision and the way they are put into practice. Within the limited space available, we have attempted to give a wide spectrum of the new ecclesial movements. There are movements which are well-established and those which are of recent origin. Similarly, there are those which have millions of members, but also those which have only a few hundred or thousand members.

Following these short articles on the ecclesial movements, there are five articles by theologians who reflect on them from different perspectives. The articles on the ecclesial movements were sent in advance to these theologians so as to facilitate their theological reflections. Paul Kalluveetil, a noted Old Testament scholar gives a brief account of some of the new movements during the Old Testament times. According to him, though there were some negative elements which led to the rejection of these movements by the mainstream community, these movements had many positive aspects as well, and hence can be considered as God's ways to correct the community and to guide it in the right path. Francis Thonippara makes a historical analysis of some of the movements in the long history of the Church from the first century. Evidently a number of movements were recognized by the Church and many continue to enrich the Church. But, even those movements which were rejected or condemned by the Church or which later became insignificant, had elements which helped her to reform her life.

Jose Kuriedath, a well-known sociologist, considers the ecclesial movements from the perspective of sociology, and describes how they contribute to necessary changes in religious practices and structures, and thus to a renewal of religious life. He points out that the Christianity itself began as a movement. The ecclesial movements help Christianity – which became gradually institutionalized – re-discover its original charism. However, naturally, these movements also may become institutionalized in the course of time.

Edward Edezhath and Jacob Srampickal make a theological analysis of the new ecclesial movements. They present a profound and balanced view, pointing out the positive as well as the negative aspects. However, they assert undoubtedly that there is more good than bad done by these movements. The questions they raise are only to strengthen the creative contributions of these movements.

Besides these articles on the new ecclesial movements, we have a few articles on different areas of theological interest. James F. Keenan's "Theological Ethics out of the United States," is the continuation of his essay in the June 2010 issue of the *Asian Horizons*, which presented a contextual development of theological ethics in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In the present essay he speaks about the important developments in theological ethics in the United States. Evidently, to get a more complete picture, we will have to add the important contributions that Keenan himself has made for the development of theological ethics. Jojo Fung, in his "An Asian Liberation Theology of Sacred Sustainability," presents a local theology in dialogue with indigenous Shamanism. He underscores that doing local theology in Asia demands an intercultural dialogue with the traditional religions. In "Revisiting the Proportionalist Debate: Proportionalism as an Integral and Holistic Methodology," Ma. Christina Astorga evaluates the positive contribution of proportionalism. She argues that proportionalism is an integral and holistic method which relates the act to the agent and that in spite of its limitations it offers a rich possibility in responding to moral dilemmas in our lives. Geo Pallikunnel, in "The Mystery of Resurrection: An Enquiry into the Writings of Prof. Varghese Pathikulangara, CMI," makes a critical appraisal of the theology of resurrection enunciated by Prof. Varghese Pathikulangara, a great theologian and liturgist of the Syro-Malabar Church. Vima Tirimanna in "Sinful Talk of Sin" argues that the "sinful talk of sin" – that is, when we empty the meaning of what sin really is – is the basic reason for the current unpopularity of the sacrament of reconciliation. Tirimanna calls for a renewed understanding of sin, taking into consideration its personal and social dimensions. According to him, reconciliation will have meaning only in the context of a faith in a loving God, revealed in Jesus Christ.

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