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## *Editorial*

### **Biotechnological Revolution in Asia**

Biotechnology is one of the fastest growing areas of science and technology. It has revolutionized healthcare, medicine, agriculture, the environment, etc. Although biotechnological development is a blessing with its potential for improved health and living, it also raises, serious concerns related to the methods and materials used, the long-term impact on individuals and communities, equitable access to technology and the commercialisation of processes and products. It is therefore not easy to assess the pros and cons of the developments in biotechnology, ethical aspects of biotechnological research and its applications.

Asia is witnessing fast development in the field of biotechnology. While many people welcome it, some are sceptical. Some of the questions raised include: Will biotechnological revolution, often controlled by market interests, result in the exploitation of Asian people, especially the poor? How helpful are expensive genetic medicines for Asian populations especially when in many countries basic healthcare facilities are still lacking? How to understand biotechnological developments in the light of the convictions of faith? Will genetic information placed in the public domain be a threat to privacy and autonomy and be used to discriminate against individuals and groups? How will genetically modified crops affect Asia's traditional crops and agricultural system?

The December 2013 issue of *Asian Horizons* proposes to reflect on "Biotechnological Revolution in Asia." Articles in this issue try to highlight opportunities as well as challenges raised by biotechnological developments.

"Ethical Concerns in Plant Biotechnological Research," by Bini Toms describes how plant biotechnology is a growing industry

promising to offer remarkable economic, social and environmental advantages in the future. However, sustaining the revolution in plant biotechnology will require continued research on and careful thought about the emerging ethical issues in this field. Though aware of the numerous benefits and possibilities of plant biotechnology, she points out the potential ethical concerns and argues that awareness building in the society about ethical conduct of research is also the responsibility of the scientific community.

Suma Sarojini, in her paper, "Medical Biotechnology: The Indian Scenario," describes how Red Biotechnology, the branch of biotechnology dealing with medical applications is offering a myriad of better healthcare choices to patients, starting from diagnostics till personalized medicine based on one's genetic makeup. She highlights how the Indian biopharmaceutical companies are making their presence felt in the international arena too. "Biotechnology and Health: Ethical Challenges for India," by Mario Vaz, delineates the pros and cons of biotechnological advances. He says that whereas biotechnology is a widening and rapidly evolving field, there has been a general view that the discourse on the ethics of biotechnology has been reactive and has lagged behind actual advances. While there are those who claim that Biotechnology increases therapeutic choices at relatively low cost, others suggest that ethical dilemmas are being inadequately addressed. Mario Vaz argues that though India has embraced the possibilities of biotechnology, technical capabilities cannot override ethical concerns.

S. Joseph Tham, in his paper, "The Challenges of Bioethics in Asia: A Natural Law Perspective," looks into the challenges of bioethics in Asia as well as natural law as a possible candidate of global ethics. He points out that in different parts of Asia, medical tourism, organ trafficking, selective abortion based on gender, and lack of individual informed consent are practised and economically driven. Joseph Tham asks whether an all-encompassing global bioethics offer a solution to these difficult questions and how the natural law tradition can shed light on these challenges.

Biju Michael shows that biotechnology's rapid growth facilitates organ donation and transplantation. The new powers of extending life also has possibilities of misuse and degradation of human dignity. In his paper, "Ethics for Organ Donation and Transplantation," he argues that there is a felt need to harmonize

technical progress with ethical rigour and examines how the teaching by the Catholic Church in this area can guide people in decision making in the context of booming technology in the field of organ donation and transplant.

"Genetic Medicines in India: Blessing or Curse?," by Scaria Kanniyakonil, after giving an overview of genetic medicines in India and ethical issues in genetics, makes an ethical appraisal of genetic medicines. He points out that different approaches like liberalism, utilitarianism, relativism, scientific positivism and scientific materialism are used to justify genetic medicine, but the dignity of the person is not considered. Kanniyakonil warns that unless we have an ethical approach based on just laws, faith and virtues, genetic manipulations will continue and medical genetics will become a curse instead of a blessing. John Karuvelil deals with two pertinent issues, namely, "The Case for Genetic Medicines in India," and "Stem Cell Therapies in India." Karuvelil points out that although often considered as the futuristic medicine for many diseases, genetic medicine or gene therapy is also one of the most challenging fields in medical ethics. While supporting genetic medicines, especially new genetic medicines for the new disease scenario dominated by non-communicable diseases, he underscores that the ethical issues in gene therapy in the context of India concern primarily the issues of justice, profiteering/commercialization, safety, accessibility, funding, protection of the poor subjects, etc. In the following paper on Stem Cell Therapies, Karuvelil attempts to investigate into the current practices in stem cell therapies in India and to point out some of the serious ethical issues involved in the practice. He shows that while stem cell therapies seem to hold much promise to the sick, it is a challenging task to make them available and affordable to the needy. Besides safety measures, issues like victimization or sacrifice of unborn human beings, unethical practices, profiteering, accessibility, etc. too are serious challenges that need to be overcome.

Following the discussion on biotechnological revolution in Asia, we have four papers dealing with other pertinent issues. Jeane C. Peracullo in her paper, "Phenomenological Reflections on Power and Vulnerability in Cyber Space by Filipino Youth: Implications to Church in Dialogue with Digital Culture," holds that while cyberspace fosters and provides democratic spaces craved by young people to creatively express themselves, such spaces can also render them vulnerable. Based on a study conducted among the De La Salle

University students, she argues that insights from Filipino youth perspective can deepen the Church's dialogue with digital culture. "The New Testament Significance of the Ecclesial Term Deacon," expounds how New Testament is the first and fundamental source concerning the origin of the diaconate. Based on the analysis of the NT texts and terms used, Devamitra Neelankavil concludes that Deacon is truly an icon of Jesus the servant.

Jones Ugochukwu Odili, in his article, "Confession and Repentance: The Interface between Christianity and Igbo Indigenous Religion," using the inductive historical research method into religious phenomena, and functionalism as a theoretical framework, highlights two indispensable aspects of the interface on which the whole gamut of Igbo religio-cultural configuration and Christianity can operate in order to mediate the Gospel in Igbo thought forms. The study reveals that the Igbo concepts of confession and repentance are some of the "shadows of the good things to come," the roots of Christianity in Igboland and recommends that emphasis should be placed on inward religiosity, rather than on outward expressions, in building a solid Christian life.

"Missiological Dimensions from Vatican II in the Context of the Vietnamese Church: 50 Years After" is a reflection of a Vietnamese priest belonging to the younger generation and breathing Post - Vatican Council II's atmosphere in a Vietnam. In his article, Jerome Nguyen Dinh Cong, beginning with an overview of *Dei Verbum*, *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes*, *Ad Gentes*, and *Nostra Aetate*, tries to show efforts of the Vietnamese Church to incorporate the Council's orientations during the past 50 years. He concludes that the transformations taking place are helping the Vietnamese Church to become a more credible witness in the context of a Communist nation.

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