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Editorial

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Asia was the birthplace of Christianity. But, already in the first centuries, Christianity spread to Europe and gradually the West became the centre of Christianity, which later gave the impression that Christianity is a Western religion. Different historical, social, political, cultural and economic factors might have played their role in this development. However, Christianity continued to exist in Asia, especially in some regions. At the same time, we cannot deny that the West became and to a great extent continues to be the centre of Christianity, though Christianity has its strongholds in other parts of the world; the structures of the Church today, mainstream theology, etc. can be said to be contributions of the West, though evidently, the contributions of the great Asian theologians were also integrated into this. Though Rome became the administrative centre of Christianity, we can say that the East continued to be prominent in the first millennium and only in the second millennium the West gained prominence.

The same may be said about theological development. First thousand years East was the theological centre of Christianity and theological developments. All the early ecumenical councils were held in the East. The most important theological schools of the early centuries were in the East, namely, Antioch and Alexandria. Important theologians in the first centuries were Easterners, most of them being bishops. The decadence of the Antiochian and Alexandrian schools began in the middle ages, mainly due to the Islamic invasion. Besides socio-political, religious and cultural factors that prevented Christianity and hence theological schools to flourish in Asia,

differences in the approach to theological sciences and theological method, lack of dialogue, misunderstandings and misinterpretations due to conceptual and linguistic differences, etc. seem to have contributed to this diminished role and sidelining of theology from the Asian soil. Thus, the legacy of the great Asian theologians of the early centuries was not effectively carried on by subsequent generations.

Recent decades have witnessed a re-emergence of Asian theology. There are many prominent theologians in Asia. A number of theological institutions and centres are developing in Asia. Asia is becoming more aware of developing a theology sensitive to its religious, cultural, social, economic and political context. Many of Asia's theologians were formed in the West. Whereas some may consider it as a handicap, others consider it as an advantage, since it gives these theologians greater possibility of integrating different traditions and perspectives.

Developing an Asian theology — a theology relevant for the multi-religious, multi-cultural and socio-economic context of Asia — is one of the main concerns of Asian theologians. Though viewed with suspicion from many quarters, Asian theologians have succeeded to a great extent to develop indigenous theologies and to convey a strong message that pluralism in theologising is an essential perspective not only for Asian theology, but for 'catholic' theology. Moreover, Asian theologians do not consider their vocation as limited to Asia. They feel with the universal Church and respond to their vocation to theologise for the universal Church. They believe that the universal Church can and should learn from them. We find a number of Asian theologians who are confident of their role in the universal Church and who are trying to faithfully respond to their vocation in the universal Church.

Asian Horizons has dedicated a few issues on theologising in the Asian context. In the current issue, a few Asian theologians share their vision of the Church. Besides reflecting on the specific Asian context and the theological challenges that Asia faces, they try to deliberate upon what the universal Church can and need to learn from Asia and how this learning process can enrich the universal Church.

The first two articles discuss the contributions of FABC in the theological formation of the Asian Churches. "Some Salient Contributions of the FABC to the Asian Churches during the Past 40 Years" by Vimal Tirimanna shows that the FABC has been the centre around which the Asian Episcopate rallied round in the immediate aftermath of the Vatican II. According to him, FABC has been the link between the universal Church and the local Asian realities. Tirimanna holds that FABC teachings also can be called "Asian perspectives" of the universal Catholic faith. A. Alangaram in his article "An Asian Ecclesiology Guided by the Spirit of Vatican II: Vision of the Asian Church Based on FABC Documents" shows how the Asian bishops have rediscovered and redefined the identity and mission of the Church, in the "complex human reality of our peoples" in Asia. According to him, the awareness that Jesus is an *Asian* has an impact on the Church. The Asian Church has to be a servant Church, a reconciling, prophetic, courageous, acculturating, dialoguing, praying and liberating Church. Alangaram underscores that, "The churches in Asia, always open to God and His Spirit, have to work together and move forward both *centripetally* and *centrifugally*, so that the poor are ultimately liberated by the power of God." Archbishop Thomas Menampampil analyses the socio-political, economic and religious contexts of Asia which offer both challenges and possibilities for theological reflection. Profusely drawing insights from different religious traditions of Asia, he underscores that there is "every possibility for cultures, civilizations, and faiths to dialogue with each other, to listen to each others' insights, and *learn from each others' wisdom.*"

In her article, "Should Religion Have a Public Role? Theologizing from the Filipino Context" Christina A. Astorga analyses the meaning of religion, presents different positions on the public role of religion and validates religion as a force of change and transformation in the Filipino context. She considers arguments against the public role of religion and asserts that, "Religion, when it inspires the common good, is a force of social change and transformation. Bearing an inherent power through people's communal faith and hope, religion sets free and liberates from the tyranny of oppression." Thus she invites Asian Churches to be relevant and to play an active role in the society, in the face of the growing tendencies even in Asia to privatize religion. Kuncheria Pathil's article, "Theological Reflections on the Church from India," tries to present the reflections of contemporary Indian theologians on the Church. After presenting a few underlying

theological presuppositions, he deals with the question of theologizing in India and its methodology. Following this, Pathil discusses the ecclesiological reflections of Indian theologians expressed mainly in the forum of *Indian Theological Association*. Pathil holds that an "Indian ecclesiology should be an authentic response to Indian reality, to India's socio-cultural and religious context." He concludes the article highlighting the question of the identity of the Indian Churches and with the dream of a new Indian Church.

Sebastian Elavathingal emphasises that the Church should be dynamic and creative. In his "From the Image of God to the Kingdom of God: The Church as a Creative Space," he argues that in order to be relevant and meaningful in today's world and to realize its destiny the Church has to be a dynamic, creative community. Drawing inspiration from the teachings of Vatican II, he argues that the Church cannot remain unaffected in the changing world. Rather, the Church can be relevant, effective and meaningful in today's world only by actively involving in its affairs and thereby constantly transforming it until it realizes its highest ideal. In his article, "Renewal of Church Structures," Julian Saldanha points out that the Church is comprised of a divine and a human element which necessitates continual renewal. According to him, "many of the Church's internal problems today are the *symptoms of a deeper malaise*, which has to do with current church structures." He argues that a remedy must be sought in a reformation of these structures. However, he underlines that nothing should detract us from the primacy of spiritual renewal.

Davis Varayilan proposes a model of the Church as *Pilgrim Community of Disciples* for the pluralistic context of Asia. His article, "Pilgrim Community of Disciples: An Asian Model of the Church," shows that the perception of Church as the Pilgrim on the "Way" is understandable and appropriate in the Asian pluralistic context, since in Asia the religions are known as the "Ways" to the Ultimate. Some of the characteristics of this model are openness to dialogue, finding avenues for joint witness, participation and exchange, and flexible community-oriented structures. Living in the 'age of migration' Gemma Tulud Cruz explores "migration as a heuristic lens on the meaning of and quest for salvation today, particularly in the way migration provides a window into sinful conditions and, at the same time, efforts towards liberation." She says

that Christian has made use of a number of models of understanding salvation and that one of the theological challenges of today is to articulate an understanding of salvation that speaks to contemporary times. Her essay "When Death Meets Life: Exploring the Links Between Migration and Salvation," presents migration as a meaningful and relevant model for understanding salvation in the contemporary world. Though migration is not a mere Asian phenomenon, this article helps us understand how new theological models can be developed, especially because migration is a lived experience of millions of Asians and because migration as a theological model is linked to many traditional models of salvation in Asian religions. Though narrates the plight of the migrants as well as their contributions, Tulud Cruz's main concern is to show that, "By simultaneously bringing and evoking suffering and healing, dying and rising to a new life migration is a symbol of a Church working its way toward redemption."

"The Epistemological Practices of Comparative Theologians," by Martin Kallungal assesses comparative theological views on comparison as an epistemological norm. Setting up a heuristic apparatus to analyze the process of comparative learning, he exposes the different, interconnected epistemic procedures of comparative theologians, especially, those of Francis X. Clooney. Kallungal proposes that comparativists might "benefit from a study of the history of theoretical reflections on the epistemological issues surrounding analogical thinking practices, especially in the Indian traditions." In the final section he assesses comparativists' use of Anselm's definition for their theological self-understanding. According to Kallungal, an attempt "to re-found interreligious theological thinking in the possibilities of our porous rationality may help us to understand the relation between the Christian faith and the context of religious pluralism."

Franz-Josef Eilers, in his article, "Social Communication and Theology – Communication Theology" explains the concept of social communication as introduced by Vatican II and the subsequent contributions, especially those of John Paul II. He further elaborates different approaches to theology and communication: 1. A Theology of Communication, 2. A communicative Theology and 3. A Communication Theology. "African Cosmology: A Catalyst to the Growth of African Indigenous Churches" investigates aspects of African

cosmology which contribute to the growth of African indigenous churches. Dr Wilson E. Ethianu and Awajiusuk, Finomo Julia point out that orthodox churches loose converts to indigenous church groups because of the former's seeming inability to address the spiritual and mundane needs of their faithful. According to them, unless mainline churches begin to provide solutions to these existential challenges, they will continue to lose membership to indigenous churches or at least have their faithful syncretize the Christian faith. "Virtue and Catholic Social Teaching: A New Generation in an Ongoing Dialogue toward Greater Realization of Social Justice and the Common Good", by James P. O'Sullivan seeks to show that there has been an evolution from the important, but insufficient, insertion of virtue into the discussion of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) to more nuanced and specific efforts of relating virtue to the vision in CST of social justice and the common good. Both the older and the newer approaches rightly insist that the vision of CST should be seen as calling for ongoing conversion and that fostering virtues in individuals is an important part in realizing that vision. A new generation, however, has come to see the importance of fostering specific virtues and recognizes that the call to virtue and conversion does not replace the need for structural change. Sullivan underscores that what is needed is a balanced emphasis on both changing structures and fostering specific virtues, with the former importantly influencing the latter.

Each continent, each nation and each region and each local Church within the same nation has its own uniqueness. Developing indigenous theologies is necessary for the growth of Catholic theology. Rather, Catholic theology becomes really 'catholic' when theology in various regions develops, keeping its own uniqueness, but at the same time contributing to the universal Church. Without polarisation, the East and the West have to learn from each other and complement each other. Many theologians, even in the West, point out that the future of Christianity is in Asia and Africa. Asian theologians should learn from the theological tradition and developments in other parts of the world. In the same way, theologians elsewhere can learn from Asian theologians. This dialogue and willingness to learn from each other will further enhance the growth of theology.

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