

Editorial

HARMONY OF LIFE: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON WHOLENESS AND COMMUNION

The motif of harmony has a distinguished lineage within Christian thought. From the Patristic concept of *musica mundi*¹ to Bonaventure's *reductio artium ad theologiam*,² theology has long envisioned creation as a divinely orchestrated symphony—each creature a unique voice, none superfluous, all contributing to the praise of the Creator. The Psalmist exemplifies this understanding by calling upon “everything that has breath” to praise the Lord (Ps 150:6), and the Deuteronomic vision of cosmic blessing and curse (Deut 30:15–20) assumes an ordered universe in which human fidelity and ecological well-being are inextricably linked.³ However, harmony does not equate to mere uniformity; it inherently involves difference, tension, and the nuanced labour of reconciliation. In a world fractured by ecological devastation, communal violence, and internal disintegration, the theme of this issue is not ornamental but of pressing importance.

Harmony in the Biblical Witness

Scripture delineates harmony not as a static equilibrium but as a dynamic, covenantal reality. The creation narratives in Genesis depict an original shalom—a state of wholeness in which humanity, creatures, and the Creator coexist in proper relationship. The Fall disrupts this harmony, resulting in alienation between God and humanity, between man and woman, and between humanity and the earth (Gen 3). The remainder of the biblical narrative can be

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), no. 341: “The order and harmony of the created world results from the diversity of beings and from the relationships which exist among them.”

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 337, on the intrinsic value and purpose of the created order as directed toward the praise of God.

³ Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 183–86.

understood as an extended, patient process of restoration: the covenant with Noah, the election of Israel, the prophetic critique of injustice, and ultimately, the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ, who is described as “our peace” (Eph 2:14).

The Pauline corpus is notably abundant in this context. Colossians 1:15–20 articulates Christ as the entity in whom “all things hold together” and through whom Divine pleasure is expressed “to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven.” This universal Christology precludes any privatisation of salvation. Redemption is understood not solely as the rescue of individual souls but as the restoration of a wounded cosmos. Likewise, Romans 8:18–23 portrays creation lamenting in travail, awaiting the manifestation of the children of God – a passage that has gained prominence in contemporary ecological theology.⁴

The Gospels, in the meantime, provide a Christological framework of harmony through the concept of kenosis.⁵ Jesus’ fellowship at the table, his healing of those possessed and marginalised, and his parables of the banquet – all exemplify a harmony that is realised not through the suppression of differences but through the transformation of hostility into communion. The Beatitudes (Matt 5:3–12) declare blessings not upon the powerful, but upon the poor in spirit, the humble, the merciful, and the peacemakers – representing a profound reordering of values that challenges every false harmony based on domination.⁶

Harmony in the Asian Context

For *Asian Horizons*, the theme of harmony possesses particular resonance. Asia is the birthplace of the world’s major religious traditions – Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism, Taoism, and numerous indigenous spiritualities – many of which have developed profound philosophies centred on harmony. The Taoist concept of “he” (和), the Confucian ideal of social concord, the Buddhist doctrine of interdependence *pratītyasamutpāda*, and the Hindu concept of *ṛta* (cosmic order) all serve as resources for a

⁴ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), nos. 137–42, where “integral ecology” is developed as the interrelation of human, social, and environmental concerns.

⁵ *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22.

⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 68–75, where the Beatitudes are read as a Christological portrait of authentic blessedness.

theology of harmony that is both genuinely Christian and authentically Asian.⁷

Nevertheless, Asia is also a continent characterised by stark contradictions. It hosts the majority of the world's impoverished populations, includes communities displaced due to development and conflict, and comprises women and children subjected to trafficking and exploitation. Additionally, its ecosystems suffer from devastation caused by extractive industries. Theologians within Asia cannot speak of harmony without confronting these profound wounds. Indeed, the Asian theological tradition—from the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences to liberationist and feminist theologians—has persistently maintained that harmony is inherently linked to justice. No form of concord can exist where the cries of the impoverished are disregarded.⁸

Interreligious dialogue is, therefore, an integral aspect of the Asian theological enterprise and not merely a peripheral activity. If harmony is considered a divine attribute, then the recognition of truth and grace within other religious traditions becomes imperative. The Second Vatican Council's *Nostra Aetate* initiated this acknowledgment, a stance that subsequent magisterial documents have further reinforced. For theologians, the fundamental challenge lies in constructing a theology of religions that avoids both relativism and exclusivism—one that respects the particularity of the Christian faith while also discerning the activity of the Spirit in contexts where harmony, justice, and communion are promoted.

Harmony and the Theological Vocation

What does the theme of harmony demand of the theologian? First, it demands a contemplative posture. Harmony cannot be produced solely through technical methods; it necessitates attentiveness to the Spirit who intercedes within us “with sighs too deep for words” (Rom 8:26).⁹ The theologian must be a listener before being a speaker—

⁷ *Nostra Aetate*, no. 2: the Church “rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions,” which “often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.”

⁸ *Ecclesia in Asia* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1999), no. 3, which takes John 10:10 as its governing text and frames the Asian mission as the promotion of “life in abundance” through humble service.

⁹ *Dominum et Vivificantem* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1986), no. 53, where John Paul II affirms that the Spirit's action cannot be confined to the Church's institutional boundaries.

listening to Scripture, tradition, the cries of the world, and the silence of God.

Secondly, harmony necessitates intellectual rigour. The theological academy is not immune to the temptations of fragmentation. Specialisation, ideological polarisation, and the pressure to publish may hinder the integration that harmony necessitates. A truly harmonious theology is one that coherently unites exegesis and systematics, history and ethics, doctrine and praxis.¹⁰ It resists the tendency to diminish the mystery of God to a singular method or perspective.

Third, harmony requires prophetic bravery. Discussing harmony within a world characterised by injustice entails the risk of being manipulated by individuals who favour superficial peace. The theologian bears the responsibility to identify the dissonance—condemning the sinful structures that disrupt fellowship—and to proclaim the reign of God, which is already emerging. This embodies the *parrhēsia* of the prophets and apostles, and it remains the calling of the theological scholar in contemporary times.

The Present Issue

The present issue of *Asian Horizons* compiles contributions that explore the concept of harmony of life from various disciplinary perspectives: biblical exegesis, systematic and moral theology, interreligious dialogue, and contextual Asian realities. The authors do not romanticise harmony; rather, they acknowledge that genuine concord arises from the crucible of difference and is often achieved through conflict that is rightly negotiated. Theologically, harmony is understood as an eschatological horizon—already inaugurated in Christ, who is our peace, yet still awaits its complete fulfilment. It is both a gift to be received and a task to be undertaken, embodying a reality that is both already realised and still forthcoming.

They demonstrate that theological scholarship in Asia must be attentive to the Spirit's polyphony—listening to the poor, the marginalised, and the wounded earth as privileged bearers of theological insight.¹¹ The task is not to silence dissonance but to integrate it into a richer, more truthful whole. Harmony, in this sense,

¹⁰ *Dei Verbum*, no. 12, and the Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), II.B, on the necessity of multiple methods for a unified reading of Scripture.

¹¹ *Evangelii Gaudium* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), nos. 198–201.

is not the absence of conflict but the presence of a love strong enough to bear it. It is our hope that this issue will stimulate rigorous reflection and faithful praxis.¹² May the harmony we seek in thought anticipate the harmony we are called to embody—in our churches, our communities, our institutions, and our care for the earth. May the God of peace, who raised Christ from the dead, make us instruments of that reconciliation which is the world's deepest longing and the Spirit's most patient work.

The Contributors' Insights

Article 1: "In Christ There Is No East or West" by Anastacia Wooden

Dr. Wooden argues that an "Eastern" way of thinking—holistic, relational, paradoxical, and communal—helped Vatican II shift Catholic ecclesiology from a juridical, authority-centred model of unity to a sacramental, Eucharistic, communion-based vision. This retrieval of patristic, liturgical, and pneumatological sources made authentic Catholic-Orthodox dialogue possible and remains an unfinished task of reception.

Article 2: "Contribution of Ecotheology to the Harmony of Life" by Konrad Glombik

Dr. Glombik presents ecotheology as a contemporary theological discipline centred on the harmony of all creatures. He develops the concept of ecological sin as the source of cosmic disharmony, critiques radical anthropocentrism, and proposes ecotheological postulates—respect for creation's inherent value, moderation, and ecological conversion—as indispensable contributions to a holistic, non-reductive vision of life's harmony.

Article 3: "Faith Seeking Harmony of Life: The Legacy of Dharmaram Theology" by Paulachan Kochappilly

Dr. Kochappilly traces the legacy of Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram through Jonas Thaliath's definition of theology as "faith seeking harmony of life." Surveying figures like Podipara, Pathrapankal, Chethimattam, Mundadan, and Pathikulangara, he shows how Dharmaram theology integrates inculturation, dialogue, liturgy, and cosmic consciousness into a celebration of life in Christ.

Article 4: "Religious Pluralism, *De Facto* and *De Iure*: An Indian Appraisal of Vatican II" by Shinto Puthumattathil

¹² *Veritatis Splendor* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), no. 107.

Dr. Puthumattathil traces the Church's journey from *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* to *Nostra Aetate's* positive appraisal of religions. He argues that religious pluralism is both *de facto* and *de iure* in India, yet the conciliar enthusiasm for dialogue has waned due to ignorance, misinterpretation, and post-Vatican II documents like *Dominus Iesus* that reassert Christian superiority.

Article 5: "Faith as Harmony of Life: Mental Health and Consecrated Life" by Sally John

Dr. Sally John argues that mental health is constitutive, not ancillary, to consecrated vocation. Drawing on theological anthropology and clinical practice with women religious, she proposes the TREASURE CARE Model—a community-based, faith-integrated framework built on literacy, early identification, accompaniment, referral, and cultural transformation—reframing psychological care as an incarnational and ecclesial imperative for harmonious religious life.

Article 6: "The Enhanced Human and the Harmony of Life" by Arnald Mahesh Irudhayadhasan

Dr. Irudhayadhasan critiques Human Enhancement as driven by dissatisfaction with finitude and modern restlessness. Evaluating HE against justice, autonomy, authenticity, and solidarity, he argues that human vulnerability is foundational to meaning and communion. Genuine harmony arises not from technological self-transcendence but from purposeful living, embracing limitation, and solidarity within our shared human condition.

Article 7: "Feminist Hermeneutics and the Quest for an Inclusive Harmony of Life" by Smitha Gabriel

Dr. Gabriel presents feminist biblical hermeneutics—grounded in suspicion, remembrance, and creative actualisation—as a transformative interpretive approach. Engaging Schüssler Fiorenza, Tribble, and Ruether, she examines texts of terror, subaltern readings, and women's discipleship, arguing that feminist subaltern hermeneutics fosters inclusive harmony by exposing power structures, centring marginalised voices, and building communities of justice and mutuality across genders.

Article 8: "Inter-Faith Dialogue: A Way of Harmony of Life" by Antony Kalliath

Dr. Kalliath argues that harmony, not imposed unity, is the foundational ecosystem of Indian religions. Drawing on Derrida, Ricoeur, Trinitarian theology, and quantum science, he proposes dialogue as a religious experience in itself—open, non-judgmental, and non-conclusive. Preferring polyphonic harmony to monolithic unity, he calls for a theology of religions rooted in justice and the sapiential wisdom of cosmic interconnectedness.

Article 9: “From Family Enculturation to Liturgical Co-Responsibility: A Developmental Communication Model of Children’s Musical Formation” by Pawel Piotrowski

Dr. Pawel Piotrowski proposes a five-stage developmental model of children’s liturgical musical agency: musical-religious enculturation, symbolic comprehension, communicative agency, ecclesial participation, and reflective co-responsibility. It integrates theology, communication theory, and music education, arguing formation should be assessed by relational, meaningful participation—not attendance, repertoire, or performance.

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