

Editorial

The Catholic Church in India is one of the most significant and influential of the Christian presence in Asia. This issue begins with an interview with one of its leaders, **Cardinal Oswald Gracias**, Archbishop of Bombay (Mumbai), who was made a cardinal last November. “The Indian [Catholic] Church really has got a lot to contribute to the universal Church,” says Gracias, who speaks not only of the Church’s bright side, but also its problems: mounting violence against Christians, difficulties in empowering women, lack of social engagement of the Church, etc. This humble leader who does not mind engaging himself even in a dialogue with Hindu fundamentalists remains nevertheless optimistic about the Catholic Church in India and Asia which “have got a tremendous future.”

Christianity in the mainland China is another great focus of attention today. In a symposium held in last December in Hong Kong, experts in the field shared their insights on the topic, “Religious Freedom and the Rise of China.” *Asian Christian Review* has obtained a permission to translate and publish the revised transcript, which is included in this issue.

In his presentation, **Chan Shun-hing** argues on the basis of his field studies in the mainland that the situation surrounding the Catholic Church in China is significantly changing as the Chinese economy thrives and lay Catholics have started holding stronger economic and social ground in dealing with the government.

Anthony Lam Sui-ki instead questions if China is really on the “rise,” if it is sacrificing much of the society, particularly the rural agriculture, for the sake of industrial development. Against the background of the increasing plight of the marginalized, Lam believes that the church should not first of all concerned about its “religious freedom,” but should rather strive to build the Kingdom of God even at the risk of confrontation.

From a Protestant point of view, **Ying Fuk-tsang** discusses how the economic reform brought about a great social change in China, and how the government’s regulatory systems for religions have become outdated. Ying goes on to observe the challenges of Protestant churches are going to face in the coming years.

Finally, **Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun**, SDB stresses and laments that religious freedom is not yet given in the mainland. While understanding the difficult situations there and also the need of concessions at times, Zen exhorts mainland Catholics to be firm on the principles, which “would ultimately benefit China.”

As if to prove Cardinal Gracias’ comment, Indian contributions are prominent in this issue’s main articles.

The first article by **J. Jayakiran Sebastian**, “Why Should Asian Theologians

Read Texts of the Early Teachers of Faith?” is a constructive admonition to a tendency among Asian theologians to disregard the “Christian past” as irrelevant to the present Asian realities of religious pluralism and poverty. While acknowledging that theology has to be attentive to its context and critical of its history, Sebastian nonetheless forcefully argues that “it is incumbent on us... to allow the legacy of our Christian past to speak to the present,” illustrating how we can draw on the rich heritage of early teachers such as Gregory of Nazianzus, Cyprian, and Augustine among others.

K. P. Aleaz, in his concise article, “Pluralistic Inclusivism: A Suggested Perspective in Theology of Religions,” proposes a new direction in the theology of religions, which seeks to transcend the widely accepted paradigms of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. The “Pluralistic Inclusivism” affirms that “there is a possibility of the fulfillment of the theological and spiritual contents of one’s own faith in and through the contributions of other living faiths.” Religions are common treasures of humanity, asserts Aleaz, and therefore, being familiar with one’s own religion alone is a religious poverty. “Mutual interaction and enrichment [of religions] on an equal footing is the inevitable reality for today and all the days to come.”

“Is there a chance for peace and non-violence in the contemporary scenario of growing local and global trends of violence and terrorism?” asks **Soosai Arokiasamy, SJ**, in his article “The Alternative of Non-Violence and Peace in a Violent World.” He first considers the definitions of violence and terrorism, revisiting also the just war theory which is becoming increasingly difficult to apply in modern warfare. In the latter half, Arokiasamy upholds non-violence as belonging to the “core message of Asian religions and...of the Gospel of Christ” and does not hesitate to state that “if non-violence belongs to our humanity, we can say that the future of humanity belongs to non-violence.”

Lastly, another reflection on theological and spiritual interactions between religions is offered by **Francis X. Clooney, SJ**, in his “Learning to Learn Interreligiously: In Light of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola.” Noting that *Exercises* guided and inspired early Jesuit missionaries, Clooney points out that it nonetheless did not substantially inform their rather conservative theology because it is theologically undetermined and open to multiple meanings. Through the examples of works by Indian Jesuits and himself, Clooney suggests that the unity and balance between practice and theology are the keys to *Exercises*, which could provide a holistic ground for dialogue with theologies and practices of other religious traditions.

The readers should be reminded that their responses to these works are always welcome.

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Editor
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