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Asian Theology

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(2) Other articles single out certain Asian insights that can enrich Christianity if properly integrated into our theology. Such are the articles by Jung Young Lee (on the Yin-Yang way of thinking), Kosuke Koyama (on the slow pace of Asian thought), Samuel Rayan (on the Indian cyclic view of history), Hideo Ohki (the Japanese concept of *shorai*, future-about-to-come), S.J. Samartha (Indian holistic thought), and Lynn de Silva (various Buddhist insights).

(3) Other articles call for contextualization, and not merely indigenization, i.e., that Christian theological premises should include a serious consideration of the present situation of poverty and oppression in many Asian countries. Here I would cite the articles by Shoki Coe, Carlos Abesamis, Raymond Fung, Aloysius Pieris, Catalino Arevalo, Sebastian Kappen, and the Asian Conference of Third World Theologians.

(4) Still others concretize this context in the struggles for liberation within their own countries: Yong Bock Kim and the various declarations of Conferences in South Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines.

(5) Finally, other articles cover diverse subjects that are best left unclassified, for example, a study of Asian Christian art by Masao Takenaka, a defense of Christianity against the "opiate of the people" accusation by Kuang-hsen Ting, and a secular anthropology based on the Bible by M.M. Thomas.

The value of this book, like the preceding volume, is that of an introduction to Asian theologians, or a source book on Asian theologies. The articles show how Asian theologians explain the Asian realities and viewpoints, usually to foreigners. However, Asians can certainly profit from this book by recognizing here various valid formulations of their own viewpoints. Many articles also demonstrate how Asian principles and attitudes can enrich Christian theology and help solve vexing European problems by mustering the help of Asian thought.

Eduardo P. Hontiveros, S.J.

Designed as an introductory textbook or as a *Quellenbuch* on Asian theology, *Asian Christian Theology* mirrors Dr. D.J. Elwood's heart and soul involvement with Asian Christians as they struggle to live and confess their faith in the context of Asia. The editor is to be congratulated for giving us a needed area source book sampling the creativity, vitality and plurality of Asian theological thinking today. Within the necessary limitations of any compilation, especially for a continent as varied as Asia, we have here made available to us from scattered and not always easily accessible sources what Asian Christians are thinking precisely as Asians and as Christians. This reviewer, for one, recommends this book (and the Asian edition) as a "must" reading particularly for Roman Catholic students of theology, who could finish their course blissfully unaware of what other Asian Christian theologians of different denominations are thinking and saying.

In a way the theological awakening going on in Asia today can be described as Asians finally getting at it to dig wells from where to draw water in their own backyards, instead of persisting to derive water from far-off European or American outlets. But it is not just a matter of convenience or practicality. To borrow the metaphor of Sadhu Sundar Singh at the turn of the century, it is to offer to the multitudes of Asia the water of life in the various Asian bowls. And even more than this, it is to drink the water of life as it literally wells up from Asian grounds with all the distinctive and diverse topological characterizations and conditions. It is not just efforts to indigenize something foreign, but rather to contextualize one's response to the Gospel within the framework of one's own situation.

It is this theological task of contextualizing Christian faith and life in Asia that characterizes all the contributions to this volume. Let us briefly refer to some of them. A theology that is contextually Asian must grapple with the interpenetrating Asian realities of overwhelming poverty and of multifaceted religiosity (Abysius Pierre, SJ, "Toward an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religiocultural Guidelines"). Only so can a theology be confessing the faith in Asian context and speaking "to the actual questions men in Asia are asking in the midst of their dilemmas; their hopes, aspirations, and achievements; their doubts, despair, and suffering" (Christian Conference of Asia, "The Confessing Church in Asia and Its Theological Task"). Contextualization as a critical Asian principle (Emerito Nakpil, "The Critical Asian Principle") demands the assessment of the peculiarity of any given context in the light of the mission of the Church as participating in the *Missio Dei* (Shoti Coe, "Contextualization as the Way Toward Reform").

As this Asian theology tries to discover the hidden "Christ" in the midst of the cultural and human realities of Asia, freed from Western cultural particularism (Kiyoto Takeda Cho, "Inquiry into Indigenous Cultural Energies"; Jung Young Lee, "The Yin-Yang Way of Thinking"; Lynn de Silva, "Emergent Theology in the Context of Buddhism"), the basic orientation is biblical. In the Asians' struggle for full humanity, to stand on the side of the poor is what fidelity to Christ demands of his followers (C.G. Arevalo, S.J., "Notes for a Theology of Development"). But this involvement in contemporary revolution must not so hussle us that we become unable to listen to the word God is addressing to us (Kosuke Koyama, "Three Mile an Hour God"). For our concern for the oppressed and the suffering (Raymond Fung, "Evangelism Today: The Sinners and the Sinned-Against") and our confession of the Christian faith whether politically (Theological Statements of Asian Churches and Other Christian Groups) or artistically (Masao Takenaka, "Christian Art in Asia: Signs of a Renewal") or in critique of ideologies (M.M. Thomas, "Theological Insight for a Secular Anthropology"; Kuang-hsun Ting, "Christian Theism: A Theology of Society"), are in the last analysis the church's participation in the "Divine Mission of Creation" (Choan-seng Song).

As the editor says in his introduction, all this is Asian Christian theology "in the making." The representative articles here assembled do not form a systematic, logical whole. They are fragmentary and speak from different points of views. Inevitably, some even go in conflicting directions. "What we have here," says Charles C. West in his foreword, "is Christian reflection on many different experiences of what it means to be Christians reaching for a common insight that God will give in his time." To the Westerners he adds, "We may have in this book the beginnings of a real word of God to us from the Asian experience." The sometimes shrill protestations by Asians against one form or another of Western theological "captivity" or colonialism detract from a real intercultural dialogue among theologians. There are limits to how far an Asian theology can really come to its own. Not everything Asians think or say is Asian. Some of what is mouthed in Asia are more like late export items by the *Frankfurter Schule* in ecumenical packing. The emerging Christian theology in Asia has much more positive to contribute to the thinking of the church ecumenical, as attested by the present volume. Dialogue here means mutual inspiration and correction. The optimism is expressed by Kosuke Koyama in his Asian foreword to the book: "The study of the theologies of Asia by Westerners and the study of theologies of the West by Asians may lead to Christianity's emancipation from its Babylonian captivity."

Sabino A. Vengco