Editorial

For a long time, the historical-critical method in the study of Christian Scriptures has been viewed as the standard one. The merit of any interpretation was judged to the extent of conformity to its canons. However, many scholars from the global South were uneasy with the claims of the historical-critical method. Their reading of the Scriptures in context exposed the limits of this method and pointed to the need for developing other ways of reading and interpreting the Bible. In the last few decades, thanks to R. S. Sugirtharajah and others, the postcolonial reading of the scriptures has caught the imagination of global Christianity.

The first article in this number of our journal brings out the contribution of Asian scholars in interpreting a particular scriptural passage—Philippians 2: 5–11—which speaks of the *kenosis* or self-emptying of Jesus Christ. Peter Das shows how this passage has turned out to be a key text from which Asian theologians and Scripture scholars have drawn inspiration to interpret many issues and concerns touching upon the lives of Christians in this continent. The theme of self-emptying resonates with the Asian ethos. Asia has emphasized Nothingness rather than Being as the starting point for interpreting the self, history and the world. The Asian interpretation of this passage assumes importance also from the viewpoint of liberation. Whereas the Exodus has been the Biblical trope in liberation theology of Latin America, in Asia, the passage speaking of *kenosis* has been viewed as a text inspiring the project of liberation.

Inculturation has been one of the significant Christian projects in the post-colonial period. This project acknowledges the role of culture in living and practicing Christian faith in different parts of the world, especially in the global South. This project, however, does not pay enough attention to the role of the faithful and their subjectivity in appropriating Christian beliefs, traditions and practices. The article by Namrata Chaturvedi shows through a nineteenth-century novel—*Saguna: A Story of a Native Christian Life*—how Christian faith

and spirituality were absorbed and lived in the life of a woman of that age. There is an awful lacuna in research on Christian women of the past. By going into this novel and interpreting it, the author unfolds the life and spirituality of a Christian woman very vividly. This article could also be considered as a contribution to the history of women's studies in Asia as well as a contribution to literary studies. Further, as the author notes, the article 'lends an opportunity to expand the scope of understanding Christianity beyond Western frameworks'.

The article that follows, in a way, continues the theme of the subject and agency of Asian Christians in the colonial period. Mark Balmforth presents and interprets the life-story of an eighteenth-century Christian—Christian David (1771–1852)—who was born in the Tanjore Kingdom of South India but who dedicated himself to the educational mission in Ceylon, even before modern colonial education was introduced by the British. It is well-known that the Danish mission in Tranquebar from the times of the German missionary Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg paid attention to education in the vernacular through the many schools it established. Schooled in this spirit, Christian David extends the educational mission in Ceylon and does pioneering work. The article could be viewed as a case study to understand the encounter of Asian Christians with modernity. In the case of Christian David, we have an Asian Christian who draws from the indigenous Tamil traditional pedagogical methods and blends them with 'the interests, commitments, and methods of his Enlightenment-inspired, German Pietist scientist-missionary mentors'.

The next article takes us from the educational mission to the field of the medical mission. Asian peoples had their traditional medical systems which were holistic in approach and were transmitted from generation to generation. The value of traditional medicine is recaptured today and continues to be practiced. Each medical system has its strength and weakness. When Western medicine was introduced in many Asian regions as part of mission work, there was resistance from the people, not only because it was different from the traditional medical practices, but mainly because it was a threat to their popular religious beliefs and rituals connected with gods and goddesses. In India, it may be surmised that it was the Dalits and the people of lower castes who embraced modern Western medicine willingly and were instrumental in popularizing it. The article by Ashok Kumar Mocherla presents us the case of Dr Anna Sarah Kugler (1880–1930), a missionary who did pioneering work in Andhra Pradesh, India, by establishing a hospital in the district of Guntur which became a rallying point for the poor to avail of necessary

medical assistance. More importantly, Kugler's hospital and medical service contributed to changing the general perception about disease and cures as well as gender relations. The author, through this article, wants to contribute to a sociological reading of medical mission by bringing out its caste and gender implications.

Conversion is a theme intertwined with the colonial history of Asia and continues to be a highly controversial one in many regions of this continent. Even Mahatma Gandhi was strongly opposed to it and dissuaded the Christian missionaries from the work of proselytization. In their confrontation with Christian conversion, radical Hindu groups have used many arguments against it. They did not stop there. There has been an effort to bring back the converted to the fold of Hinduism. This is known as *gharvāpasī* or 'home-coming'. The origin of this goes back to Arya Samaj founded in the nineteenth century to revive and reform Hinduism. Lekhram was a significant thinker of this movement. During the colonial period, it was commonplace to contrast the powerful, martial and masculine West with effeminate and weak East. If the converts joined the ranks of the masculine Christianity, the persuasion to make them return had to show that Hinduism, unlike the colonial construct, is no less a masculine religion, though not a martial one. There is an 'alternative masculinity'. It meant that the 'ideal for men was, "loving family men" proactively seeking ways to promote some sort of equality among social classes and genders'. David Singh plunges into the original writings of Lekhram and the way this Hindu thinker elaborates this argument.

The issue of migrants and refugees is one of the burning questions in the contemporary world which has momentous political, economic and cultural consequences. In Asian societies, massive migration—both transnational and internal—is taking place. At this juncture, it may be helpful to recall and study instances of how Asian peoples have tried to come to terms with this problem in the past. Under *Field Notes*, the article from Glenn Shive deals with the dynamics of migration in the former British colony of Hong Kong during a critical period (1945–1960) in the history of the Chinese people. The author presents the role played by the Christian churches and missionaries in welcoming and rehabilitating the refugees. The article is also interreligious as it expands on the role played by the Wong Tai Sin Taoist temple in Kowloon in responding to the suffering and aspirations of the migrants and refugees. It can also be viewed as a contribution to contemporary migration studies in Asia and at the global level.

I wish to thank all the six authors for their high-quality research contributions and for revising their texts in the light of comments by the peer-reviewers.

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Felix Wilfred
Editor-in-Chief