Editorial

Secularisation is a thesis that refuses to die despite its incisive critique in the past few decades from any number of quarters. We continue to see new representatives holding this old thesis aloft with fresh arguments. Such is the case with two authors – Steve Bruce and Karel Dobbelaere – whose position the opening article by Jemima Baar examines and studies its plausibility in relation to the phenomenon of secularisation in China and Korea. The article argues that one needs to consider certain factors of history, the mode of governance at work, the challenges and conflicts a people face, which all seem to break the conventional frame of interpreting secularisation as resulting from such processes as urbanisation and industrialisation. Baar contrasts the scene of the disintegration of Christianity in the West with that of the remarkable expansion of it in China and Korea right at the heart of these societies' modernisation process. The article opens up new avenues for research on religion, modernisation, and Asian societies, calling for other frames of interpretation than secularisation.

One of the reasons for the severe limits of secularisation thesis in Asia appears to be the way religion is interconnected with ethnicity and nationalism. Francis Loh takes us to the complexity of this issue by investigating deep into the situation of the Christian minority in Malaysia and the Rohingya Muslim minority in Myanmar. In these and similar instances, what happens is that the minorities are excluded from participation in the political process and economic development policies. In this context, the author advocates a conception of the nation along the lines of citizenship and inclusion rather than an exclusivist one stemming from ethnic approach to nationalism.

Vinil Paul leads us to reflect on the theme of exclusion through a contribution from history in India's caste-based society. Well-known is the case of Dalits (formerly referred to as "the Untouchables") whose conversion to Christianity has been the object of many research studies and investigations. Vinil Paul makes a study of the less-known practice of slavery in India before the mass conversion movement of Dalits to Christianity. The beginning of Dalit

conversion goes back to the early nineteenth century when they were slaves, bought and sold by the upper castes and rich Syrian Christians of Kerala, India. The article enlightens us on the unique story of missionary involvement in the liberation of the runaway slaves and their education amidst trying conditions and despite stiff opposition from upper caste masters among who were the Syrian Christians. As for the Dalit slave themselves, their conversion was complex, as they were suspicious of Christianity and had serious difficulties with its doctrinal tenets. It was far from a mass conversion movement as the Dalit slaves were judicious in choosing to become Christian.

General Knowledge about the Philippines tells us about its majority population made up of Christians – Catholics and Protestants. Least known, however, is the fact that there is a significant presence of three Eastern Orthodox Churches in that country. Of these, the Russian Orthodox Church seems to be dynamic and flourishing. Katja Richters investigates why this is so. Here she applies the rational choice theory mostly used in economics and finds that the strict observance of Orthodox tradition adds to the attraction of Russian Orthodox Church as a quality religious good worth pursuing, despite or rather precisely because of its strictness as the cost being paid. It fits into a general pattern wherein religious institutions liberal in approach decline while those strict in their demands seem to grow. Further, according to Richters, the financial resources from Russian business persons contribute to Russian Orthodox Church's growth in the Philippines.

The next two contributions have Korea as its focus but the themes treated have broader application in other parts of Asia and the larger world. Sunhee Jun's paper is a fascinating study on how mistranslation of even a single word could cause enormous confusion. No wonder one speaks in Italian of '*traduttore, traditore*' alerting us that a 'translator' could easily become a 'traitor'. In the translation of the Bible into Korean, the word *Gwisin* was employed to translate the demon or evil spirit in Mark's Gospel. However, in the Korean language, the word has multiple layers of meaning. Among others, it could refer to the ancestors' benevolent spirits and the spirits of those who died unjustly. A translation without reference to the cultural context, history of the people, and the fine nuances of their language caused ambiguity and confusion among the readers.

Hanna Kang studies the liminal position of new generations of diasporic Koreans when they migrate back to the country of their roots. The root migrants straddle two different worlds which seem to meet in their person evoking in them the feeling of neither here nor there along with the experiences of alienation and rejection both by the diasporic society and the country of their roots. Drawing inspiration from Virgilio Elizondo's work, the author argues that their

liminal position as '*mestizaje*' could be a very creative moment and the root migrants could become bridge-builders and agents of cultural enrichment. The article contributes to a less investigated aspect of Asian migration studies and migration theology in particular.

Under the section of 'Notes from the Field', Mario Francesco reports on the Philippines' political developments under the populist President Rodrigo Duterte. It could be puzzling for many how in the Philippines with the overwhelming majority of Christians, a president pursues extrajudicial killings in the name of 'war on drugs' and challenges Church leaders and Church teaching, yet enjoys remarkable popularity. In this context, the author shows that what is happening on the ground in the Philippines is not an abrupt break from the past but it is 'both disruption and reinforcement of traditional politics and its inherent institutional and religious dimensions'. Moreover, the Manichaeian religious perspective of the president seems to reinforce his populist agenda and ensure mass support. The author reflects on how to pursue the evangelising mission of the Church and how to come to terms with the challenges in the present political climate of the nation.

The present issue concludes drawing the readers' attention, by way of reviews, to a few works that openly or indirectly bear upon the study of Asian Christianity.

While thanking the authors and book-reviewers for their rich contributions to this number, we also wish to highlight that, with this issue, our review '*International Journal of Asian Christianity*' (IJAC) steps into the fourth year of its existence. This budding peer-reviewed journal's significance is being recognised among scholars across the globe, attested by the high quality of contributions we receive for publication. IJAC encourages young as well as established scholars to publish in our journal, researches about any aspect of the study of Asian Christianity.

Felix Wilfred

Editor-in-Chief, Emeritus Professor, State University of Madras,
Chennai, India

felixwilfred@gmail.com