Editorial

Historically, religious believers in God and secular non-believers have something in common: Both of them have been violators of human dignity and rights. The violence unleashed by religion is well-known. Less discoursed are the human rights violation, torture, genocide, and crimes against humanity perpetrated by secular states, ideologies, and institutions. The most heinous instances are the crimes under the National Socialism of Hitler, the purge of Stalin (Gulag), the killing spree by Mao Zedong in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution of China, the genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Srebrenica), Rwanda and Darfur. Statist, ideological, and ethnic brutalities have cost two hundred million precious lives in recent history. Who has violated more – the religious or the secular forces – is a matter of odious comparison, reminding of the kettle calling the pot black. The legacy of religions and secular forces have been, to say the least, ambiguous.

However, as far as religion is concerned, its revival and increasing role in international politics today have raised many critical questions on its claim to be an agent of peace and upholder of human dignity and rights. Some would argue that a theological and faith-based approach to justice and peace invests the contemporary global agenda of human rights with moral content, going beyond the legal aspects of human rights, which is Janus-faced, straddling both the world of morality and law.

The engagement with justice and human rights issues, which includes in its purview economic rights and equality of peoples and races, is played out differently according to cultural and historical contexts. The Asian context for Christian involvement is characterized by many conflicts – political, ethnic, social, economic, cultural, and not the least, conflicts within the Church. How Christian commitment to justice and peace, democracy and human rights could become an actuality needs to be discerned amid different conflictual situations. Some Asian societies continue to be in conflict, while others find themselves in post-conflict situations.

The present issue of the *International Journal of Asian Christianity* is dedicated to the investigation of religious, more specifically Christian, commitment

and practice in Asia and Oceania. The various articles assembled here under the general theme, "*Christianity in the Crucible of Conflicts in Asia*," take up unique cases in this region but have global significance and import. Though specific to a particular context, the struggles in a specific society provide great insights and lessons for other situations in other parts of the globe.

The complexity of the situation of the Asian Christians derives from many factors such as their minority situations acutely felt, for example, in Pakistan; the conflict within the Catholic community, and the State, as is the case in China. Another conflictual situation within the Church is illustrated by the plight of the Dalits in the South Asian Churches. In the process of overcoming the discriminatory situation, prophetic anger plays an important role. In some other cases, the conflict is directed against the Church for its discriminatory policies, as illustrated by the Aborigines of Australia. The opening to the peoplehood of Aborigines and their theology of the land is a step toward greater understanding and reconciliation. However, in another case, though the Church finds itself in an ideologically conflictual situation between North and South Korea, has found its way to contribute to the cause of peace by working through social movements. How Asian feminist theological reflections could accompany the healing, reconciling, and peace-making role of women at the grassroots in a post-violence situation is brought out by studying an Indonesian case. Most dramatic is the situation of the Palestinians who, in their conflict with Israel, find themselves isolated and increasingly colonized with no real peace, while international politics operate with a pseudo conception of peace.

As editor-in-chief, I would like to express my sincere thanks to each of the authors for their valuable contributions. Especially, I wish to thank Dr Jude Lal Fernando, a distinguished Associate Editor of our journal, for accompanying the production of these excellent and well-researched articles and assembling them with his own fine introduction. Furthermore, the high quality of the articles was ensured by our anonymous peer-reviewers, whom I wish to thank sincerely.

My warm appreciation and thanks go to Ms Nirmal, who, as in the past, stood by me in shaping and finalizing this special issue, and checking the entire manuscript before going to press. Thanks to Dr Tessel Jonquière, Acquisition Editor, and Dr Arjan van Oorsouw, Production Editor of Brill, for their support and cooperation in bringing out the issues of our journal in good shape and on time amid the challenging situation of the pandemic.

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