Editorial

I am happy to present to our readers the current issue of IJAC, carrying an assortment of essays and researches from different parts of Asia and on wide-ranging topics of great contemporary interest and relevance.

The first article by Ruairí Meyler deals with the present-day global discourse of war on terror. It exposes the underpinnings of this discourse in the medieval crusades and in the language deployed from the nineteenth century since the invasion of Egypt by Napoleon up to the present, which have marred the relationship between Muslims and Christians. The author contends that the repairing of the relationship between Christians and Muslims in West Asia and interreligious understanding today calls for a deconstruction of the crusade imagery that has been widely misused. Recalling the historic example of the encounter between Saint Francis and Sultan al-Kamil in the thick of crusade battles of the Middle Ages and the more recent encounter between Pope Francis and Shia cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, he points to the future direction to be followed in Muslim-Christian relationships.

The following essay from West Asia, in fact, tell us how the repair of Muslim – Christian relationship could be fostered, illustrating with a concrete example from Lebanon. In the early period of inter-religious dialogue project, one thought that mutual clarification on beliefs could pave the way for peace and understanding among the believers of different religious traditions. It was followed by efforts to find common denominators in the various belief systems hoping that this would bring different religions together in understanding and harmony. However, the experience of the past few decades has demonstrated that they are ideals that, in practice, do not bear much fruit and are often surrounded by controversies and claims of superiority. There has come about a new consciousness that religions need to look at the broader society and world, be concerned about public issues, and contribute to the common good, especially reconciliation and peace. It is in this context that we read the contribution of Ana Maria Daou, who shows from her ground experience in Lebanon how shared public life values could bring together Muslims and Christians for

common engagement for the well-being, harmony, and peace in society. “The article draws on real-life examples from the Lebanese context – especially from the experiences of members of the Forum for Religious Social Responsibility at Adyan Foundation”. The article is full of insights from the grassroots and could inspire inter-religious efforts for peace along these lines.

On his part, as an Asian living in the U.K., and as a scholar of Islam and Muslim societies, David Singh explores a highly relevant issue today, namely how Asian Muslims migrating to the West respond to the issues they face in the new context of the traditional Christian but secularised world. The author uses two interpretative frames of reference to understand and analyse the various responses of the migrants – the one is modernity and the other conversion. The author studies the manifold and complex problems and questions around these issues closely and makes us see with exemplary clarity where the crux of the problems lies and how the migrants try to address them.

The next two articles are in the area of biblical studies. Chingboi Guite Phaipi goes into a very illuminating exegetical analysis of the creation account in the Book of Genesis 2–3, and indeed from the experience of patriarchy in her tribal society. Generally, the narratives in Genesis are invoked as justification for the subjugation and subordination of women also in tribal societies, as elsewhere. This needs to be stated since there is a common belief that tribal societies are matriarchal. By deploying her mastery of the Hebrew language and semantics, Guite Phaipi dissects the narration of Genesis to demonstrate that what is intended by the text is the sameness and togetherness of man and woman, and not the subordination of woman to man. This article is indeed a great contribution to the study of Christian tribals in India and other parts of Asia, as well as to biblical scholarship.

The following article by Jerry Hwang is a substantial contribution to contextual theology through a study of biblical translation. Modern hermeneutics tells us how any translation is also an interpretation. The article notes how the Chinese Union Version (CUV) Bible of 1919 contributed to creating the language and idiom for forming Chinese indigenous and inculturated theology. As the author observes, “its [translation] impact in providing Chinese Christians the language to indigenise their faith has been incalculable”. In translating the bible, however, the missionaries in China could not free themselves entirely from their own Western frames of reference and theology. The article illustrates the ambiguity and confusion this could cause in the world of readers. While acknowledging the efforts put in by the missionaries to bring out the Chinese Union Version (CUV), the author points out, by way of example, how the word “sin” when translated, came across to the Chinese readers as signifying ‘crime’ with many consequences for Christian daily life, especially in the contemporary world.

The above essays are followed by two contributions from the field of mission history. Japan is, perhaps, the first country in Asia that demonstrated why modernisation need not be equal to westernisation and that one can live in local culture, ethos, attitudes, and values as fully Japanese and yet be modern in industry, technology, organisation and so on. As for Christianity, for centuries, the Catholics and Protestants were engaged in accommodating to Japanese culture and its religious world of Buddhism and Shintoism. The research article by Markku Ruotsila goes into the study of a small Protestant fundamentalist group from the USA, which proved to be an exception to this general trend. This fundamentalist group that made its presence in Japan during the Cold War period was countercultural and combative against communism and quite averse to other religious traditions. The author has drawn materials from the archives of Princeton Theological Seminary Library, the USA, to reconstruct the story of this fundamentalist Christian group, its initial growth, and eventually its practical disappearance. This study highlights the importance of studying the phenomenon of fundamentalism in context.

The final essay in this issue is from South Asia, discussing a chapter in the history of medical mission. Satheesh Palanki shows that not only the state actors – the British colonial power and the local ruler of Travancore – were involved in diffusing Western medicine for the people, but there was a serious engagement by the missionaries in this task. London Missionary Society (LMS), the Church Mission Society (CMS), and Salvation Army were at the forefront of medical missions in the Travancore Kingdom, now part of Kerala, India. Through well-trained doctors and nurses and with their modern medical equipments, the mission hospitals became the hub for best medical care for the poor and the lower caste people. By availing the modern missionary medical care, the rural population of Travancore helped diffuse Western medicine, whereas there was reluctance in the beginning to modern medicine on the part of upper castes and classes. The author also raises a critical question as to whether medical mission in Travancore was not also in view of conversion to Christianity of lower castes.

It is hoped this assemblage of essays will respond to the expectations of our readers with their focus of interest on the study of Christianity in one or other part of Asia.

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