The current issue begins with a research contribution by David Singh, who, thanks to his deep knowledge of Urdu and Islam, delves into a little-known indigenous journal in South Asia called Nur-e Afshan (the refulgent light). This journal was published from the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century and was initiated by American Presbyterian missionaries. It stands as a treasure trove enlightening us on debates surrounding Christian-Muslim relationships in the region.

Scholars often discuss the missionary era followed by indigenous clergy and leadership. However, the nuances of this transition have not been studied closely. This article is unique as it unravels the fact that this transition simultaneously signified a gradual change in the attitude of Christians towards Islam, and other religions in general. While the missionaries, with few exceptions, took a highly polemical approach by defending Christianity and pointing out doctrinal errors in Islam, the assumption of leadership by South Asian Christians contributed to softening this strident stance. The journal, characterized as “semi-secular,” actually helped widen the horizons of Christian-Muslim relationships along positive lines. There was an attempt to understand Islam within South Asia’s overall political and socio-cultural context, paving the way for an era of flourishing Christian-Muslim dialogue eventually.

The following contribution addresses another issue of great interest in studying Asian Christianity. While there are numerous historical studies on migration in general, few delve into how Christian communities in Asia migrated from one area to another and the push and pull factors involved in this process. Martin Joseph’s contribution is a study on the migration of the agrarian community of Telugu Catholics in the eighteenth century, relocating from their native villages in Andhra Pradesh to the present-day state of Tamil Nadu, specifically within the regions now covered by the Catholic Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore and the diocese of Chingleput. The article provides a comprehensive portrayal of the Telugu Catholic community’s identity, culture, and mobility, as well as the changes resulting from their new settlement as
migrants. Additionally, the study sheds light on significant aspects of the mission history of the times in the British colonial context, particularly the role played by missionaries in facilitating migration and negotiating with colonial authorities to establish new settlements for the migrants, engaging them in cultivation.

The third article is authored by two anthropologists, Eldhose Varghese and Jesurathnam Devarapalli, who approach the study of the Jacobite Christian community of Kerala, India, from an interdisciplinary perspective. Using symbolic and interpretative theories of anthropology, they examine the identity formation within this community, which heavily relies on the material church building as a central symbol. Within its varied spaces, the church embodies the Old Testament Jewish Temple and serves as a symbol of the theophany at Mount Sinai during Moses’ time. Functioning as an epitome of the Oriental theological tradition of sacred space and encounters with the Divine, the church simultaneously integrates into the cultural context and habitus of the community, shaped and ingrained through festivals, rituals, everyday religious practices, and local traditions. The authors encapsulate the essence of their contribution by stating, “Through symbols, the church constructs a sense of universality, and through practices developed by the habitus, it establishes boundaries and identity. While this phenomenon is not exclusive to the Jacobite church, it serves as a prime example of the above thesis”.

The following two articles redirect our attention to the oceans and seas. The increasing ecological consciousness and the development of ecological theologies prompt us to focus on Mother Earth, often solely associated with firm land, flora, and fauna. People tend to overlook that two-thirds of our world comprises oceans and seas, housing a vast variety of creatures in their waters. These two articles specifically delve into the sea, encouraging reflection and discussion about an ocean-based theology rooted in the lives of those who inhabit and draw sustenance from it.

P.T. Mathew’s article examines a Catholic fishing community in a coastal village of Kerala, tracing its origins back to the sixteenth century, during the time of St. Francis Xavier. Their fishing livelihood intertwines with the rhythm and moods of the sea, shaping their faith, culture, and worldview. The author identifies significant elements and pearls of wisdom in the lives of these fishermen, advocating for the necessity of “a theology of the ocean.” Such a theology could balance current ecological concerns, which are predominantly land-focused.

The following article, jointly authored by three scholars – Andreas Kristianto, Emanuel Gerrit Singgih and Stefanus Christian Haryono – appears to further explore the concept of a ‘theology of the ocean’ by connecting an Indonesian myth from a maritime society with the waters and the Spirit of God hovering
over it, reminiscent of Genesis 1:2. The study is situated along the coastal line of Java, Indonesia. As an ecologically maritime nation, Indonesia naturally developed its wisdom, values, myths, folklore, and other cultural expressions around the sea, shaping people’s cosmology. This essay delves into the lives of Javanese fishermen and the legend associated with the mythical figure of Nyi Roro Kidul, the guardian and Spirit of the Sea. The author attempts to interpret the Christian belief in the Holy Spirit through the lens of this legend and maritime ecology in general. The article makes a significant contribution to the development of Indonesian contextual pneumatology.

The ‘Notes from the Field’ section contains an article by Hwarang Moon, a Korean author, regarding controversies and debates surrounding Church music in the Presbyterian Church. The author highlights that modern forms of music started influencing church music and gained prominence in Korea since the 1960s, thereby balancing and, perhaps, somewhat unsettling the importance accorded to God’s Word and the Lord’s Supper in the tradition of Protestant Reformers. Around this controversy, the author weaves a theology of Christian music, providing diverse views on it, particularly from the tradition of the Reformers. The article also offers valuable insights into how music and faith formation influence each other, emphasizing their significant role in contributing to the unity and cohesion of the community.

We have selected seven volumes for book reviews in the present issue, each bearing relevance to Christianity in Asia in different ways. Two of these volumes merit special attention here. One is by Mitri Raheb, titled ‘Decolonizing Palestine – The Land, The People and The Bible.’ The Gaza War has reignited an intense ideological debate around Jewish Zionism, Christian Zionism, and Anti-Semitism, all drawing arguments from the Bible. An analysis of these issues and the use of arguments favouring these ideologies, primarily when written from the field – Palestine – renders this volume highly relevant.

The other work, entitled ‘Dangerous Memory in Nagasaki: Prayers, Protests and Catholic Survivor Narratives,’ sheds light on a lesser-known fact: the bomb dropped on Nagasaki severely affected the settlement of Japanese Christians, including their cathedral, resulting in numerous deaths and immense suffering. This work recalls and narrates this ‘dangerous memory’ from the survivors, making it a unique and fascinating piece.

The preparation of this issue has been a laborious effort, supported by many. Firstly, as Editor-in-Chief, I am grateful to all the writers for their contributions, humility, and generosity in revising their texts, several times, as requested. I also want to thank the scholars across the world who contributed book reviews. My sincere thanks are due to our book review editors Dr Jude Lal Fernando and Dr James Ponniah for their diligence and commitment to
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