

# **ASIAN HORIZONS**

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## **BIBLICAL THEOLOGY: A FEW CONTRIBUTIONS FROM ASIA**

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## *Editorial*

### **Biblical Theology: A Few Contributions from Asia**

Although the Bible was written by Asians, and most of the biblical books had their origin in the Asian soil, Asian contribution to biblical scholarship cannot be said to be considerable except in the first centuries, or the first millennium. Developing biblical scholarship from an Asian perspective is significant, especially as its origin was mostly in Asia.

In the last few centuries there have been attempts to develop biblical theology from an Asian perspective. Initiatives to develop an Asian biblical theology are noteworthy especially from mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Many theological faculties in Asia offer specialization in Biblical theology, and there are diocesan, regional and national biblical centres as well as those run by religious congregations, which try to develop biblical theology in the particular cultural and historical context. Contributions of some of the missionaries as well as indigenous scholars are worth mentioning. Dialogue with religions, cultures and the poor of Asia has been the key in developing an Asian biblical theology.

This issue of *Asian Horizons* presents a few biblical scholars from Asia and some of the contemporary trends in biblical theology in Asia.

According to Antony Edanad, though the Word in Vedic literature and in Johannine writings have their specific social, cultural, and religious milieus, differing perspectives and doctrinal backgrounds, we find striking similarities between them. Based on his research and teaching experience for decades, Edanad argues that the similarities between the two can best be understood as the result of common elements in the humans' encounter with the divine. He underscores that in the Indian context, the Vedic concept of *Vāk* and the Biblical idea of the Word serve as a bridge between Hindus and Christians involved in religious dialogue. This article is an excellent example of

mutually enriching and complementing dialogue between Christianity and other religions, which is necessary in the multireligious and multi-cultural context of Asia.

“A Hermeneutical Proposal” by Yiu Sing Lúcas Chan is a unique contribution to Biblical Ethics. Lúcas Chan, who was basically a moral theologian, within the limited span of his life, contributed a lot to the development of biblical ethics, especially in the multireligious and multi-cultural context of Asia. This article – originally a chapter in one of his books – argues that virtue ethics among all ethical systems is the most suitable to translate exegetical insight into contemporary moral guidance. Besides presenting different dimensions of virtue ethics, Chan discusses different issues concerning the cultural and theological adaptation of virtues, and concludes that they are not ultimately relative to a limited context or culture but remain open to revision in light of new circumstances. Based on a virtue-based reading of the Scripture, Chan demonstrates how virtue ethics can be effective as a hermeneutical method for bridging a scriptural text to the contemporary world.

The following two articles present two biblical scholars who have greatly contributed to the development of biblical theology in India. Without doubt, other countries in Asia and other continents have recognised their scholarship and have benefited from them. Tomy Thomas Kattampally delineates the works and contributions of George M. Soares-Prabhu, SJ, a celebrated theologian of his era, and who continues to challenge us today. Soares-Prabhu believed that theologizing in India should take into account the context of religious pluralism and social oppression; even today India is in urgent need of such a contextual theology. According to him, the traditional methods like Historical Criticism, etc. for studying the biblical texts are not fully sufficient for theologizing in India, but an ‘Indian Religious Reading’ as well as ‘Indian Social Reading’ for interpreting the text should be adopted, so as to bring about an ‘Indianness’ in theology. Pascal Koroth describes the contributions of Professor Joseph Pathrapankal, CMI, who has been an outstanding biblical theologian, an illustrious teacher and prolific writer, and above all noted for his dedicated service in different fields of biblical scholarship and Word-centred life. After giving a brief sketch of the life of Prof. Pathrapankal, the article offers an overview of his academic contributions and an analysis of his theological vision. In his scholarly books and articles, we can find a vast number of biblical, historical, theological, spiritual, pastoral, cultural, inter-cultural, economic, national, international and socio-political topics. He

believed that the Church was basically missionary, but was convinced that it was a self-emptying mission bringing good news to the nations, instead of dominating others. Inclusiveness and openness for dialogue are characteristics of Pathrapankal's theology. Koroth considers the *Christian Programme*, which presents the new *dharma* of Jesus elaborating upon the Sermon on the Mount in the multi-religious and multi-cultural context of Asia and in the complex world scenario at the end of two millennia, as one of the most resourceful and helpful contributions of Pathrapankal.

Pointing out that we must pay attention to God's unfailing attention in favour of the poor and marginalized, Joy Philip Kakkanattu examines the dialogue with the poor in the bible. Arguing that any theology, to be relevant, needs to enter into a dialogue with the context, Kakkanattu emphasises the importance of entering into dialogue with the poor in Asia, a continent with a huge number of poor. He understands "poor" as anyone, including nature, which experiences any kind of deprivation and marginalization. Kakkanattu tries to look at the idea of the poor in the Bible as a dialogue of inclusion and involvement, identifying various models and connecting it to the FABC documents. In a more specific manner, he applies it to the Indian and Asian context of poverty and inequality. Kakkanattu underscores that "A worshipping community without having sensitivity to the cry of the poor and nature may not be able to please God of the Bible..."

Thomas Srampickal analyses Paul's pioneering missionary endeavours and the theological insights presented in his writings. Giving a few examples, Srampickal shows that Paul is a model of religious and cultural contextualization. It is this openness to the Spirit and to the working of the Spirit in the context that lead him to argue for the reception of the gentiles without imposing on them the Jewish norms. In fact, this decision was vital since it liberated Christianity from being viewed as a Jewish sect and thus resulted in the its sudden growth. Srampickal also discusses Paul's approach to slavery and to the role of women in the community and points out that in-depth study may help us understand better Paul's position regarding these. Srampickal emphasises that "the way he [Paul] proclaimed the gospel adapting to the particular context of the place and the culture of the people" will help us in our missionary undertakings to be open-minded and contextual.

Kristine C. Meneses reflects on a biblical theology of and for the Deaf. She points out that in the Christian tradition, our pastoral care and theological thoughts on disability and the persons with

disabilities is limiting and limited. This is because the traditional view of disability is confined to a mere medical model of disability, seeing it merely as a physical condition. Most of us see disability as a deviation from the normal and the standard. This is reflected also in the interpretation of disability in the scripture, which according to the author, has not changed even after centuries. Offering a re-reading of certain biblical stories of Persons with Disability, mainly drawing insights from Persons with Disability of a Deaf community where she serves, Meneses invites the readers of the of bible to see disability in a new light. Following this, she presents a theological reflection on the importance of having a participatory biblical conversation with Deaf people. Responding to a world that is becoming increasingly violent, Benny Thettayil enquires into the concept of violence in the bible, based on which he proposes how we can respond to religious, cultural and ethnic violence that we encounter today, especially taking into consideration increasing violence in India propelled by a faulty nationalism. While acknowledging that the early history of the people of Israel was violent to a great extent, Thettayil points out that there is a gradual evolution of biblical perspective on violence, culminating in Jesus who is the catalyst of nonviolent social revolution that was the harbinger of the renewal of Israel. In the Bible we see a progressive divine portrait, which is complete only in a God on the Cross. Thus, Thettayil asserts that Jesus is the answer to the violent delusions of the world. Teresita and Mullooparambil make a critical study of the judgment towards a whoring people, an important theme shared between the books of Hosea and Revelation. Analysing the theme of judgment in Hosea 2 and Revelation 17-18 this article establishes that the books have an especially close relationship with many phrases, themes, and theological concepts in common. From this analysis they proceed to the theological message of the two texts for a people of God in crisis. They say that both Hosea and Revelation can be taken as a strong criticism on worship that becomes mere religious practice devoid of religious values, and empty ritualism without interiority.

There is one article on another important theme. Bijosh M.B. reflects on challenges to public healthcare in India. After presenting some of the challenges to public healthcare and unhealthy practices, Bijosh proposes that we need an ethics for healthcare based on the value of human life, the rights of the human person and social justice.

**Shaji George Kochuthara**  
Editor-in-Chief