

Editorial

This special edition of *CTC Bulletin* features a selection of the papers presented at the 6th Congress of Asian Theologians held at Central Philippine University in Iloilo City, Philippines on 8- 14 February 2009. The theme of the sixth congress, “Doing Mission from the Underside: A Challenge to the Understanding of Mission since 1910,” was a call for a serious and critical reflection on the prevailing understandings and practices of mission in Asia. The theme was appropriately chosen by the CATS VI Continuation Committee in view of the centennial anniversary celebration of the Mission Conference in Edinburgh in 1910.

The Mission Conference in Edinburgh 1910 was both the culmination of nineteenth-century missions and the formal beginning of modern ecumenism. Indeed that gathering in Edinburgh, Scotland, led to the founding of several ecumenical projects and agencies, including the World Council of Churches (WCC) which was formally established in 1948. However, while it gathered 1,200 representatives of mainly Protestant denominations and missionary societies from around the world, only 17 were known to have come from the colonized regions such as Asia. The Edinburgh 1910 sought to take stock of the so-called gains in Christian mission since 1810, particularly in the areas of evangelism, Bible translation, mobilizing church support, and cooperation. But the very few Asians present at the conference were already very critical of the type of mission that was being propagated in the region. They made passionate speeches pointing to the unimaginative transplantation of Western creeds, control of money by missionaries and the problem of cooperation between foreign and native workers.

In keeping with that critical spirit, Asian theologians gathered in the 6th congress to seriously reflect on the current mission understandings and practices of mission today. It is common knowledge that even though Christianity was born in Asia, it came back to Asia through the wings of Western colonialism. Hence, mission has been understood and practiced with the notions of conquest – e.g. “to conquer the world for Christ” and “bringing Christ to the nations.” Such a mission orientation carried European and American brands with notions of moral superiority, exclusive righteousness, and monopoly of the absolute truth. It is no wonder that Christianity is still unfortunately regarded by the people of other faiths in Asia as a Western or foreign religion.

Of course it is to the credit of the early Western missionaries that there is a strong legacy of Christian witness and character, especially through the services of various missionary institutions such as schools, hospitals, orphanages, etc. which continue to this day. Nevertheless, Asian theologians noted the negative impact of mission which is too narrow in orientation for a very plural region like Asia.

The Congress of Asian Theologians is a movement in theologizing which is jointly owned by the various theological education associations and theological movements in Asia and other religious bodies. The founding members of CATS are: Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), Board of Theological Education-Senate of Serampore College (BTE-SSC), Association of Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA), Program for Theologies and Cultures in Asia (PTCA), Asian Christian Art Association (ACAA), and Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC).

Started in 1997, this movement seeks to create a theological community that would bring together various theological movements and associations of theological education, as well as individual theologians for the following aims:

- (1) To promote a cooperation process of study, analysis and reflection among committed Asian theologians in order to deal with critical Asian issues as part of the Asian theological agenda;
- (2) To foster collaboration in articulating and promoting relevant Asian contextual theologizing among theologians, theological movements and institutions of theological education;
- (3) To provide a venue for professional update, sharing of experiences, reflection on current issues, and networking among seasoned and emerging (younger) Asian theologians especially ensuring the participation of women theologians.

As in the previous congresses, CATS VI included keynote address and theme presentations, panel presentations on various topics, discipline groups and issue groups.

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