

CONSULTATIONS

ASIAN THEOLOGY

Topic: Prophetic Voices in Asia
Convener: Michael T. McLaughlin, Saint Leo University
Presenters: Peter C. Phan, Georgetown University
 Edmund Chia, Catholic Theological Union
 Kei Kato, King's University College, University of Western Ontario

Around 40 people attended the Asian Theology Consultation session this year. Peter Phan gave the initial paper, "Key Elements of an Asian Ecclesiology" especially its kingdom-centered (or "regno-centric") orientation. It then focused on the way in which the prophetic function is exercised in such new "way of being church." The paper concluded with reflections on the possible contributions of this ecclesiology to the mission of the world church and to the shaping of Asia itself as it becomes one of important actors on the global stage.

Edmund Chia presented "Contemporary Minor Prophets of Asia." This session looked at a few prophetic voices from Asia, especially those whose influence have made significant impact on their local communities. The first was Sr. Mary John Mananzan of the Philippines whose prophetic voice has led to many women being empowered. Next was Fr. Ben Beltran, a prophetic figure of the Smokey Mountain garbage city in Manila. Moving across to Thailand, the session looked at the ministry of Fr. Niphot Thienviharn amongst the Karen hill-tribe people in Chiangmai. Next was Sr. Michel Lopez and her work amongst the vulnerable women and children of Pattaya who are engaged in Thailand's sex tourist industry. The final figure was the Venerable Dhammananda, the first woman to be ordained bhikkhuni in Thailand. All of these voices have shaped the theology of Christians in Asia.

Julius-Kei Kato gave the third paper of the panel, "The Prophetic Call of Narrative Forms of Theology." He argued that there are an increasing number of "hybridized" people today (particularly in Asia) who feel that they must simultaneously belong to multiple worlds in order to find wholeness. For them, Catholic teaching (especially in its dogmatic forms) can sometimes seem exclusionary, and, consequently, one that they cannot fully make their own. That is felt even more at present because of the reemphasis on traditional doctrinal orthodoxy in institutional Catholicism. This paper explores how theology can play a prophetic role by remembering directions pointed out by Hans Küng, C.S. Song, and Peter Phan who, in some important works, propose strategies in order to make the

Christian message more relevant for Asia and the contemporary world. Song and Küng have suggested narrative styles of theology over a dogmatic and propositional one. Phan proposes what he terms *morosophia*, the wisdom of holy fools. Drawing from these different sources, this study suggests that, for many an Asian soul, the path of appropriating Christian truth often takes them from a pre-critical *mythos* stage (stories/narratives) to *logos* (more abstract ways of expressing the faith, inseparable from Christianity as a historical entity). However, when the limitations of *logos* are experienced, they eventually reach a post-critical “return to *mythos*” and rediscover that, for Asia, narrative forms of understanding the faith are often more congenial because they are more open-ended and inclusive.

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