

Editorial

This edition of *CTC Bulletin* carries some of the papers shared at the two sub-regional consultations of “Churches and Seminaries: Appraising Our Ecumenical Vision for Today’s World”. The South Asian consultation was held in Kolkata, India on 17-21 November 2008 while the South East Asian consultation was held in Manila, Philippines on 25-29 November 2008.

These sub-regional consultations were conceived following the 50th anniversary of the Christian Conference of Asia in 2007. A number of factors led to the conceptualization of these consultations.

When the East Asia Christian Conference (early name of Christian Conference of Asia until the change in 1973) was conceived in 1957, Asian ecumenical pioneers behind it affirmed that “the purpose of God for the church in Asia is life together in a common obedience of witness to the mission of God in the world.” [*The Constitution of the Christian Conference of Asia*, 2005, p. 1]

More than 50 years have passed since that affirmation was made. Yet, the spirit of competition among churches continues with the sprouting of many more church groups and the resurgence of the spirit of denominationalism. Denominations have entered many countries including those where, until recently, there used to be no denominations at all, e.g. Cambodia and Nepal. There is also an anti-ecumenism campaign going on, smearing the ecumenical movement and its global, regional and national organizations. According to reports, part of this anti-ecumenism campaign is being done by church groups outside the ecumenical circle; but part is also being done by some of the traditional mainline churches and their related bodies. So what does life together mean for churches today, if they are called to a common witness? What does common witness mean for the churches?

The CCA affirmation clearly states that the common obedience of witness is to the “mission of God in the world”. This is premised on the belief that Christians are called to participate in God’s mission, not in the church’s mission or denominational mission. Yet, there have been various and often contradictory understandings of mission, with Asian missionaries now being the zealous promoters of the traditional concepts and practices of mission, such as proselytism (i.e. bringing people over from one religion or denomination to the Christian fold or another denomination). What should be the churches’ understanding of mission and ecumenism in the midst of Asian religious and cultural plurality, if mission is seen as God’s mission rather than the church’s mission or denominational mission?

Many churches in Asia have been affected by the Cold War propaganda (i.e. the rivalry between the USA and the former USSR), which continues to this day with the psychological warfare of war on terror. This has resulted in the anti-communist stance and the communist-scare and labeling of people who are questioning the injustices in society and organizing people to fight for their basic human rights. Today, this Cold War ideology has led to the killing of human rights workers and peace activists in the Philippines. What should be the churches’ understanding of mission and ecumenism in the midst of

ideological plurality in Asia? How do churches relate with civil society groups that are also working for peace and justice and humane life for all?

Finally, the world into which the church is called to participate in God's mission is today characterized by so much brokenness, disintegration and alienation. This is not only at the level of human relationships but also in the relationships between humankind and creation. There is alienation among people because of domination by certain groups over others: certain sex over others – sexism; certain race over others – racism; certain class over others – classism; certain caste over others – casteism; certain privileged groups over others: e.g. the able-bodied over the disabled, the old over the young, the educated over the less educated, and so on. Above all, there is the whole question of humanity exercising domination over the rest of creation – anthropocentrism – thereby resulting in the abuse, misuse and overuse of creation. How are churches addressing this issue of brokenness and disintegration of humanity and of the whole of God's creation? What should be the church's response to all these?

The two sub-regional consultations were held in order for churches and seminaries to meet and appraise their respective ecumenical vision, with the hope of mutual enrichment towards a common and wider ecumenical vision that is appropriate for their region of Asia. Countries invited to the consultations were those known to have ecumenical bodies and theological education institutions. Efforts were made to invite representatives from the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) of the Catholic Church and the Asia Evangelical Alliance (AEA) of the Pentecostal/Evangelical Churches. FABC was represented in the Manila consultation while the AEA was represented in the Kolkata consultation.

We are indeed very grateful to Kerkinactie, Mission Department of the Protestant Church of the Netherlands, which made it possible for us to hold the two consultations.

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Editor