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Asian Christian Theology, Emerging Themes

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Likhaan I represents an auspicious beginning for the Creative Writing Center of the University of the Philippines. It is a commendable book, and represents a much needed outlet for creative writing in the Philippines. Let us hope that *Likhaan*, like so many impressive ventures in the past, will not be stifled in childhood by financial or critical constraints.

Joseph A. Galdon, S.J.

ASIAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY, EMERGING THEMES. Edited by Douglas J. Elwood. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980. 342 pages.

I wonder why Prof. Elwood did not simply edit a second volume of his previous work. He calls this book a revised edition of *What Asian Christians Are Thinking* (published in 1976). Actually only eight of the twenty-nine articles in this book come from the previous volume (which itself had thirty articles). Even the Foreword by Kosuke Koyama has been entirely rewritten. (The companion Foreword by Charles West has merely been revised; so has Prof. Elwood's Introduction.) As for authors, seven of the previous volume's sixteen authors have been dropped, and nine new ones have replaced them.

The classification of articles has been mainly retained from the previous volume. The seven sections of this book cover most of the areas of theological thinking. The first part deals with the rethinking of Christian theology itself, to meet the needs of the Church in Asia. Then follow sections on Man, Christ, Christian Mission, Religious Pluralism, Development, and Liberation. The final section gives us five "Statements" of various conferences, bearing mostly on the political situations in South Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines.

The articles in this book have been chosen from among hundreds of others. They are the works of living Asian theologians, written mostly within the last ten years. They are theological reflections conceived within the Asian context; they address themselves to the actual questions that Asian Christians are asking in the midst of their world, their problems, and hopes; and they answer these questions from the viewpoint, strengths, and biases of Asians. The articles have been chosen for their successful attempt at presenting Asian theology. (Needless to say, the authors do not always agree among themselves concerning the meaning and implications of "Asianizing," or indigenizing, or inculturating, or contextualizing Christian theology.)

At the risk of oversimplification, I would like to point out certain themes that recur in these articles.

(1) Some articles voice out a general appeal for freedom to work out theology in the Asian way, since this is the only way Christianity can really incarnate itself into the Asian context. Some guidelines are added for the fashioning of a truly Asian theology. Under this heading I would class the articles written by Emerito Nacpil, Kiyoko Takeda, Cho, Saphir Athyal, Choan-seng Song, and the 1965 statement of the Christian Conference of Asia.

(2) Other articles single out certain Asian insights that can enrich Christianity if properly integrated into our theology. Such are the articles by Jung Young Lee (on the Yin-Yang way of thinking), Kosuke Koyama (on the slow pace of Asian thought), Samuel Rayan (on the Indian cyclic view of history), Hideo Ohki (the Japanese concept of *shorai*, future-about-to-come), S.J. Samartha (Indian holistic thought), and Lynn de Silva (various Buddhist insights).

(3) Other articles call for contextualization, and not merely indigenization, i.e., that Christian theological premises should include a serious consideration of the present situation of poverty and oppression in many Asian countries. Here I would cite the articles by Shoki Coe, Carlos Abesamis, Raymond Fung, Aloysius Pieris, Catalino Arevalo, Sebastian Kappen, and the Asian Conference of Third World Theologians.

(4) Still others concretize this context in the struggles for liberation within their own countries: Yong Bock Kim and the various declarations of Conferences in South Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines.

(5) Finally, other articles cover diverse subjects that are best left unclassified, for example, a study of Asian Christian art by Masao Takenaka, a defense of Christianity against the "opiate of the people" accusation by Kuang-hsen Ting, and a secular anthropology based on the Bible by M.M. Thomas.

The value of this book, like the preceding volume, is that of an introduction to Asian theologians, or a source book on Asian theologies. The articles show how Asian theologians explain the Asian realities and viewpoints, usually to foreigners. However, Asians can certainly profit from this book by recognizing here various valid formulations of their own viewpoints. Many articles also demonstrate how Asian principles and attitudes can enrich Christian theology and help solve vexing European problems by mustering the help of Asian thought.

Eduardo P. Hontiveros, S.J.

Designed as an introductory textbook or as a *Quellenbuch* on Asian theology, *Asian Christian Theology* mirrors Dr. D.J. Elwood's heart and soul involvement with Asian Christians as they struggle to live and confess their faith in the context of Asia. The editor is to be congratulated for giving us a needed area source book sampling the creativity, vitality and plurality of Asian theological thinking today. Within the necessary limitations of any compilation, especially for a continent as varied as Asia, we have here made available to us from scattered and not always easily accessible sources what Asian Christians are thinking precisely as Asians and as Christians. This reviewer, for one, recommends this book (and the Asian edition) as a "must" reading particularly for Roman Catholic students of theology, who could finish their course blissfully unaware of what other Asian Christian theologians of different denominations are thinking and saying.