
The author of this modestly-entitled introduction to the Catholic Church of Asia is eminently qualified for his task. Having lived and worked in the Philippines since 1934, he has also for the past seventeen years been a staff member and professor of missiology at the East Asian Pastoral Institute. In this latter capacity, particularly, he has not only worked and lived with students from all the principal Asian countries, but has visited and lectured in almost all those countries as well. Drawing widely on his personal and academic experience, he has presented in this book an overview of the living Church in Asia, its achievements and its problems, its concerns and its possible future directions.

Though the work of a well-qualified scholar, the book in its main substance is written primarily for educated and interested non-scholars, be they Asians or not. Father Clark writes in a clear and orderly style, without theological jargon. Yet scholars will recognize from his footnotes and bibliography that he has read widely on whatever has been written on his subject, in half a dozen different languages and in many more countries of Asia, Europe, and America. Because, moreover, he is aware of contemporary theology as well as the church history of both Asia and the West, Clark is able to put his knowledge of contemporary Asia into a context which greatly illuminates the ecclesial life and experience of Asian local churches. One may remark in passing that "Asia" in the book signifies East, South, and Southeast Asia, as is the common contemporary usage, thus excluding the Middle East and the Asian part of the U.S.S.R.

The main focus of the book is best summed up in the title of the fourth chapter: "What Asia can give to the Catholic Church; what the Catholic Church can give to Asia." Under these headings come such specific topics as the following: Asian martyrs and saints (a fascinating chapter for this reviewer, one based on the author's previous book, Asian Saints); the Scriptures in the Asian churches; Asians in the international ministry of the Church (another too little known subject); and inculturation in the Asian churches. Under this last heading we find a chapter giving an informative and thoughtful discussion of Asian Christian art, as well as a chapter containing a balanced treatment of both the theological and practical aspects of the tensions between "the [Roman] center" and "the [Asian] periphery" — that is, the problem of building an inculturated Asian local church while preserving full communion with the Roman center, unity without uniformity.

As a book of this kind demands, Clark combines theological treatment (most frequently based on the documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences [FABC]), relevant historical or contemporary factual data, and
practical suggestions. He makes no pretension to providing complete answers to all the issues he raises; his purpose is to give an introduction. But he provides what for the ordinary reader will be an accurate and informative overview of Asian Catholicism, and for the specialist will offer many suggestions for further study and reflection.

Though keeping in mind that the book only purports to be an introduction, the reviewer would nonetheless like to suggest that a little more could have been said about the dangers facing the Asian churches. Not that Clark is unaware of this aspect — he adverts to, but does not explore at any length, for example, the fact that an Asian value like the extended family has negative as well as positive aspects. He also excludes from his chapter on "Asians Overseas in the International Service of the Church to the World" consideration of the relatively large number of priests who have permanently migrated from Asia to the United States or elsewhere in the First World. In certain countries, however, notably — but not only — the Philippines, this alarming drain has reached proportions which threaten to nullify the heartening increase in vocations to the priesthood.

In the final chapter two possible scenarios, among others, are considered: one, that the Church in Asia will remain the small minority it is now, about 2.4% of Asians; the other, the more hopeful one, that in the probability that much of traditional Asian religion will not be able to withstand the secularizing pressures of modernization, truly inculturated Asian local churches might offer a greater attraction to serious-minded Asians in search of religious values. Nonetheless, he rightly insists, inculturation is not merely a strategy for Church growth but an imperative based on the Incarnation and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The book concludes with two important appendices. The first is a more technical discussion of the relation between mission and dialogue today, not merely on the level of terminology, but of the reality behind them. The second appendix is an illuminating bibliography of Scripture in Asia, 1960-1984.

Errors in this finely-produced as well as well-written book are almost nonexistent. I would only question the statement that Catholic social doctrine "can offer solutions" (p. 33) to contemporary problems. One might better say that the principles and values developed in Catholic social teaching may serve those who seek their own solutions. To sum up, Father Clark has produced a work useful, under different aspects, to Asians and non-Asians, to Christians and non-Christians, to scholars and ordinary educated readers.

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