coming like Moses” (p. 77) who was, above all, the trustworthy servant of God.

The use of the Fathers of the Church as well as Midrashic sources, in addition to the central role accorded to Moses in leading us to a deeper following of Jesus, made *Through Moses to Jesus* a valuable companion for me in my 39th year of following the Spiritual Exercises. And occasionally a passage caught my imagination and became a leitmotif of my own prayer. For example, in the final day of the retreat Martini introduces the contemplation of the Resurrection with this striking thought (p. 120): “God is small and great at the same time, and he eludes all our attempts to program our dialogue with him. God is Love, and love does not let itself be programmed. God becomes small and frustrates our programs; he accepts being a scandal to all who do not want to leave him free to love as he wishes. . . . It is this love that the small Jesus, the Logos become small, offers to Mary of Magdala, the two disciples of Emmaus and the apostles, “wasting” his time with them. In this way God’s love repeatedly disconcerts us in our pagan nostalgia for a revelation that is complete, total, absolute, definitive and always under our control.”

Shortly after reading — or rather, praying through — Martini’s *Through Moses to Jesus*, I celebrated my 25th anniversary of priestly ordination. My retreat experience was a beautiful preparation for that day. Martini concludes the Foreword with these words (p. 8): “May this book give its readers courage to dare the leap of trust, so that their own lives may be marked by the paschal experience of following in the footsteps of Moses and of him whom he prefigured, Jesus.” To any who desire to make, or to renew, that leap, be they priests or religious or laity, *Through Moses to Jesus* can be recommended with confidence.

*Thomas H. Green, S.J.*


An Asian Rahner or Augustine? Too bold a statement — even out of place? Would the recipient accept the compliment — find it odious — prefer that it had never been spoken? Such comparisons-questions-flights of fantasy engulf one’s mind while reading *An Asian Theology of Liberation* by the Sri Lankan Catholic theologian Aloysius Pieris, S.J. Without doubt, this is a uniquely original and creative book! It is authentically Asian and poignantly perceptiv[e]! Pieris’ passion and sensitivity for contextualized theology distinguish him as one of Asia’s foremost theological visionaries.
This volume of nine essays and a brief postscript is culled from Pieris’ previously published writings, mostly dating from the mid-1980s. The book situates the individual pieces within a triple thematic presentation: Part I — “Poverty and Liberation”; Part II — “Religion and Liberation”; Part III — “Theology of Liberation in Asia.” Pieris himself writes that the three essays/chapters of Part I on “spirituality, poverty, and liberation” respectively present “a more substantive context” for Parts II-III which unfold “the main elements of my thinking” on Asian theology.

A prospective reader must not presume to know the themes or content of the book because of its title or publisher; it is definitely not just another Orbis volume on Liberation Theology of the South American variety. It emerges from the womb of Asia and this continent’s unique questions about the relevance of Christianity within a context of many poor and many religions. Asian Christians “will not adequately address the problem of Asian poverty unless they do so within the context of dialogue with Asian religions, and . . . they will not carry on an authentic and successful interreligious encounter unless they base that dialogue on a concern for the poor” (p. xi). In short, authentic liberation and dialogue progress in harmony through mutual reinforcement and inter-praxis. Listen to Pieris’ urgent pleading: “Hence, my final appeal to the local churches in Asia: Harden not your heart; enter into the stream at the point where the religiousness of the Asian poor (represented by the masses) and the poverty of religious Asians (reflected in our monks) meet to form the ideal community of total sharing . . .” (p. 50).

Undoubtedly, Pieris is struggling to promote an authentic Asian theology; he questions various models of inculturation and their applicability within Asia (chap. 5). He explores perspectives for a Christology and for speaking of the Son of God in non-Christian cultures (chap. 6). The Mission of Asia’s local churches is probed in relation to the continent’s non-Semitic religions (chap. 4). And yet, all these constitute sub-themes which are integrated within the book’s wider central focus: An Asian Theology of Liberation.

Pieris asserts his conviction that contextualized theological reflection has to analyze and critique “the ‘inculturationist’ versus ‘liberationist’ debate among Asian Christian theologians” (p. xv). He does this in Part III, and he critically engages both groups: “I insist that inculturation and liberation, rightly understood, are two names for the same process!” (p. 111). Returning to “the liberation/inculturation schema” will only be a “futile debate.” Pieris displays impatience with “some ‘liberationists’ [who] want to duplicate a Latin, Christian model in their non-Latin and non-Christian environments”; he is equally unenamored with “inculturationists” who miss the “liberative dimension” of culture, religiousness, and poverty. It is only an “old paradigm” which reduces “religion and poverty to the categories of inculturation and liberation.” Pieris asserts that unfortunately “the polarization continues to this day” (all quotes, p. 88). He even offers an ingenious diagram of this
polarization (p. 89).

As a challenge to this passé mindset, Pieris convincingly elaborates his insights for a contemporary theology truly Asian; it is precisely out of that "yet-undiscovered point [where] poverty and religiousness seem to coalesce [and] procreate the Asian character of this continent" that the church can expect the emergence of Asian theologies (p. 69). This also implies that "a valid theology of liberation in Asia is born first as a formula of life . . . before it is shaped gradually into a confessional formula" (p. 112). Pieris sees the necessity of ecclesiolae (basic communities) to be "the founders of the not-yet-discovered liberation theology in Asia"; these prophetic communities are "the seeds of the not-yet-developed local churches of Asia" (p. 121). Pieris both affirms and reinforces through his questions: "Should not theology be the explicitation of the theopraxis of these ecclesiolae ('little churches') that have appropriated the evolutionary religiousness of the Third World? And should not the writing of this theology be relegated to later redactors? Did not all the sacred scriptures originate in this manner? Is this not the Third World way of doing theology?" (p. 110).

Constraints of the book-review genre require moving to a briefer format in presenting additional highlights of the book. This reviewer finds Pieris creatively insightful on a variety of themes:

POVERTY-WEALTH-MAMMON: "in an Asian situation, the antonym of 'wealth' is not 'poverty' but acquisitiveness or avarice, which makes wealth antireligious. The primary concern, therefore, is not eradication of poverty, but struggle against mammon — that undefinable force that organizes itself within every person and among persons to make material wealth antihuman, antireligious, and oppressive" (p. 75).

INCULTURATION . . . ASIAN RELIGIONS: "Thus, whoever thinks of inculturation not as an ecclesiastical expansion into non-Christian cultures but as the forging of an indigenous ecclesial identity from within the soteriological perspectives of Asian religions has begun moving in the right direction" (p. 55). It is difficult "to give an Asian facade to a church that fails to strike roots in Asian soil because no one dares to break the Greco-Roman pot in which it has been existing for four centuries like a stunted bonsai!" (p. 53).

CHRISTOLOGY: "the church must be given time to step into the baptismal waters of Asian religion and to pass through passion and death on the cross of Asian poverty. Until this ecclesiological revolution is complete, there will be no Asian christology" (p. 63).
LIBERATION: "No true liberation is possible unless persons are 'religiously motivated' toward it. To be religiously motivated is to be drawn from the depths of one's being" (p. 100).

MARX/MARXISM: "Marx, whose contribution to the liberation of Third World nations dare never be underestimated, does not, for that reason, cease to be a man of his own time and clime: a nineteenth-century European" (p. 92). "A 'liberation theopraxis' in Asia that uses only the Marxist tools of social analysis will remain un-Asian and ineffective" (p. 80).

BUDDHISM . . . PAUL VI: "The Buddhist worldview has always preserved the orientation that Paul VI advocated: true gnosis is spiritual wisdom guiding scientific knowledge to the fullness of authentic development" (p. 80).

ASIAN THEOLOGIANS: "Regrettably, some of us are misnamed 'Asian theologians' when in reality all we do is explicitate this implicit theology and educe the ecclesiological implications of this newly-found Asian Christian identity. In doing so, however, we do articulate a theology of liberation for our continent and simultaneously announce the birth of genuine local churches of Asia" (p. 126).

Normally, a review offers a critique or even some suggestions in evaluating a book. Truthfully, in the Pieris book deficiencies are minimal — almost unnoticeable. It has a remarkable unity and flow, in spite of being a collection of previously published pieces. I am personally awaiting the next Pieris title promised by Orbis Books: Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism. Once you have tasted Pieris, you also will be expectantly waiting and watching with me!

James H. Kroeger, M.M.


One of the difficulties faced by an author, when he seeks to put together in book form material which had earlier appeared either in print or in lectures, is to meld the disparate material into a unified whole. This is obviously the case for the book under review. About half of the material was published in The Way (of which Sheldrake is the co-editor) or in The Way Supplement