THE ASIAN SYNOD: TEXTS AND COMMENTARIES
Edited by Peter C. Phan
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Reviewed by James H. Kroeger

Peter C. Phan is the Warren-Blanding Professor of Religion and
Culture at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC.
In addition, he has recently served as President of the Catholic Theolo-
gical Society of America.

Phan’s book on the “Asian Synod” experience contains four ma-
jor sections: I. The Preparatory Phase; II. The Synod in Action; III.
The Future of Asian Christianity; and IV. The Apostolic Exhorta-
tion: Ecclesia in Asia. Each section contributes pivotal insights for
appreciating the event popularly known as the “Asian Synod.”

After presenting a narrative overview of the Synod in a ten-page
introduction entitled “A Moment of Grace,” Phan documents the
three-year (1996-1998) Synod “Preparatory Phase.” He includes the
Lineamenta, eleven responses (positive and critical) from various Asian
bishops’ conferences, two theological evaluations, and the
Instrumentum Laboris. The stage has been set for the month-long Synod
in Rome (19 April to 14 May 1998).

Part Two, “The Synod in Action,” contains numerous and varied
deliberations of the Synod, wherein 252 participants explored the
Synod’s theme: “Jesus Christ the Savior and His Mission of Love
and Service in Asia: ‘... that they may have life, and have it abun-
dantly’ (John 10:10).” Phan selects interventions from seventeen
bishops; they express concrete pastoral concerns on topics pivotal
to the Church and her mission in Asia. Phan also includes three
group discussion reports, the Synod’s fifty-nine propositions, the fi-
nal message, and a superb editorial from Vidyajyoti, which describes
the Synod as an “Ecclesial Event.”

“The Future of Asian Christianity” is the title given to Part Three,
which contains eight articles on the Asian Synod and the Pope’s Post-
Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*. These in-depth presentations by six Asians (Arokiasamy, Tagle, Amaladoss, Phan, Chinh, Chia) and two long-term missionaries in Asia (Kroeger, Prior) provide broad perspectives on areas of special concern for Asia's local Churches (e.g., interreligious dialogue, inculturation, mission and evangelization).

The final section of fifty-five pages reprints *Ecclesia in Asia* in its entirety, including its 240 endnotes; this document, issued on 6 November 1999 in New Delhi, India, sums up the papal vision of the Synod proceedings and outlines the evangelizing mission of the Asian local Churches for the new millennium. Noteworthy also is the comprehensive twelve-page index—an appropriate addition in a volume of this size and nature.

Editor Phan noted in his "Preface" that one goal of this book was to "help readers appreciate the impact of the Asian Synod" (x) and to present "Asia, with its theologies of inculturation and interreligious dialogue" (x-xi); this volume admirably achieves those goals. In addition, John Paul II noted in *Ecclesia in Asia* (4) that he wished "to share with the Church in Asia and throughout the world the fruits of the Special Assembly [Asian Synod]." Again, Phan's book facilitates the pope's wish by bringing the Asian experience of "a new way of being Church" to the worldwide Christian community.

It is noteworthy that Peter Phan from Washington collaborated with James Kroeger in Manila to edit a second volume on the Asian Synod, entitled: *The Future of the Asian Churches* (Manila: Claretian Publications, 2002). This second volume contains a wide panorama of material that richly complements Phan's first volume. Both books make unique contributions; they facilitate a deeper appreciation of Asia's dynamic Churches.