

MORAL THEOLOGY OUT OF EAST ASIA

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[For this first section of the Notes on Moral Theology, the author draws upon his experience of theology in Korea, to address specific issues in moral theology that face Asia, especially East Asia. He discusses the recent Synod of Asia (1998), Christianity's dialogue with Asian traditions, feminist issues, and several other topics. From these issues, he offers some reflections on the contextualization of moral theology in East Asia, highlighting its vastness, complexity, and ambiguity. He then underscores some connections affecting ecclesiology, missiology, systematic theology, as well as cross-cultural studies, such as anthropology, religious studies, and political science.]

KARL RAHNER'S LAST MAJOR ARTICLE on the Second Vatican Council spoke of the watershed that the council represented in marking the beginning of the Church as a truly world Church and the challenge this presented especially for the integration of non-Western cultures: "either the Church sees and recognizes these essential differences of other cultures for which she should become a world Church and with a Pauline boldness draws the necessary consequences from this recognition, or she remains a Western Church and so in the final analysis betrays the meaning of Vatican II."¹ One ramification of Rahner's interpretation involves paying greater attention not only to how ethics is approached in various parts of the world, but also to change within Roman Catholic moral theology in places such as Asia. "Asia" is largely a Western construct. Depending on the context, the

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¹ Karl Rahner, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 40 (1979) 716–27, at 724. The text is reprinted as "The Abiding Significance of the Second Vatican Council," in *Theological Investigations* 20 (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 90–102; and in *Vatican II: The Unfinished Agenda: A Look to the Future*, ed. Lucien Richard et al. (New York: Paulist, 1987) 9–32.

term can include countries and cultures from the Indian sub-continent through Indonesia, the Philippines, and even Australia. Rather than attempt an overview of such a large and diverse area, my contribution to these Notes on Moral Theology focuses on China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan since these countries share definite similarities in several important elements in their religious, philosophical, cultural, and historical background. The Church in this region has a particular challenge of being both a relative newcomer and a minority. Thus, interreligious dialogue is woven into its ethical reflection with a tradition that includes Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, while at the same time each region is also marked by an individual indigenous religiosity as well (such as Shintoism and shamanism). These cultures are also deeply touched by the contemporary forces of globalization and westernization and a variety of issues these forces helped to generate and/or complicate.

THE SPECIAL SYNOD OF ASIA

The special Synod of Asia held in Rome in 1998 provides a good spectrum of many of the issues, approaches, and conflicts that mark these efforts at intercultural and intracultural dialogue.² While at first glance, “moral theology” was not a major theme of the synod, upon closer analysis it is amazing how virtually every issue touched upon comes back in some fashion or another to ethics in East Asia in the sense of Rahner’s moral challenges posed by the “essential differences of other cultures.” At the Synod of Bishops on Evangelization, a quarter-century earlier, much stress was placed on careful dialogue with and respect for indigenous cultures. As the preparatory documents for the recent Asian Synod were circulated, however, many bishops felt the mandate of the 1974 synod and the charge

² The synod was held in Rome from April 19 to May 14, 1998; various synod related texts and speeches can be found in a variety of publications such as *Origins* and a special issue of the *East Asian Pastoral Review*, “Synod of Bishops Special Assembly for Asia,” 35, no. 1 (1998). The apostolic exhortation that summarizes the synod’s recommendations was promulgated by Pope John Paul II on November 6, 1999, during his visit to India; see *Origins* 29 (November 18, 1999) 357–84. One synod observer tabulated 191 interventions by participants in the first seven days and noted, “Seventy-six percent of the interventions (146) dealt with four main topics: the Asian churches in dialogue with other faith traditions (43 interventions), the Church becoming Asian by dialoguing with living cultures (41 interventions), the churches learning to dialogue with the poor (33 interventions), and the Asian Church as a Church of the laity (29 interventions). Thus, for the bishops and the observers, the threefold dialogue with other religions, with cultures, and with the marginalized looks to the context, approach, and content of the New Evangelization” (John Mansford Prior, S.V.D., “Apostles and Martyrs: Consecrated Life at the Bishops’ Synod for Asia,” *Review for Religious* 58 [1999] 11–12).

of *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975) to go to the very root and depths of the culture³ still had not been adequately met in the Asian context, and this led to a frank expression of tensions uncharacteristic of traditional Asian etiquette. The Japanese Catholic Bishops' Conference, rather than give the requested "response" to the preparatory *Lineamenta* for the synod issued by the Vatican, submitted their own document which addressed some perceived deficiencies in the Vatican text, and proposed alternative approaches that differed markedly in key areas from the Vatican document. The Japanese Bishops observed that inasmuch "the questions of the *Lineamenta* were composed in the context of Western Christianity they are not suitable. . . . From the way the questions are proposed, one feels that the holding of the Synod is like an occasion for the central office to evaluate the performance of the branch offices. That kind of Synod would not be worthwhile for the Church in Asia. The judgment should not be made from a European framework but must be seen on the spiritual level of the people who live in Asia."⁴ The bishops went on to warn against overstressing the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the "One and Only Savior," for that would render impossible "dialogue, common living, or solidarity with other religions. The Church, learning from the 'kenosis' of Jesus Christ, should be humble and open its heart to other religions to deepen its understanding of the mystery of Christ."⁵ They concluded that neither the approach of the *Lineamenta* nor contemporary Western theology seemed suitable to address the Asian context: "Based on this kind of theology, we cannot approach the unsettled Asia of today. In the *Lineamenta* there is a lack of understanding of Asian culture, especially the Asian culture of today, which is a mixture of an Americanized modern culture. Moreover, it does not appear that we can be satisfied with modern Western theology either."⁶

Taking Asia seriously, and all that implied, constituted one of the primary ethical issues raised at the synod. While the curial officials (e.g. Cardinals Baum, Tomko, Sodano) tended to emphasize the central necessity of proclaiming a common faith in Jesus Christ as the only Savior, unity

³ "Evangelization is to be achieved, not from without, as though by adding some decoration or applying a coat of colour, but in depth, going to the very centre and roots of life. The gospel must impregnate the culture and the whole way of life of man, taking these words in the widest and fullest sense which they are given in the constitution *Gaudium et Spes*" (*Evangelii nuntiandi* no. 20).

⁴ Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan, "Official Response of the Japanese Church to the *Lineamenta*," *Japan Mission Journal* 51 (1997) 193. The document also highlighted a number of specific issues such as poverty, modernization, political corruption, secularization, materialism, and maintaining communion with the Church in China. Inculturation and dialogue with other religions were also specifically highlighted.

⁵ *Ibid.* 196.

⁶ *Ibid.* 197.

with the Petrine office, etc., “all of which transcend cultural diversity,”⁷ many of the Asian participants focused precisely on that cultural diversity and the issues and theological approaches that must take into greater account the cultural particularity of the Asian contexts. Bishop Francis Hadisumatra of Manokwari-Sarong, Indonesia, stated that “Bishops are not branch secretaries waiting for instructions from headquarters!” and argued for a “rediscovered conciliar vision” of ecclesial unity, noting that the local Church “becomes truly local when its laws are not only in line with the Spirit of the Gospel and ecclesial norms, but also with the ethos and legal tradition of the local people.” This would require local “authority to interpret church law according to our cultural ethos, to change, and where necessary, replace it.”⁸ Bishop Arturo Bastes of Romblon, Philippines, began with the observation that “There are still strong indications that Asian realities have not yet been taken seriously enough in the present practice of the Church’s pastoral mission” and went on to focus on four areas needing a “change of perspective: a shift from the perspective of a Euro-centered Church to an authentically Asian view, a shift in the understanding of history, a shift in the model of the Church, [and] a shift in the understanding of spirituality.”⁹ He noted the success of world religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism at finding “a home in the hearts of Asians. Christianity itself was born in Asia, but it has been alienated from Asia because of the perspective of a Euro-centered church.”¹⁰ Bastes concluded by stating that a particular vocation of Asian religious is “to save Asia from the onslaught of materialism coming from global market forces by the wisdom and depths of Asian spirituality with which Asian[s] feel at home, which is not opposed to the teachings of Christ because they are a true manifestation of God’s Spirit working in all peoples.”¹¹

Taking up a similar theme, Leo Jun Ikenaga, S.J., Archbishop of Osaka, noted that Buddhism developed easily in Japan, but Christianity has not. He suggested cultural differences as one (though not the sole) reason for this failure and stressed the need for greater use of Asian ways of expression if evangelization is to succeed.¹² Bishop Augustinus Jun Ichi Nomura of Nagoya echoed this view and called for presenting Jesus Christ as the spiritual Master who would communicate virtues of detachment, simplicity, compassion, and peace in a way that would be more “specially tuned to the

⁷ William Cardinal Baum, “Proclaiming the Truth about Jesus Christ,” *Origins* 27 (May 7, 1998) 772.

⁸ Bishop Francis Hadisumatra, “Enhanced Role for Bishops’ Conferences,” *ibid.* 773–74.

⁹ Bishop Arturo Bastes, “Asian Formation for Consecrated Life,” *ibid.* 776.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.* 777.

¹² Archbishop Leo Jun Ikenaga, S.J., “Asian Ways of Expression,” *ibid.* 769–70.

Asian ethos," which in turn would better aid the Christian communities there to address the concrete ethical issues facing them.¹³

These calls for respect in regard to Asian culture found resonance among non-Asian participants, as evidenced by the intervention of Bishop Francis DiLorenzo of Honolulu who outlined a number of concrete steps American "host" churches should take in welcoming Asian immigrants, including the need to understand Asian cultures and in particular to "learn more about non-Christian religions and their impact on the Catholic experience," including how Asian Catholic perspectives "view and teach creed, morality, sacraments, ecclesiology, Christology and religious devotions."¹⁴ The Final Message of the Synod of Asia was meant to take up many of the key points discussed during the synod, but according to one observer present the Final Message "erased" many of the voices of individual bishops and the small working groups.¹⁵ Nevertheless, it did touch upon many items such as respect for Asian non-Christian religions and recognition of many of the particular ethical challenges facing Asia, including globalization, international debt, pastoral care of migrant workers, refugees, the dignity and equality of women, and so on. In reference to respect for the strong Asian humanist heritage the document expressed "esteem for the ethical values in the customs and practices found in the teachings of the great philosophers of Asia, which promote natural virtues and pious devotion to ancestors"¹⁶ and the necessity for "dialogue with the cultures of Asia, dialogue with the religions of Asia, and with the peoples of Asia, especially the poor."¹⁷

DIALOGUE WITH THE ASIAN TRADITIONS

The theme of taking the Asian cultural context seriously through inter-religious dialogue occupies a good deal of attention in recent Asian writing. Often it is portrayed as a twin task of inculturation and of ethics that views interreligious dialogue as a moral obligation of the Church in Asia.¹⁸ Much

¹³ Bishop Augustinus Jun Ichi Nomura, "Communicating the Gospel in Japan," *ibid.* 771.

¹⁴ Bishop Francis DiLorenzo, "Asian Immigrants in American Culture," *ibid.* 780.

¹⁵ John Mansford Prior, S.V.D., "A Tale of Two Synods: Observations on the Special Assembly for Asia," *SEDOS Bulletin* 30 (August/September 1998) 219–24.

¹⁶ Special Synod of Asia, "Message to the People of God," *Origins* 28 (May 28, 1998) 19.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 20.

¹⁸ This has been a constant theme of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC) for more than a decade, and also has been taken up by Asian Protestant theologians as well. See the Joint Statement of the FABC and Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), "Working With Other Religions" [report on the July 5–10, 1987, meeting in Singapore], *Catholic International* 1 (October 1987) 38–39.

recent writing undertakes precisely this task in attempting to engage, articulate, and elucidate the religio-philosophical traditions in Asia. At the outset it is important to recognize the problematic of multiple cultural characteristics, which at times overlap, compete, and conflict. Chacko Aerath notes the problems of maintaining group identity in a pluralistic society, and in particular the challenges posed to Asian Christians who so often live in cultures that are not “Christian” and thus exert influences that counter the Christian ethos.¹⁹ Other authors would not deny Aerath’s concern, but their accent falls on how better to understand and integrate the Asian philosophical and religious traditions into the inculturation of theology whether this term is used explicitly or not.²⁰

Several writers are grappling to establish some conceptual framework for exposition of Asian thought and dialogue with non-Asian traditions.²¹ One Confucian philosopher, A. S. Cua, suggests that on the meta-ethical level a coherent conceptual scheme can be constructed “with the ideal of *tao* (the Way) as a unifying perspective for viewing the interdependence of basic aretaic notions (notions of virtue), i.e., *jen* (benevolence), *li* (propriety), and *i* (rightness) [often transliterated as *yi*].”²² However, this cross-cultural dialogue may hit a snag when one moves from the metaethical level to the normative application, since the notions of *jen* and *li* do not easily lend themselves to translation into principles that would seem to

Protestant theologians also continue to advance this study, for example, Lee Sang Jik’s “Hanguk Kyo-hoe-ae Chon-Tong-Chu-ae hwa Chong-kyo Da-won-Chu-ae Sa-i-ae Kal-dung-yo-in-ae Bun-sok kwa Chong-kyo-kan-ae Dae-hwa Sae-ro-un Dae-an-ae Mo-sek,” [“Analysis of Conflict Factors between Church Conservatism and Religious Pluralism in Korea and the Search for an Alternative Interreligious Dialogue”], *Shinhak Sasang* [“Theological Thought”] 101 (Summer 1998) 180–217.

¹⁹ Chacko Aerath, O.I.C. “Cultural Paranesis and Christian Ethos: Christian Live in the Pluralistic Indian Society,” *Vidyajyoti* 61 (1998) 824–830.

²⁰ See the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) colloquium on Taoist and Confucian Contributions to Harmony in East Asia held at Lei Li-O, Taiwan, in April 1996. For one contribution of this conference, see Cheng Chih-ming, “Harmony in Popular Belief and its Relation to Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism” [in Chinese with English summary and translation by Jac Kuepers, S.V.D.], *Inter-Religio* 35 (Summer 1999) 31–36.

²¹ For example, in reference to Buddhism, L. S. Cousins has suggested that “this subject matter of what is known in the West as ‘ethics’ is handled by Buddhism in quite different ways and subsumed under different categories” (*Religious Studies* 30 [1994] 252). This is a review of Damien Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (London: Macmillan, 1990) and is quoted by Keown in his article, “Karma, Character, and Consequentialism,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 24 (Fall 1996) 332.

²² A. S. Cua, “Principles as Preconditions of Adjudication,” chap. 14 in his *Moral Vision and Tradition: Essays in Chinese Ethics* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1998) 303.

possess “objective validity and universal applicability.”²³ This point is exemplified in many of the philosophical classics, such as the *Analects*, in which the majority of the exchanges recorded between Confucius and his disciples are simply exhortations to do one’s best in following the Way (*tao*).

Tao is the one concept that runs through the East Asian ethical traditions.²⁴ The Confucian classics are filled with numerous references and discourses on the various manifestations and meanings of this term, but perhaps one classic citation will serve to underscore its importance for the Confucian moral vision: “The Master [Confucius] spoke, ‘In the morning if one hears the *tao*, in the evening they may die without sorrow’.”²⁵ Though the root meaning of *tao* may be a road, this *tao* furnishes not so much a map for the moral life, as a vision of a range of possible directions, any number of which will be upright morally, as long as one follows the spirit of the *tao*. The *tao* is not a path external from the human person but is realized in the fulfillment of one’s humanity; neither is the *tao* a means followed to an end, nor, in the words of Tu Wei-ming, does it “provide an ideal norm or a set of directives to be complied with. It functions as a governing perspective and a point of orientation.”²⁶ “Moral discernment” might be a good rendition to explain how the *tao* operates. The notion of *tao* is obviously quite congenial to an ethics of virtue, especially if the *tao* is viewed akin to prudence as the form of the virtues, as well as to the related notion of moral virtuosity, i.e., an outlook that views the moral life as essentially an art that must be lived in daily practice, and it is this practice that moves humans to perfection.²⁷ Moral rules certainly are important to this endeavor, but probably the construct of “absolute, exceptionless norms” or “intrinsically evil” acts are concepts that are would not enjoy a clear and unequivocal analogue in Asian thought. Asians might say that moral rules could be “bent” but it would be more accurate to say that moral norms, whether conceived as rules for conduct or ideals to emulate must be interpreted before they can be applied.

“Ambiguity” seems to be a constitutive element in Asian ethics and this

²³ Ibid. 304.

²⁴ The ideogram *tao* has two levels of basic meanings: the concrete, such as “road” or “path,” and the philosophical, such as “principle” or “truth.” However, the “way” seems to be as good as translation as any in English, since it conveys both levels of meaning at the same time.

²⁵ *The Analects*, Book 4, Chap. 8 (my translation).

²⁶ Tu Wei-ming, *Humanity and Self-Cultivation: Essays in Confucian Thought* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities, 1979; Cheng & Tsui, 1999) 37.

²⁷ For a fuller discussion of this point, see James T. Bretzke, S.J., “The *Tao* of Confucian Virtue Ethics,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 35 (1995) 25–41.

ambiguity will be a challenge to the inculturation of moral theology in East Asia. However, ambiguity could be viewed more as a resource to be utilized rather than an obstacle to be overcome. Obviously, in traditional Roman Catholic moral theology ambiguity is not usually seen in this way. “Doubts”—whether located in conscience, law, or fact—are to be resolved prior to action, and certainty is prized.²⁸ However, the East Asian religious ethos often judges ambiguity differently—not necessarily as a positive value, but as a recognition of reality. Moral harmony is achieved not by overcoming ambiguity, but by accepting it and living with it. In accepting ambiguity one embraces the moral reality of one’s existence and tries one’s best to live in that reality. *Yin* and *yang* might be viewed as one classic way in which ambiguity is accepted and harmonized. All the virtues, but especially *jen* and *li*, guide one in navigating the moral path of the *tao*. In Taoism, Buddhism, and especially in Confucianism, the various ethical terms and concepts are highly “context-dependent, addressed to a particular rather than universal audience”²⁹ and therefore their aim has not been to establish a universal moral discourse in the usual Western sense. Abstract analysis and definition (what is “rational”) give way in pride of place to what might be termed a moral aesthetics (what is “reasonable”) in which the individual seeks to cultivate and perfect his or her nature in the myriad aspects of daily life. The accent falls on praxis, and in the Confucian view a “viable ethical theory is thus subject to pragmatic assessment in the light of changing circumstances. Consequently, ethical requirements cannot be stated in terms of absolute principles or rules.”³⁰

Instead, Confucianism has stressed moral self-cultivation seen in terms of both overall character formation or individual cultivation of virtue (*te*). Yet the individual never operates alone, but always within the matrix of five human relationships³¹ that in turn furnishes the basis of the moral action and community, or what Tu Wei-ming refers to as a “fiduciary”

²⁸ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on conscience, esp. nos. 1778–90.

²⁹ Cua, “Basic Concepts of Confucian Ethics,” Chap. 13 in *Moral Vision and Tradition* 268.

³⁰ Ibid. The distinction between “rational” and “reasonable” is also Cua’s, and is developed in his essay “Reasonable Action and Confucian Argumentation,” in *Moral Vision and Tradition* 1–18.

³¹ Traditionally, these base relationships have been organized hierarchically into five fundamental relationships, namely: (1) the relationship between the ruler and his ministers; (2) the relationship between a father and his son; (3) the relationship between spouses; (4) the relationship between elder and younger (often portrayed as between elder and younger brother); and (5) the relationship between friends. One principal moral virtue is identified with each of the individual relationships. Thus, between the king and his ministers there is to be justice (*i* or *yi*); between father and son, intimacy; between husband and wife, distinction of duties; between elder and younger, respect of propriety (*li*); and between friends, fidelity.

community, as distinguished from a Western, individualistic, “adversarial” community.³²

Only in this fiduciary community of relationships does each individual find his or her identity, which involves living out roles in which both rights and duties are inseparable from one another. As Henry Rosemont puts it, “there can be no *me* in isolation, to be considered abstractly: I am the totality of roles I live in relation to specific others. I do not *play* or *perform* these roles; I *am* these roles. When they have all been specified I have been defined uniquely, fully, and altogether, with no remainder with which to piece together a free, autonomous self.”³³

If a society is knit together by individuals committed to living out the five relationships and following the lead of the ancients in keeping to the moral path of the Confucian *tao*, then that society will be truly happy, prosperous, and just, its individual citizens morally upright, with the rights of all and the common good³⁴ assured in a fiduciary community built on reciprocal trust, rather than on an understanding of society as an “adversarial system” in which the dignity and rights of the individual must be protected, lest the community impinge upon these rights. The fundamental import of the Confucian five relationships is that there can be no split between self and society, no “oxymoronic private citizen,” to borrow Robert Bellah’s phrase, since the very identity of each individual human person is con-

³² Tu Wei-ming used this concept originally as a principal organizing concept in his analysis of the *Doctrine of the Mean*. See esp. Chap. 3 of his *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness*, rev. ed. (Albany: SUNY, 1989). He also applies this same concept to his analysis of contemporary East Asian societies. See his “The Search for Roots in Industrial East Asia: The Case of Confucian Revival” in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, ed. Martin Marty and R. Scott Appelby (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992) 740–81. Tu’s concept is also taken up by contemporary Sinologists, especially in contrasting Confucian views on society with those of Western political liberalism, which Confucians often characterize as an “adversarial” system. See John Berthrong’s “Mou Tsung-san’s Defense of Confucian Religiosity and Tu Wei-ming’s Appeal to Fiduciary Community,” Chap. 4 in his *All under Heaven: Transforming Paradigms in Confucian—Christian Dialogue* (Albany: SUNY, 1994); James Chieh Hsiung’s “Human Rights in an East Asian Perspective” in *Human Rights in east Asia: A Cultural Perspective*, ed. James Chieh Hsiung (New York: Paragon House, 1985) 1–30; and Kevin Shun-Kai Cheng, “The Social Dimension of Liberation in Early Confucian Tradition,” *Ching Feng* 36 (1993) 61–81.

³³ Henry Rosemont, Jr., “Why Take Rights Seriously? A Confucian Critique,” in *Human Rights and the World’s Religions*, ed. Leroy S. Rouner (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1988) 177.

³⁴ For a discussion of the Confucian notion of the common good, see James T. Bretzke, “The Common Good in a Cross-Cultural Perspective: Insights from the Confucian Moral Community,” in *Religion, Ethics and the Common Good*, Annual Publication of the College Theology Society 41, ed. James Donahue and Theresa Moser (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third, 1996) 83–105.

ceived essentially in terms of his or her moral matrix of relationships.³⁵ Thus, to echo Rosemont cited above, there is no “I” that is not at one and the same time the “I” that is my father’s son, my sibling’s older brother, a member of the nation, and so on. Through these various relationships each individual comes to know who s/he is, i.e., morally aware of one’s particular social identity, as well as to become enculturated into that role, with all of its attendant rights, rites, responsibilities, and duties.

A related area of study connected with the Asian ethos centers on how traditional Asian philosophy³⁶ might impact and/or be affected by Western philosophy and/or theology.³⁷ At times such efforts may involve working through some of the effects of Western missionary evangelization, and Asian Catholics find it necessary to convince themselves of the possibility and desirability of utilizing traditional Asian sources in their theology.³⁸ In

³⁵ Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California, 1985) 271.

³⁶ It is important to bear in mind that often there is considerable overlap and blurring of distinctions between terms for philosophy, theology, and religion in the East Asian tradition. In Korea, e.g., Christianity was initially viewed as a new variety of Confucianism, and was termed either *Sohak* (Western learning) or *Shilhak* (new learning). Studies of the Confucian classics continue to abound, e.g., Paul G. Fendos, Jr., “Book of Changes Studies in Korea.” *Asian Studies Review* 23 (March 1999) 49–68.

³⁷ For China, see Ren Jiyu, “Why Has the Influence of Confucian and Daoist Thought Been So Profound and So Long-Lasting in China?” *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 30 (Fall 1998) 35–44; and Lo Yu-bin, “Comparison with Thomas Aquinas’ Natural Law Theory and Mencius’ Moral Law” [in Chinese], *Taiwan Journal of Theology* 17 (March 1995) 79–104; and his “A Study of Paul’s ‘Law of Nature’—An Exegesis of Romans 2:14–15 and its Justification in Mencius’ Moral Philosophy,” *Taiwan Journal of Theology* 19 (1997) 145–72. For Japan, see James Sack, “Ethical Relationships through the Tokugawa Period,” *Theologia-Diakonia* 30 (1996) 183–96, and “Ethical Relationships (II): From the Meiji Period to the Present,” *Theologia-Diakonia* 31 (1997) 131–51. Some articles also deal with how Western thought has influenced and changed the contemporary Asian religio-philosophical ethos. For example, see Hwang Kyung-sig’s article which traces the period from 1945 to the present: “The Reception and Influence of Western Ethic,” *Korea Journal* 39 (Spring 1999) 154–72.

³⁸ It would be unfair to lay all the blame for the underdevelopment of Asian sources in theology just on missionaries or theologians outside of Asia. As Rev. Na Won-gyun, pastor of Seoul’s Kui-dong parish, put it in a round-table discussion on inculturation in Korea a few years back: “To date, Korean Catholicism has not given much thought to its Oriental heritage, and because we have ignored our own culture in the process of preaching the gospel, many aspects of Christianity still strike Koreans as odd and unusual” (Na Won-gyun, as reported in Cho Kwang-ho; Chung Ho-kyung; Kim Chi-ha; Kim Su-chang; Koo Sang; and Na Won-gyun, “Priests and Poets on Inculturation in Korea, Panel Discussion,” *Inculturation* 2 [Summer, 1987] 13).

Korea, which was first evangelized by Korean Confucian scholars and only subsequently by foreign missionaries, answering the summons to inculturation, according to Kim Sung-hae, requires looking back to the first period of indigenous foundation, since these early scholars used Asian sources for their evangelical and catechetical work. Following their lead may better offer “an inspiration or a guiding principle which proves to be most true to the spirit of the Gospel since those early Christians were most immersed in both traditional thought and present realities of their time. This fact indicates where the heart of inculturation lies and which direction we should go in our effort of doing theology with our own resources, traditional and contemporary.”³⁹ In any event, studies such as these clearly illustrate the importance of that indigenous, traditional cultural ethos that still influences Asian theologians, even though efforts to bring together both strands are relatively recent and still in process. While the precise effect that Christianity has had on reshaping the contemporary Asian ethos is unclear, it remains a topic of considerable self-scrutiny among Christian leaders, whether the problems be bribery and corruption by Christian leaders or lesser failings.⁴⁰

The global and particular of East Asian religious ethics intersect in hu-

³⁹ Kim Sung-hae, “Liberation and Inculturation, Two Streams of Doing Theology with Asian Resources: The Catholic Experience in Korea,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 24 (1987) 380. Kim looks at the history of the Catholic Church in Korea in terms of three major periods: the first founding 60 years that Asian resources were creatively used; a second period of the next 120 years dominated by French missionaries and their Western understanding of Catholic orthodoxy; a third, post-Vatican II period of rebuilding and reconceptualization which Kim concludes should look back to the earliest period of indigenous foundation. Kim holds a doctorate in comparative religions from Harvard and teaches in the Religious Studies Department of Sogang University in Seoul. See also her “Liberation Through Humanization: With a Focus on Korean Confucianism,” *Ching Feng* 33 (1990) 20–46, where she avers that Korean Confucianism needs to re-evaluate itself in the present age and offers a study of Tasan (Chong Yak-yong 1762–1836) as an example of the liberative power of the Confucian ethical ideal; see also her “A Contemporary Ideal for a Democratic and Equal Community: A Challenge to Confucianism and Christianity,” *Pacific Theological Review* 25–26 (1992–1993) 64–67; and her excellent comparative study, *The Righteous and the Sage: A Comparative Study on the Ideal Images of Man in Biblical Israel and Classical China* (Seoul: Sogang University, 1985).

⁴⁰ For example, an interesting study based on questionnaires given to a cross-section of Japanese of all religions (including those who profess “no religion”) compared the moral attitudes towards a variety of perceived “offenses” (sins and/or crimes) that might produce guilt or shame, and concluded that there is no great statistical discrepancy evidenced in the responses among the various religious/non-religious adherents, including Christians. See David C. Lewis, “Moral Values and Social Characteristics of Japanese Christians” *The Japan Christian Review* 63 (1997) 68–80.

man rights. Widespread disagreement remains whether the current conceptualization of human rights is primarily Western, or whether the notion of human rights is generally cross-cultural, and more particularly, whether the contemporary notions of the human-rights discourse exist in certain Asian traditions, or whether these traditions are compatible with human rights.⁴¹ However, Asian nations obviously have accepted the Western-led conceptualization of human-rights discourse to a considerable extent, as demonstrated by the very fact that the majority of Asian nations are signatories to various human-rights treaties and protocols.

FEMINISM IN EAST ASIA

Feminism is one area that has brought Asian religious and philosophical traditions into critical dialogue with theology. Cristina L. H. Traina's recent work on feminism and natural law discourse, while not concerned specifically with Asia, nevertheless expresses well both the problem and the possible solution. Many Asian feminists in their own way have echoed a similar point, stressing the need to liberate women from traditional sources often employed to oppress them, while grappling to respond concretely and effectively to women's needs. Traina notes that "generally the ill effects of ethicists' ignorance are felt soonest and most strongly by others who are distant, whose complaints we have learned to ignore, and whose precise differences from ourselves we have failed to recognize."⁴² Her solution, at least in part, is to recognize that ethics "with women's welfare at the center requires new practitioners bearing new tools, logics, and skills. Our task is to begin to describe—in more detail than in the introduction—the concrete shape of these requirements."⁴³ By and large, Asian feminist

⁴¹ Again, this is a topic with a vast bibliography. Particularly helpful are the range of essays contained in works such as William Theodore de Bary and Tu Wei-ming, ed., *Confucianism and Human Rights* (New York: Columbia University, 1998); Abdullahi A. An-Na'im, Jerald D. Gort, Henry Jansen, and Hendrik M. Vroom, ed., *Human Rights and Religious Values: An Uneasy Relationship?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); Claude E. Welch Jr., and Virginia A. Leary, ed., *Asian Perspectives on Human Rights* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1990); and James Chieh Hsiung, ed., *Human Rights in East Asia: A Cultural Perspective* (New York: Paragon House, 1985). See also Christina M. Cerna, "East Asian Approaches to Human Rights," *The Buffalo Journal of International Law* 2 (Winter 1995–96) 201–14; and David Little, "Rethinking Human Rights: A Review Essay on Religion, Relativism and Other Matters," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 27 (Spring 1999) 151–77.

⁴² Cristina L. H. Traina, *Feminist Ethics and Natural Law: The End of the Anathemas* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1999) 24.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 25. Traina emphasizes that feminists must develop a model of theological reflection first before they turn to articulating the particular points this or that model will raise for women's flourishing. Development of such a model mandates

theologians, such as Chung Hyun-kyung,⁴⁴ are well versed in Western feminist studies. Often these scholars have studied in the West as well, and the methodology that Traina suggests might furnish some important criteria not only for Asian feminist theology in particular but for Asian theology in general. Prostitution as sex tourism is one such concrete women's issue much discussed in Asian feminist writing.⁴⁵

Confucianism in particular is often challenged as being inhospitable to concern for women and/or feminist ethics. Yet this view has come under some important internal challenge recently. The Confucian Studies Section at the 1997 American Academy of Religion national convention featured several presentations that advanced a real possibility of a genuine Confucian feminism.⁴⁶ Kim Sung-hae—already cited in the Korean context—has also written on the use of Asian sources for feminist theology. In a discussion of both the personal and social moral ethos of Confucian and Taoist spiritualities she argues that these traditions are part of the contemporary

a certain “*epistemological privilege*: a methodological principle that grants first hearing to women's accounts of their own experience of themselves and the world around them. The point is not to remove authority from one set of knowers in order to bestow it on another—here authority remains concentrated—but to enlarge and transform ‘the structures of cognitive authority’ in order to expand our vision of both knowers and knowledge in the interest of women's good” (40).

⁴⁴ Chung, who now teaches at her alma mater, Union Theological Seminary in New York City, stresses that “Asian women cannot define humanity apart from their suffering. To be human for Asian women is to suffer because suffering is the major element of their life experiences” and underscores that for women this evil “is manifested through colonialism, neo-colonialism, capitalism, racism, classism, castism, and sexism” (Chung Hyun-kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1990] 40). See also Choi Young-Sil's “Han-e Chil-gok-ae-soh Pe-oh-ni-nun Hanguk Yoh-song Shinhak” [“Korean Feminist Theology Arising out of Han”] 100 (Spring 1998) 121–55.

⁴⁵ Much of the recent discussion has taken place in various Internet discussion groups, but see also Katharine H. S. Moon, *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S. Korean Relations* (New York: Columbia University, 1997) and Rita Nakashima Brock, “Facing Sexual Exploitation: Understanding Prostitution in Asia and the United States,” *Journal of Asian and Asian American Theology* 2 (Summer 1997) 4–20.

⁴⁶ Jinfen Yan asserted the possibility of a Confucian feminism in which gender roles are both differentiated and egalitarian. Ann Mongoven looked at friendship in the *Analec*t through the lens of some contemporary feminist studies on friendship. Jordan Paper drew an important distinction between the social, lived aspects of the Confucian tradition that often involved subordination of women and the intellectual, theoretical aspects contained in the various classics, such as the *Li-chi* (Book of Rites) in which men and women act ritually in both equality and correlation, a view echoed by Edward Y. J. Chung who also focused on the importance of the *Li-chi* as a foundational text for Confucian attitudes toward sex roles as correlatively balanced.

cultural ethos in East Asia that can offer many positive resources if reinterpreted according to their true moral meaning, in ways that are not inimical to feminist concerns.⁴⁷

Another area of ongoing development would be explicit interaction with some recent work in Western feminist ethics. A Korean feminist theologian working in the U.S., Young Lee Hertig, attempts to overcome what she sees as “the socially constructed, dichotomous margin-center paradigm which the feminist movement sought to overcome, but which it works within. In reaction to male patriarchy, the feminist movement has not reconciled the intersecting relationships of gender, class, and race.”⁴⁸ Hertig tries to resolve this problem through Asian “Yinist” feminism that purports to be “holistic, dynamic, synthesizing, and complementary with yang, the male energy. Yinist feminism diffuses false sets of dichotomy deriving from the dualistic paradigm: male against female, human being against nature, God apart from human being, this world apart from the other world.”⁴⁹ In a similar vein, others draw comparisons between contemporary feminist ethics of care and a similar ethics of care found in Confucius, and argue that for Confucius “caring” is not solely a feminist perspective.⁵⁰

OTHER ISSUES

A survey of recent literature uncovers a multitude of other ethical issues, of which only a few can even be mentioned here by way of conclusion. For example, all Asian countries struggle with globalization, environmental and ecumenical ethics,⁵¹ the Asian economic crisis, and at the same time

⁴⁷ Kim Sung-hae, “A Christian Social Ethos of Woman in the Confucian and Taoist Culture of East Asia,” *Studies in World Christianity* 3 (1997) 38–55.

⁴⁸ Young Lee Hertig, “The Asian-American Alternative to Feminism: A Yinist Paradigm,” *Missiology: An International Review* 26 (January 1998) 15.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ James D. Sellmann and Sharon Rowe, “The Feminine in Confucius,” *Asian Culture [Asian-Pacific Culture] Quarterly* 36 (Autumn 1998) 1–8.

⁵¹ Several articles in last two years of the Korean language journal *Shinhak Sasang* [“Theological Thought”] treat interreligious dialogue, ecumenical ethics, and in particular relations with the World Council of Churches. Economic ethics, with special attention to the International Monetary Fund, was treated in the Summer 1998 issue (vol. 101), and a wide variety of articles on ecology and the environment are found in a variety of journals, as well as a most helpful set of essays contained in the series *Religions of the World and Ecology*: Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Berthrong, ed., *Confucianism and Ecology: The Interrelation of Heaven, Earth, and Humans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, 1998), and Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryūken Williams, ed., *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, 1997).

what in Korea is called doing *Minjung* (Asian liberation) theology in a “post-*Minjung*” era that has witnessed a growing middle class with concomitant improvements in political and economic rights.⁵²

In China the Catholic population has grown from 3 million in 1949 to 10 million today (perhaps as a result of persecution), but the overall percentage of Catholics is still quite small. The issue that occupies center stage in the Chinese Church is the uneasy relationship between the “official” (or “Patriotic”) Church and the “underground” Church.⁵³ Joseph Zen Se-kiun and John Tong Hon, respectively coadjutor and auxiliary bishop of Hong Kong—both of whom attended the Synod of Asia—stressed reconciliation as the principal need of the Church in that part of the world.⁵⁴ Besides the common tasks of evangelization and inculturation which face most of Asia, Japan and Taiwan in particular are confronted by the aging of the native Catholic population in which deaths often outnumber baptisms. These two countries, together with Korea, are confronting a new challenge in the pastoral and social care of a burgeoning foreign worker population coming from other parts of Asia, as well as from Latin America and the Middle East. These foreigners experience the difficulties of acculturation associated with immigration, compounded by exploitation by employers, visa problems, and the like. Thus, pastoral resources already stretched thin must cover increasing numbers of people; in Japan and Taiwan the high

⁵² See, e.g., Kim Sung-jae, “Minjung-Shinhak-ae Oh-jae, Onul, Naeil” [Minjung Theology: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow] *Shinhak Sasang* [“Theological Thought”] 100 (Spring 1998) 7–60. Oddly, certain *minjung* theologians seem now to enjoy more popularity in the West than in Korea, and several prominent theologians, such as Chung Hyun-Kyung, David Suh Kwang-Sun, and Cyris H. S. Moon, etc., spend a considerable amount of time teaching and lecturing in the United States and Western Europe.

⁵³ The literature on this topic is vast. Some helpful articles include John B. Zhang Shijiang, “Toward a Wider Reconciliation: A Cultural-Theological Reflection on the Division within the Church in China” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 34, no. 1/2 (1997); Aloysius Berchmans Ch’un-Shen Chang, S.J., “Can Mainland China’s ‘Official’ Church Still be Called ‘Catholic?’” *Tripod* 15 (March–April 1995) 34–46; Robert E. Carbonneau, C.P., “The Chinese Catholic Church and the Quest for a Reconciliation Narrative.” *Canon Law Society of America, Proceedings of the Fifty-Ninth Annual Convention* 59 (1997) 105–22; Richard Madsen, *China’s Catholics: Tragedy and Hope in an Emerging Civil Society* (Berkeley: University of California, 1998); Jean-Paul Wiest, “The Current Status of the Catholic Church in the People’s Republic of China.” *Missiology* 23 (1995) 281–93; and James T. Bretzke, S.J., “*Moi Aussi* (So Am I): A Jesuit Reflection on the Catholic Church in China Today,” in *With Faith We Can Move Mountains*, ed. Judith A. Berling (Berkeley: Asia Pacific Bridges/Graduate Theological Union, 1996) 65–74.

⁵⁴ Bishop Tong also went on to observe that “Atheism is no longer a dominant ideological factor in the Chinese government’s religious policy. What the government is concerned about is whether or not it can control all aspects of society” (“Understanding the Catholics of China,” *Origins* 27 [May 7, 1998] 767).

influx of Catholic foreign workers (largely from the Philippines) is creating a demographic anomaly in the church-going population, so that at many Masses the native population finds itself outnumbered by foreigners.

In conclusion, not only these specific issues, but the whole area of the contextualization of doing moral theology out of East Asia, highlight its vastness, complexity, and ambiguity, and underscores the necessary connections of ecclesiology, missiology, systematic theology, not to mention other disciplines such as cross-cultural studies, anthropology, religious studies, economics, political science, and history, if the Church is to meet the challenge of becoming more truly a world Church.