

back for tea at Blackfriars (page 265). *The Council and Reunion* had just been published by Sheed and Ward (he had his first gin and tonic at the launching party, 'still my favourite drink'). That autumn we read it at the evening meals. I remember shocked cluckings in the cloister afterwards; but the Prior, who did not like the contents either (he eventually left the Church, disillusioned by the 'changes'), would never have taken a book off which had been put on as refectory reading on his authority.

*My Struggle*, translated by John Bowden, doyen of translators, should have been copy edited by someone familiar with Catholic usage. Perhaps Küng wanted the Holy Office referred to throughout as the Sanctum Officium (never italicized); but Montini was not 'the substitute' (page 265); it is odd to call Ciampi 'Maestro of the Palazzo Apostolico' (page 266); to refer consistently to the great Jesuit church in Rome as 'Al Gesù'; to the spiritual director at the Germanicum as 'the Spiritual'; to the visits to the Blessed Sacrament as 'the *adoratio*'; and much else.

There are only five references to Pope John Paul II, two of which report that he studied with the Dominicans at the Angelicum only because the Jesuits at the Gregorian refused him admission on the grounds that his philosophical studies had not been completed satisfactorily. The paperwork was probably not in order: after all, his studies were abbreviated, in the underground seminary in the archbishop's palace in Krakow, in somewhat hectic years (1942-44). A different story is that Archbishop Sapieha hated Pope Pius XI, for several understandable reasons, who, as Nuncio in Poland, had directed clever young priests to the Gregorian: Sapieha was determined that none of his should ever go there, and, in any case, much admired the Dominicans in Krakow.

We shall hear much more about John Paul II in the second volume of these wonderfully readable memoirs.

FERGUS KERR OP

**THE FUTURE OF THE ASIAN CHURCHES: The Asian Synod & *Ecclesia in Asia*, edited by James H. Kroeger and Peter C. Phan, Claretian Publications, Quezon City, 2002, Pp. viii + 206, pbk.**

In this book just short of twenty theologians, bishops and journalists reflect upon the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops and the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation signed by the Holy Father during his pastoral visit to India (5-8 November 1999). According to Thomas Menampampil, Archbishop of Guwahati (India), the Asian Synod was the 'most important ecclesial event for Asia from the time of the Great Councils.' He also believes that it helps us to 'look at Asia with Asian eyes'.

This four year project of Church reflection and renewal began with the publication of the *Lineamenta* (1996), continued with discussion on the *Instrumentum Laboris* (1998), reached its apex with the month-long synod in Rome (April 18 – May 14, 1998) and culminated with the proclamation of *Ecclesia in Asia* (November 6, 1998). Whether the Synod did in fact

look at Asia with Asian eyes instead of with Western or Roman eyes (as some contributors to this book suggest), what is certain is that it is almost impossible to agree upon a definition of either the Asia to be looked upon or the Asian eyes with which to look.

Asia is the largest and most populated continent and constitutes one third of the land area of the whole world. Its population is nearly two thirds of all humanity and still rising fast. Of these 3.5 billion Asians, only 2.9% are Catholics (compared with 17% worldwide). If one takes the Philippines, where 50% of Asian Catholics live, out of the picture, this minority shrinks still further. On the other hand, 85% of the world's non-Christians live in Asia. Asian Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims between them outnumber Catholics 17 to 1. For the purposes of the Synod, 'Asia' was defined as the landmass between the Levant in the West and Japan and Indonesia in the East, from Timor in the South to Mongolia and Kazakhstan in the North. Such a definition is geographical and not cultural, hence the difficulty of talking of Catholicism 'with an Asian face'.

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences said soon after the Synod that they were 'committed to the emergence of Asianness of the church in Asia.' Yet a Jordanian would have a very different notion of 'Asianness' than might a Filipino or a Goan. Even where Asian churches have something in common, for example being a minority faith in Pakistan, India or China, the differences are even greater. The attitude of the majority confession in each of those countries (Sunni Islam, Hinduism and Atheism) towards the church is different and therefore so must be the mode of evangelisation adopted by each local Church. It is not surprising, then, to discover that most contributors to *The Future of the Asian Churches* agree that 'Asianness', if it is anything at all, is based upon difference and diversity, something which defies categorisation except, perhaps, in contradistinction to what gives other continents their cultural and religious cohesiveness.

It is something of an irony that the experience of the Philippines looms so large in 'Asian theology' when it is the country that is least typical of the Asian church, with a population which is 92% Christian. Whilst most contributors tend to talk about a multiplicity of Asian churches they want to leave Asian *culture* in the singular. One fact that all agree upon is that the Asian situation is like no other — precisely because of this lack of cultural hegemony. For the Church in the Philippines or in Goa, the challenge is to re-evangelise a Catholic population. In Pakistan, where Christians number less than 2%, the immediate challenges are ecumenism and survival. Yet despite its small size the Church in Pakistan still 'punches above its weight' thanks to its large number of excellent schools and hospitals. The current president of Pakistan was educated at a Catholic school, and a convent school education is still an item on the check-list of many families looking for a Muslim bride for their son. When I last visited Afghanistan there were just four expatriate religious women and not a single priest in the entire country. Each country in Asia has a different story to tell.

A theme which arose frequently during interventions during the Synod

(146 out of 200) was that of 'threefold dialogue' — with other religions, with cultures, and with the marginalized, especially the poor. Most commentators in this volume quote approvingly proposition 41 of the Synod which calls for openness, a willingness to listen and for respect in dialogue with other believers. A more problematic question was that of how to proclaim Jesus as Lord in obedience to his command: no easy task in China or in Iran. Here the commentators cautiously praise the exhortation for recommending a *gradual* pedagogy in the proclamation of Christ as the only Saviour although many make no secret of the fact that they would prefer even greater leeway. The desire to emphasise the human traits of Jesus as a compassionate teacher of truth or guru surface throughout the book and one imagines that most of the authors would have been disappointed by *Dominus Iesus* a year or so later.

For me the most fruitful area of discussion concerns the Church's prophetic rôle in Asia. This minority religion is the leaven of transformation in the world. Christians in Asia are coming to terms with the fact that they are probably destined to remain for the foreseeable future a *pusillus grex*. What can it mean for a deprived and persecuted minority to 'go and make disciples of all the nations'? The Synod did not provide the answer to this question, it only elaborated the question and set limits, reminding the church in Asia that Christ's great commission is not an option but an obligation. How this obligation is undertaken in dialogue and evangelisation will necessarily vary between local churches. The truth and fruitfulness of the Synod will perhaps not be seen primarily in the documents but will depend upon the bishops continuing to germinate the seeds of the Synod, strengthened in the new hope it has given them.

TIMOTHY GARDNER OP

**RADICAL OPTIMISM: PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD** by Beatrice Bruteau, *Sentient Publications, Boulder, CO, 2002, Pp 139, \$13.95 pbk.*

To be optimistic is usually taken as either a sign of ignorance, or worse, a Pollyanna-like desire to ignore reality. Dr Bruteau writes that the deepest truth is our union with the Absolute, with Infinite Being, with God. That is the root of reality and, therefore, of her radical optimism. The book is clear and helpful for someone wishing to enter more deeply into prayer as she clearly explains the need for leisure, stillness, and practising meditation. Her section on the power of imagination in our lives is especially helpful.

The key idea of her book is that we have things backwards: 'This is why the abundance of "salvation" has to come first. *First*, learn to relax the ego-defenses by fully accepting God's unconditional sustaining love; *then* enter into the Trinitarian Life of shared personal love energies; and *finally* manifest that life by incarnating it into the workaday world. To make this *last* step of unselfish behaviour in the world the condition of meriting the *first* step, the reception of God's love, is completely erroneous because quite impossible' (p.130).