crucial to its pursuit. But Frend's book does not set out to be a comprehensive account of its emergence and we must be grateful for the gallery of portraits he has given us that would be part of a more comprehensive story of our modern understanding of early Christianity.

R. A. MARKUS

IS THE CHURCH TOO ASIAN? Reflections on the Ecumenical Councils by Norman Tanner. *Chavara Institute of Indian and Inter-religious Studies*, **Rome**, and *Dharmaram Publications*, **Bangalore, 2002, Pp. 91**, $**7 hbk**; $**5 pbk**.

Who or what counts as Asian? The arresting title of Norman Tanner's captivating book, *Is the Church too Asian*?, invites such a question. His book is the published version of three lectures (the Placid lectures) given at the Chavara Institute of Indian and Inter-religious Studies in Rome during December, 2001. The lectures are held in memory of Father Placid Podipara CMI, who was a *peritus* representing India at the Second Vatican Council, a professor at the Oriental Institute in Rome, as well as a consultor to the Roman Curia's Congregation for the Eastern Churches.

Is the Church too Asian? considers a long tradition of the twenty-one ecumenical and general councils of the Church from Nicaea I (325) to Vatican II (1962–5). It calls into question the oft-heard charge in contemporary theology that western, or European, culture has been overly dominant in Christianity's history. Tanner skilfully builds a case to illustrate that far from being excessively influenced by western ideas and values, the Church has been continuously and richly influenced by Asia throughout its history.

To further his aim of examining Asia's contribution to Christianity it is obviously necessary for Tanner to clarify what he means by 'Asian'. He informs his readers that 'Christ and his disciples were Asians, the early Church was predominantly Asian' (p. 11). We are also told that the apostles and the prophets of the Old Testament were all Asians (p. 52). Such a use of the word 'Asian' rests on a very ancient understanding of the word's meaning. In contemporary settings, Asia is normally understood to include countries like India, China, Thailand, and Vietnam. However, in the ancient Hellenistic era, Asia referred primarily to the Seleucid Empire. At the height of the Roman Empire, Asia simply designated a province of the Empire in what is now regarded as the western region of Turkey. As this book explains, 'The province of Asia in the Roman Empire stretched, at its greatest extent, from the Aegean coast in the West to a point beyond Philomelium (modern Aksehir) in the east. It was only much

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later, as a result of European voyages from the fifteenth century onwards, that the continent of Asia came to have its modern definition' (p. 14). The point is, whether in modern or ancient understandings, Asians have contributed incalculably to the welfare of Christianity.

The three chapters of Tanner's book seek to elucidate the extent and nature of that contribution. The first chapter attends to the ecumenical councils of the first millennium of Christianity. It is followed by a chapter that examines the course of councils during the Middle Ages. A concluding chapter ponders the contributions of Asians to Vatican I and Vatican II.

With regard to the Asian contribution to conciliar development during Christianity's first millennium, this book concludes that it was not merely great, but dominant. The seven councils of the undivided early Church – Nicaea I (325), Constantinople I (381), Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (451), Constantinople (553), Constantinople III (680–1), Nicaea II (787) – were undertaken with a membership of which the majority of participants were Asians. Indeed, at Constantinople I there was not a single representative from the western church. All of its 150 or so participating bishops came from dioceses in the East (p. 15). In view of all this, 'the complaint of Christians in the West, regarding the location, composition of the first seven councils, might well have been, "The Church is too Asian, or at least too eastern". Just the reverse of the talk today!' (p. 17).

This slender book is peppered with striking historical and theological observations. To begin with, it points out that the churches of the East bequeathed to Christianity its legacy of canon law. Nicaea I's disciplinary legislation, although intended for churches of the East, furnished the template for the first code of canon law for the universal Church. Moreover, Constantinople I's revision of the Nicene creed remains to this day the principal creed of all mainstream Christian churches. In the third place, the Council of Chalcedon's 'Definition of Faith' 'is the most authoritative and influential statement of the Church outside of the Scriptures' (p. 26). Fourthly, Nicaea II's decision to defend the use of religious art, in the wake of the iconoclast movement of the seventh and eighth centuries, 'ensured another gift of inestimable value from Asia to the universal Church' (p. 29). Finally, one of the more fascinating sections of this book underscores the subtle contribution of a Greek-speaking theology to the life of the Church. Tanner observes that such a language stands in contrast to the more pragmatic, precise, or legal language of the Latin-speaking West. In this light, the decrees of the of the first seven ecumenical councils employ such a flexible language that their decrees can be regarded 'better as signposts pointing to open fields and mountains, warning too of false trails, rather than as batons of policemen herding people into prisons – as sometimes they are

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portrayed and hence rejected in the cause of liberation from western colonial theology' (p. 31). To illustrate his point Tanner memorably cites a Greek-English lexicon according to which the Greek word for person, as in three Persons of the Trinity, can mean 'standing under, supporting, sediment, jelly or thick soup, duration, coming into existence, origin, foundation, substructure, argument, confidence, courage, resolution, steadiness, promise, substantial nature, substantial existence, reality, wealth, property, and various others!' (p. 310). Who could ever accuse Greek-speaking theologians of petty-minded verbal fixity?!

The second chapter focuses on ten general councils of the medieval West from Lateran I (1123) to Lateran V (1512–17), as well as the Council of Trent. By the year 1300, by far the majority of Christians lived within western Christendom. The conciliar decrees of medieval western Christianity were largely more concerned with matters of church order than doctrine. Doctrinally, the medieval Church saw itself as standing in continuity with the councils of the early Church and therefore held the decrees of the first seven councils in the highest esteem. The Asian conciliar contribution to the Church was thereby continued and enhanced. The oft-maligned council of Trent receives a fascinating treatment in these pages which esteem that it helped to return the church to its catholic and Asian roots in an attempt to escape from 'the excessive Eurocentrism of some aspects of the Protestant Reformation' and 'the more extreme forms of individualism and self-righteousness to which the doctrine of justification by faith alone, especially, might be prone and which have often been associated, subsequently, with the western psyche' (p. 54).

Some readers may be surprised to encounter in Chapter Three the comment that Vatican I's decree, 'On the Church of Christ', 'does not say directly that the pope is infallible' (p. 56). Surprising though the statement may be, it is nonetheless accurate. Tanner explains that Vatican I places a doctrine of papal infallibility within the wider context of the Church. In short, Vatican I teaches that the pope possesses an infallibility that Christ willed *his Church to enjoy*. The pope thereby represents God's people. Such an ecclesiology reflects an eastern, rather than an individualistic, understanding of authority. In addition, Vatican I stands squarely in an Asian tradition that accords pride of place to Constantinople I's revised version of the Nicene creed.

The section on Vatican II does not survey all of the decrees of the council, but highlights significant interventions and contributions made by Asian bishops as the council unfolded.

Is the Church too Asian? should not be judged on what it does not seek to accomplish. It is not a comprehensive account of every decree of each and every council. By contrast, it aims to draw attention to the frequently overlooked though highly significant influence that

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Asia – ancient and modern – has exerted on Christianity throughout its lifetime. Its aims are more than amply achieved.

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A HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN THE MIDDLE AGES by F. Donald Logan, *Routledge*, **London and New York, 2002, Pp. xiv + 368**, **£15.99 pbk**.

This is the work of the maturity of a humane and reflective scholarly mind. It is a model of its kind in its balance and judiciousness. Yet it is not easy to sum up an age in a way which defines it, and it could be argued that Donald Logan has not succeeded. But then he has not attempted anything so ambitious. His emphasis, as he admits, is largely chronological and what he presents us with is a narrative. The narrative moves from the early Church, given as a background to the medieval Church; through the process of conversion of the various parts of Europe which were Christian by the end of the Middle Ages. A chapter is given to Justinian and Mohammed. The story then moves to the conversion of the English, and so we are moved on through a series of topics clustered about a period or a theme.

The obvious weakness of this approach is that it makes it difficult to bring out, at the level of the intellectual debate, the ebb and flow of the tides of indignation and the power-struggles and the rest of the forces which shaped the world in which the Reformation took place. This is not a story which can satisfactorily be told from the outside, and principally in terms of events. Heretics and dissidents were involved in a 'process' of thought and argument in which an individual was likely to pick up notions from others, and few stood alone. From the stage at the beginning of the book (p. 9) when the Church is discussed in terms of its 'organization' and 'units', to its last section, where John Wyclif is portrayed as holding 'views on the Eucharist out of step with the received orthodoxy of the times' and as denying the existence of purgatory (p. 326), we are given scant indication of the struggles of conscience and scholarship. There is no sense of the achievement of the Middle Ages in ecclesiology and sacramentology.

This is a 'history of the Church in the *Western* Middle Ages'. The Greek Christians appear briefly in the story, before the Crusades at the time of the schism of 1054 and again at the Council of Florence in the 15th century.

It is startling to find the book ending short of the Reformation. The tradition of anti-establishment dissent now building to a climax and waiting their Luther; the discontent lingering after the inconclusive conciliarist challenge to papal monarchy, all lack their denouement.

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