

Editorial

The ever-widening vertical bands on the cover page represent three millennia, the last representing the present one. The three bands are only symbolic in covering the entire span of cosmic history or human history. No criteria can be found to divide the 'total' length of time into three parts. The periodizing that Grammar does, by interpreting the agent's preceding (past) and following (future) actions from the standpoint of the immediate (or present), is only confined to a relatively short period of time – perhaps no longer than the making of a statement. Hence there are no markers of history here. Only a rough, perspectival division can be made. One such that may be suggested is that of seeing the *first stage* as one of beginnings, of creative attempts of putting together building blocks and of working towards higher forms based on experience. The *second stage* is that of systematization, which in the 'modern' age was praised as 'order' and 'sophistication', but which today is increasingly shown to be the elevation of some forms over others, reduction of variety and difference to some selected forms, and domination in the name of reason. The *third stage* or millennium should really be seen as a culminating stage but one which is unending and inclusive, the nature of which we shall briefly explore below. The colours on the cover page, white and mauve, stand for the world and the church respectively. The world is not light itself but just manages to have light by struggling against darkness. Similarly, the church characterized by the mauve, the purple of royalty with the tinge of crimson, or power of the cross, is not a claim of high calling but of identification with suffering and death and in that situation finding and suggesting hope. The church is neither to see itself as light that is to be shed on the dark world, nor to claim that it has the moral right, proper understanding or the best means to serve. Rather its (episcopal) function is that of serving and shepherding at all levels for life to be sustained and new life forms to emerge. This role of the church will become visible only when the church is ready to change, and already changing, its message and its structures in the light of the world's needs. The church's example of service cannot therefore be advice-giving or distribution of goods, but undergoing birth-pangs to produce new life, new light and unashamedly proclaiming and working with hope in the midst of suffering.

Is it fair to say that no one enters the new 'millennium' in a passive mode without any sense of excitement, an expectation of the new or some kind of hope? Can one really speak for those in situations different from one's own? Certainly it is unacceptable to think that we can represent the experiences and aspirations of others. And it is equally unacceptable to think that we should only speak if we can be sure of the views and feelings of those whose social and economic conditions are much different from ours, particularly that of those who are 'poorer' than us. So the millennium we are talking about is only one among many possible discourses of the millennium, and one in principle acknowledging the complexity of the concept. Nevertheless the promise with which we give expression to what we see and believe is very much tied with the concept of millennium, which shows signs of a *meeting* of and *exchange between many* worlds.

This is what gives the millennium its greater *bandwidth*. It allows many lines of communication and facilitates the coming together of the various contents of communication. All

need not come to the one authentic and authoritative place to be served and edified; everything is waiting to be read on one's desktop or laptop. That is the revolution the web has brought about. We might be discerning takers, but takers and regular takers we are! There is no escape from hearing the world's voices. But what are we *sharing* with the world as theologians and Christian leaders? How and what are we communicating with the wider public? The books of Bishop Richard Holloway, former Primate of the Scottish Episcopal Church, was referred to by an English friend of mine as most readable by the general public. His works were commended for addressing issues faced by that public, and at the same time his Christian conviction coming across with sensitivity, passion and imagination. This lay person's view that not much is available to the not-theologically-schooled churchperson is shared by the well-known American theologian, John B. Cobb, who wrote in 1994 in the *Christian Century*: "Since so little of the scholarly and intellectual work of faculties of theology is geared to the service of the church, it is not surprising that the church takes little interest in this work. Scholars write for one another and for the students to whom they assign their books."

The situation is not much different in India. Most insightful Indian Christian writings of the past or present have hardly reached beyond the theological college or Christian institute circles. Apart from some theologian-bishops and some serious-minded church leaders involved in leadership training and social projects, theological literature hardly appeal to most church leaders. From time to time theological colleges, the Senate of Serampore College, the N.C.C.I. and the churches make attempts to address this situation. So seminars and consultations are arranged for lay people inclined towards taking their Christian commitment and sense of mission seriously. Theologians and others who can give direction are invited to be speakers at these meetings so that theological communication could first take place through a more direct means, with the hope that on-going theological communications will emerge through literature and other electronic media. Surely this must be seen as a worthy attempt as it gives space for theory and practice to refresh and revise each in the light of the other. One important thing has been recognized: that only the joint endeavours of the theological community and the church can find solutions and be able to make a contribution to the public discourses. The step forward requires a certain boldness. Although the church sees itself as the *light* and the *leader* and the *final authority* (which is contrary to what the church should be in the postmodern situation) and by implication has to be constantly addressing the world, the church in actuality has been more guided by its own (mis)understanding of Jesus' command, 'do not throw your pearls among swine'. The challenge before the church and the theological community is to continuously address the world with the gospel. In the postmodern world, we have to make ourselves visible and take the risk of placing our message alongside others with the hope that a future with human wellbeing and meaningful existence as its hallmarks will emerge.

Finally, I would like to profoundly thank my colleagues, Rev Dr T Hembrom, Rev Dr K P Aleaz, Dr Siga Arles, Rev Dr V J John, Mr Philip Peacock and Rev Dr S M Caleb, for help with transliteration and proof-reading. I thank Bishop's College for having given me the opportunity to serve as editor for the last two years, and I wish my colleague and friend, V J John, the very best as he takes up the editorship together with Siga Arles of Serampore College.

M M Ross
Editor