

## **Evangelization in South Asia since *Maximum Illud***

A theological symposium held on 14-16 February 2019

Having celebrated its golden jubilee in November 2018, the Morning Star College, Kolkata, India, launched on another “golden event”, i.e., a theological symposium on “Evangelization in South Asia since *Maximum Illud*”, on 14-16 February 2019. The symposium was promoted by the Pontifical Mission Societies and the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples as part of that “reflection”, which every baptised is called upon to undertake in view of the forthcoming Extraordinary Missionary Month, October 2019.

The symposium – organised in collaboration with St. Xavier’s University, Kolkata (SXUK) – saw 120 participants, which included 26 experts in different disciplines of thought – theology, education, medical care, social scientists, legal experts, social activities – twelve archbishops and bishops and veteran missionaries from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

The purpose of the symposium being to take stock of the evangelisation in South Asia so far, especially since the Apostolic letter *Maximum Illud* of Pope Benedict XV, and to reflect together on the future course of action. The one thing common to all South Asian countries is that Christians are a minority in them. Moreover, in almost all the countries spreading the Word of God is a real challenge. However, surprisingly, the discussions did not concentrate on the persecutions the Church is facing, rather on the positive “actions” carried on by the “disciples”. There was a general realisation that evangelisation *is* possible, especially through the concrete living of the Beatitudes.

In his welcome address Archbishop Thomas D’Souza of Kolkata emphasized on the need of awakening the sense of duty in the “baptised” that they are also “sent” to evangelise. Prof. Elias Frank, who represented the PMS in Rome, explained the purpose of the Extraordinary Missionary Month, October 2019; he stressed that *prayer*, *reflection* and *action* are the three “mantras” on which the forthcoming ecclesial event rocks.

Prof. Felix Wilfred, the Founder-Director of Asian Centre for Cross-Cultural Studies, Chennai, in his key-note address noted that the Church’s work of evangelization needs to focus on the poor as the recipient of the Good News and building bridges among the followers of various religions. He stressed on the need for developing a new mission method that acts in cooperation with the people of goodwill across religious boundaries to contribute to the transformation of the society and the wellbeing of the world in accordance with the Kingdom values of Jesus Christ, the Saviour, rather than building barriers and walls of separation.

The selection of resource persons from different fields of work gave a wide picture of the situation in South Asia. Among the encouraging events taking place in India is the *Khristabhaka* movement (devotees of Christ), which began in Varanasi, the very heart of Hinduism; there are tens of thousands who form part of this movement. Dr Jerome Sylvester IMS, an expert on the subject, explained how the seekers become devotees of Christ and the devotees become followers and followers become members of the Church. Caring for the physically challenged persons, struggle for the rights of domestic workers, advocacy on eradicating human trafficking are other activities where the “disciples” are actively involved in; thus bear witness to their faith in Christ.

Fr J.A. Santhanam, the rector of the Morning Star College and Fr John Romus, were the main architects of the symposium. The acts of the symposium are expected to be published before October 2019.