

## FOREWORD



*M*issio *ad-inter gentes* (mission *towards-among* the nations) is a new paradigm of the Asian missiological approach according to the vision of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) for the past three decades, since its inception in 1970. In the context of plurality of religions and multiplicity of cultures, and the enormous number of poor and marginalized people, the Church cannot but take the route of dialogue with these ground realities, without however relinquishing the direct proclamation of the joy of the Gospel. Through its reflection and documentation, the FABC has insisted that the Christian mission in Asia is best carried out through a threefold dialogue with the myriad Asian religious traditions, Asian cultures and the teeming masses of Asian poor and marginalized, which can be called *missio inter gentes*. Interreligious dialogue, inculturation and liberation are the three dimensions of evangelization. Though the FABC has not used the phrase "*missio inter gentes*" to describe its missionary approach, it could be surmised that it best exemplifies what FABC

hopes to achieve in Asia without, however, precluding the evangelization to the nations (*missio ad gentes*).

In this direction, “Prospects and Pathways in India: *Missio Ad-Inter Gentes*”, edited by Lazar T. Stanislaus, SVD, is an attempt to translate in our times the Church’s approach to the people in bringing the joy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This book is the outcome of a committed effort from the Pontifical Missionary Union (PMU), International Secretariat, to foster and share theological and missionary reflections of local thinkers from Catholic Churches spread out all over the world. In view of the preparation for and implementation of the Extraordinary Missionary Month (EMM) announced by Pope Francis on 22 October 2017 and scheduled for October 2019, Indian Catholic writers have come together to offer their life experience and thinking on the Church’s mission today. In line with the main theme chosen by Pope Francis for the observance, “Baptized and sent: the Church of Christ on mission in the world”, what the writers share through these writings is meant to be a true catalyst for the commitment to Jesus Christ, his Gospel and the Church for the sake of his salvation and mission to all.

What Pope Francis calls “proclamation by attraction”, the Asian bishops name the “witness of life”. “Proclamation is not a fourth dimension added to these three, but is the aspect of witness that is an integral element of all the three dimensions of evangelization.”<sup>1</sup> Proclamation and dialogue, *missio ad gentes* and *missio inter gentes*, as two approaches, are like two poles of a bar magnet, both poles required to create the magnetic field of the love of Jesus Christ. On the one hand, *mission to the nations* is like the North Pole that gives the direction based on the words of Our Lord. Before

he returned to his Father, Our Lord addressed his disciples with these words: “Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation” (Mk 16:15). Mission *among* the nations, on the other hand, as at the other pole, would indicate the effective modality we need to foster today to make the whole creation experience the merciful love of God the Father through Christ, in the Spirit. Pope Benedict XVI would say at the beginning of his Petrine ministry as the bishop of Rome: “There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him.”<sup>2</sup>

Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG) teaches that the Church should be in a permanent state of pastoral and missionary conversion: “I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are. ‘Mere administration’ can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be ‘permanently in a state of mission’” (25). The Church, missionary by nature (cf AG 2), is incessantly urged to “go forth”, bringing the Good News of love and mercy to those who are waiting for the message of the Lord; those who have already received him must be helped to strengthen their faith-commitment to go forth with new vigour. In this clarion call by Pope Francis, dialogue also has a great role. As the Asian bishops affirm, dialogue is “an integral part of evangelization”;<sup>3</sup> indeed, it is an “essential mode of all evangelization”.<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Tan observes that “The FABC has also explained that dialogue does not preclude the need for the proclamation of the Christian gospel: ‘in fact there could be a moment when we shall not be timid when God opens the door for us to *proclaim* explicitly the Lord Jesus

Christ as the Saviour and the answer to the fundamental questions of human existence’.”<sup>5</sup> The FABC clarifies the mutual relationship between proclamation and dialogue in the Asian context as follows: “While proclamation is the expression of its awareness of being in mission, dialogue is the expression of its awareness of God’s presence and action outside its boundaries... Proclamation is the affirmation of and witness to God’s action in oneself. Dialogue is the openness and attention to the mystery of God’s action in the other believer. It is a perspective of faith that we cannot speak of the one without the other.”<sup>6</sup>

In the context of the centenary celebration of the apostolic letter *Maximum Illud* given by Pope Benedict XVI on 30 November 1919, the Catholic Church once again takes stock of her efforts in realizing the mission entrusted to her by Our Lord. The PMU, one of the Pontifical Mission Societies, operating under the guidance of the Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, wants to facilitate the missionary formation of all the components of the Church: the laity, clergy and religious in different parts of the world. It has come forward to put minds and hearts together to reflect on our identity as a Church which exists for evangelization; as Pope Paul VI would say in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, “She [the Church] exists in order to evangelize, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ’s sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of his death and glorious resurrection” (14). The missionary consciousness among the pastors and faithful has to be reawakened. In the pre- and post-Vatican II times, the Church is awakening in the souls of men and women. As Romano Guardini wrote: How can we cultivate this missionary consciousness among the laity, the religious and

the clergy in the context of India today so that they would appreciate their missionary identity? The authors of these essays, with their experience in the field, have contributed their deep reflections for the benefit of all. I wish that readers benefit from these contributions towards the missionary formation of every baptized person in the Church.

***Bishop Peter Paul Saldanha***  
*Mangalore Diocese*

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## ENDNOTES

1. Theological Advisory Commission (now known as the FABC Office of Theological Concerns), *Theses on Interreligious Dialogue*, art. 6.4, as quoted in J.Y. Tan, “*Missio Inter Gentes*. Towards a New Paradigm in the Mission Theology of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC)”, in *Mission Studies* 21, 1 (2004): 76
2. Benedict XVI, Homily at the Mass for the Beginning of the Petrine Ministry on 24 April 2005: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2005/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20050424\\_inizio-pontificato.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20050424_inizio-pontificato.html)
3. Bishops’ Institute for Missionary Apostolate (BIMA) II, art. 14, in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, vol. 1, ed. G. Arevalo and Rosales G. B. (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997), 100
4. Message of the 1979 International Congress on Mission, art. 19, in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, vol. 1, ed. G. Arevalo and Rosales G. B., 131
5. FABC V, art. 4.3, in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, vol. 1, 282, italics in the original
6. *Theses on Interreligious Dialogue*, art. 6.5 (emphasis added)

