

COMMUNION AND DIALOGUE FOR MISSION IN THE CONTEXT OF ASIA

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Abstrak

Gereja Katolik adalah Gereja yang berciri misioner. Dimensi misioner ini diterima dari Allah Tritunggal. Karena itu Gereja tidak ada tanpa misi. Karena misilah maka Gereja didirikan. Namun demikian dalam konteks Asia di mana terdapat agama-agama besar dunia, tidaklah mudah melaksanakan misi apabila misi dimengerti secara sempit yakni mewartakan Yesus Kristus sebagai satu-satunya Juruselamat kepada orang yang belum menjadi warga Gereja. Berdialog dengan penganut agama yang berbeda pada level hidup sehari-hari merupakan kewajiban bagi penganut agama yang berbeda di Asia, tak terkecuali umat Katolik. Di sanalah umat Katolik memberi kesaksian tentang imannya yang menawan bagi penganut agama lainnya sebab bukan jumlah umat yang menjadi tekanan utama, melainkan Kerajaan Allah makin dialami umat beriman yang saling berinteraksi.

Kata-kata kunci: misi, komunitas, dialog, Kerajaan Allah, Gereja, profetis, hidup.

A Personal Experience

I was ordained to priesthood in 1992 and assigned, alongside two other Capuchin priests, to St Theresa's parish of Air Molek, in the diocese of Padang, West Sumatra, Indonesia. The parish was geographically large, yet had a tiny minority of Catholics among the vast majority of Muslims. We had two Javanese Muslims, male and female, working for us. They had been working there for years before my assignment to there.

The male was a driver who looked after the cars quite well. Unfortunately, he seemed not to practice his faith much, yet he was responsible for his job. On the way to visiting out-stations, we used to say rosaries while driving. He knew the prayers "Hail Mary" and "Glory." We used to have meals together, especially when we did a three-day pastoral visit to out-stations. I said grace over meals and also

encouraged him to do the same on other occasions, but he seemed to be reluctant.

The woman, a widow, did industriously and faithfully services such as cooking (including cooking pork), washing, ironing, looking after the garden and cleaning the home, keeping tidy the grotto of our Lady, even the church of the parish. This humble lady knew exactly the prayer "Hail Mary" just by overhearing those Catholics praying at the grotto. One day, to my surprise, she took pride to tell me that she could recite the "Hail Mary" correctly. I asked her to recite it which she did. Saying this, however, does not mean that she was thinking about conversion to Catholicism. She was faithful to her Islamic faith. I could hear her praying in one of the rooms of our parish residence where you could find crucifixes in every single room.

No one of us, both priests and parishioners, complained about her activities of praying in our home. Neither did we ever talk about Jesus Christ to them openly and formally. They took part in religious events such as Easter and Christmas celebrations, held in the parish.

What would this experience of mine say of 'communion and dialogue for mission'? Did we, the three Capuchin priests and the parishioners, downplay or neglect or abandon at all the mission of the Church by welcoming the two Muslims to work for/with us and by never speaking of Jesus Christ to them explicitly, formally and doctrinally? Should we have explicitly proclaimed to them the Gospel in its fullness as strongly stressed in the Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* (EA, 21)? And how? As a Christian missionary, what would you do if you were in such a situation?

Missio Dei

In his book, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Bosch elucidated his insights of the theology of mission. His profound insights deserve to be cited at length:

During the past half a century or so there has been a subtle but nevertheless decisive shift toward understanding mission as *God's* mission. During preceding centuries mission was

understood in a variety of ways. Sometimes it was interpreted primarily in soteriological terms: as saving individuals from eternal damnation. Or it was understood in cultural terms: as introducing people from East and the South to the blessings and privileges of the Christian West. Often it was perceived in ecclesiastical categories: as the expansion of the church (or of a specific denomination). Sometimes it was defined salvation-historically: as the process by which the world – evolutionary or by means of a cataclysmic event – would be transformed into the kingdom of God. In all these instances, and in various, frequently conflicting ways, the intrinsic interrelationship between Christology, soteriology, and the doctrine of the Trinity, so important for the early church, was gradually displaced by one of several versions of the doctrine of grace...

Mission was understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It was thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another 'movement': The Father, Son and the Holy Spirit sending the church into the world. As far as missionary thinking was concerned, this linking with the doctrine of the Trinity constituted an important innovation...

Our mission has not life of its own: only in the hands of the sending God can it truly be called mission. Not least since the missionary initiative comes from God alone...

Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission. There is church because there is mission, not vice versa. To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love.¹

To construct an alternative ecclesiology in order for Asian Churches to find new ways of being Church is seen urgent by Peter C. Phan. He says:

¹ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 389-380.

This ecclesiology, in a sort of Copernican revolution, de-centers the Church in the sense that it makes the center of the Christian life not the Church but the reign of God. Christians must be not ecclesiocentric but regnocentric. Their mission is not to expand the Church and its structures (*plantatio ecclesiae*) in order to enlarge the sphere of influence for the Church but to be a transparent sign and effective instrument of the saving presence of the reign of God, the reign of justice, peace, and love, of which the Church is a seed.²

The Exhortation itself puts it well:

Empowered by the Spirit to accomplish Christ's salvation on earth, the Church is the seed of the Kingdom of God and she looks eagerly for its final coming. Her identity and mission are inseparable from the Kingdom of God which Jesus announced and inaugurated in all that he said and did, above all in his death and resurrection. The Spirit reminds the Church that she is not an end unto herself: in all that she is and all that she does, she exists to serve Christ and the salvation of the world (EA, 17).

According to van Sanders, the phrase *missio Dei* (the sending of God) was first coined in 1934 by Karl Hartenstein, a German missiologist, in his response to Karl Barth and his emphasis on *actio Dei* (the action of God). Bosch's theology of mission is supported by Sanders who writes: "When kept in the context of the Scriptures, *missio Dei* correctly emphasizes that God is the initiator of His mission to redeem through the Church a special people for Himself from all of the peoples of the world. He sent His Son for this purpose and He sends the Church into the world with the message of the gospel for the same purpose."³

² Peter C. Phan, "Ecclesia in Asia: Challenges for Asian Christianity" in <http://eapi.admu.edu.ph/content/ecclesia-asia-challenges-asian-christianity>, downloaded 22 Sept 2011.

³ Van Sanders, "The Mission of God and the Local Church," in *Pursuing the Mission of God in Church Planting*, ed. John M. Bailey (Aphareta: North American Mission Board, 2006), 24.

In the same vein, the Exhortation highlights the source and the end of all mission, saying: "Communion and dialogue...have their infinitely transcendent exemplar in the mystery of the Trinity, from whom all mission comes and to whom it must be directed" (EA, 31).

Mission is not primarily an activity of the Church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God. "It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church."⁴ The Church must not think its role is identical to the *missio Dei*; the Church is participating in the mission of God.

Communion

By using the theology of communion, the Church is described in the Exhortation "as the pilgrim People of God to whom all peoples are in some way related. On this basis the Synod Fathers stressed the mysterious link between the Church and the followers of other Asian religions, noting that they are 'related to [the Church] in varying degrees and ways'" (EA, 24).

Communion is used in two senses. Firstly, it refers to Christians among themselves, and secondly to Christians with others. So, the Exhortation goes further to say, "In this sense, communion and mission are inseparably connected. They interpenetrate and mutually imply each other, so that 'communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion'" (EA, 24).

Without being a communion, the Church cannot fulfill its mission, since the Church is nothing more than the bond of communion between God and humanity and among humans themselves. As the Exhortation puts it, "communion and mission go hand in hand" (EA, 24).

⁴ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 64; quoted in David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390.

Dialogue and Proclamation

In the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the term *evangelization* “remains identified with the proclamation of Jesus Christ to those who do not know him and the invitation which the Church extends to them of becoming his disciples in the Christian community (cf. LG 17; AG 6). A broader concept of the Church's evangelizing mission, comprising, besides the proclamation of the Gospel, other elements such as human promotion and liberation and interreligious dialogue, will be a postconciliar development.”⁵

In the Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* we thus find the understanding of evangelization in different ways: from broader to more specific.⁶ The more specific concept of evangelization is identified with proclamation, but, this is only one aspect of evangelization.⁷ This papal teaching, however, does not speak of interreligious dialogue as another element of the Church's evangelizing mission.

The Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* of Pope John Paul II provides us with a broad perspective of the evangelizing mission of the Church, “according to which evangelization is not reduced to proclamation and the Church activities deriving from it, but comprises as integral parts other activities, such as interreligious dialogue and others. Dialogue and proclamation are two distinct elements or expressions of the same evangelizing mission.”⁸ This Encyclical Letter insists that “interreligious dialogue is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission”; it is “one of its expressions” and “a path toward the Kingdom.”⁹ Interreligious dialogue and proclamation appear as two elements of evangelization. Between both there is no conflict but a close link and distinction. This is spelt out

⁵ J. Dupuis, *A Theological Commentary: Dialogue and Proclamation*, in “Redemption and Dialogue. Reading *Redemptoris Missio* and *Dialogue and Proclamation*”, edited by W.R. Burrows, Orbis Books: Maryknoll 1993, 124.

⁶ Cf. EN 17-24.

⁷ Cf. EN 22.

⁸ J. Dupuis, *A Theological Commentary*, 151.

⁹ RM 55. 57.

as follows: "These two elements must maintain their intimate connection and their distinctiveness; therefore, they should not be confused, manipulated, or regarded as identical, as though they were interchangeable."¹⁰

The 1984 document of the Secretariat for non-Christians on dialogue and mission, concerns primarily with "the relationship which exists between dialogue and mission."¹¹ This document states that the mission of the Church is a "single but complex and articulated reality"¹² one that "comes to be exercised in different ways according to the conditions in which [the] mission unfolds."¹³ It then indicates the principal elements of the mission, two of which are interreligious dialogue and proclamation. They are two elements of the Church's mission in its totality, which is another term for evangelizing mission or evangelization.¹⁴

¹⁰ RM 55. Commenting on this passage, J. Dupuis, *A Theological Commentary*, 151, remarks: "That dialogue cannot be 'manipulated' means that it cannot be reduced to being a means for proclamation, but must be viewed as a form of evangelization in its own right. That the two elements are not 'interchangeable' or 'identical' means that the practice of one or the other is not simply a matter of choice on the part of the evangelizer. However, while the two elements are said to be "distinct" forms of evangelization, it is also said, on the other hand, that "dialogue does not dispense from proclamation" (RM 55). [I]n this passage evangelization is..., surreptitiously and implicitly, identified with proclamation. A certain ambiguity thus remains in the terminology used by RM, which here falls back on a narrow view of evangelization".

¹¹ D&M 5.

¹² D&M 13. Commenting on this term, J. Dupuis, *A Theological Commentary*, 130 says: "...it is a process. This means that, while all the elements making up the process are authentic forms of evangelization, not all have either the same place or the same value in the mission of the Church. Thus, for instance, interreligious dialogue precedes proclamation. It may or may not be followed by it; but only if it is, will the process of evangelization come to completion. For proclamation and sacramentalization are the climax of the Church's evangelizing mission."

¹³ D&M 11.

¹⁴ Cf. DP 8.

As to the relationship between dialogue and mission, the same document states that love and respect for others, which “ought to characterize the missionary activity of the Church”, are “proof for Christians of the place of dialogue within that mission.”¹⁵ Dialogue, besides being a distinct element of mission, is “a manner of acting, an attitude and a spirit” and, as such, “the norm and necessary manner of every form of Christian mission, as well as of every aspect of it, whether one speaks of simple presence and witness, service, or direct proclamation.” All these elements of mission must be “permeated by... a dialogical spirit,” otherwise they “would go against the demands of true humanity and against the teaching of the Gospel.”¹⁶

As regards the mutual relationship between dialogue and proclamation within the Church's evangelizing mission, the 1991 joint document of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) and the Congregation for Evangelization of Peoples (CEP) on dialogue and proclamation and the official commentary of Jacques Dupuis describe proclamation as:

...the communication of the Gospel message, the mystery of salvation realized by God for all in Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit. It is an invitation to a commitment of faith in Jesus Christ and to entry through baptism into the community of believers which is the Church.¹⁷

Dialogue, on the other hand, is taken in different meanings. “The spirit of dialogue which should permeate all the activities constituting the evangelizing mission of the Church”¹⁸ is distinguished from dialogue in its specific meaning. It is necessary to cite it completely here. Thus dialogue in its specific sense refers to:

¹⁵ *D&M* 19.

¹⁶ *D&M* 29.

¹⁷ *DP* 10.

¹⁸ J. Dupuis, *A Theological Commentary*, 121.

...all positive and constructive relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment (D&M 3), in obedience to truth and respect for freedom. It includes both witness and the exploration of respective religious convictions. It is one of the integral elements of the Church's evangelizing mission.¹⁹

Dialogue and proclamation, therefore, are distinct from each other, each having its specific finality, although the witness of life is presupposed in both. They have mutual relationship but each has its role.

Interreligious dialogue and proclamation, though not on the same level, are both authentic elements of the Church's evangelizing mission. Both are legitimate and necessary. They are intimately related, but not interchangeable... The two activities remain distinct, but one and the same local Church, one and the same person can be diversely engaged in both.²⁰

It goes on to say that "in actual fact the way of fulfilling the Church's mission depends upon the particular circumstances of each local Church, of each Christian." It needs sensitivity to the various situations and attentiveness to the "signs of the times," both developed through "a spirituality of dialogue."²¹

There is another significant text of DP dealing with the relationship between dialogue and proclamation. It urges all Christians to be involved in these two of the ways of mission while at the same time always keeping in mind the distinction between them.

They must nevertheless always bear in mind that dialogue... does not constitute the whole mission of the Church, that it cannot simply replace proclamation, but remains oriented

¹⁹ DP 9.

²⁰ DP 77.

²¹ DP 78.

toward [it] insofar as the dynamic process of the Church's evangelizing mission reaches in it its climax and its fullness.²²

This passage seems to make proclamation more important than dialogue and dialogue subordinate to proclamation, although both are necessary, even "absolutely necessary."²³ Here arises a question: How is it possible to say that one is subsidiary to the other, if both are really taken to be absolutely necessary?²⁴

This ambiguity can also be found in RM. RM states the "permanent priority" of proclamation to which "all forms of missionary activity are directed."²⁵ A commentary of J. Dupuis on it reads as follows:

This priority must not be understood as temporal, as if proclamation had in all circumstances to precede other forms of evangelization, for it will be said thereafter that interreligious dialogue is often the "only way of bearing sincere witness to Christ and offering generous service to others" (RM 57). The "permanent priority" is of a logical and ideal order of importance: proclamation has "a central and irreplaceable role" (RM 44).²⁶

As far as DP is concerned, the answer on that ambiguity is found in it. So the following passage reaffirms that dialogue has as a form of evangelization value in itself, even in the absence of proclamation.

Whether proclamation be possible or not, the Church pursues her mission in full respect for freedom, through interreligious dialogue, witnessing to and sharing Gospel values.²⁷

²² DP 82.

²³ DP 89.

²⁴ Cf. J. Dupuis, *A Theological Commentary*, 147.154.

²⁵ RM 44.

²⁶ Cf. J. Dupuis, *A Theological Commentary*, 153.

²⁷ DP 84.

What does the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) say of the issue in question? Two years after the publication of the EN, a strict sense of evangelization was still maintained in a document of the FABC. In the meeting on *Ministries in the Church*, which took place in Hong Kong, on March 5th, 1977, evangelization refers to leading "men to repentance, and to a turning of the heart to Jesus as Lord. The II Vatican Council, the Synod of Bishops in Rome and the Bishops of Asia have all insisted on evangelization as the highest priority of the Church."²⁸ Some years before the publication of *Redemptoris Missio* and of *Dialogue and Proclamation*, however, since 1979 onwards its subsequent documents have indicated a broader concept of the Church's evangelizing mission. Besides interreligious dialogue, proclamation has been seen as one of the vital aspects of evangelization, though it has a primary importance within the total mission of the Church. In the First BIRA, held in 1979, dialogue has become "intrinsic to the very life of the Church, and the essential model of all evangelization"²⁹ and in the 1982 meeting of the same institute the relationship between dialogue and proclamation is complementary. Sincere and authentic dialogue does not have for its objective the conversion of the other. For conversion depends solely on God's internal call and the person's free decision."³⁰

Dialogue and Conversion

The understanding of conversion is taken in different ways by the joint document of the PCID and the CEP. The first refers to "the humble and penitent return of the heart to God in the desire to submit one's life more generously to him." In more specific understanding, conversion is viewed as "a change of religious adherence."³¹

²⁸ Gaudencio Rosales and C. G. Arevalo (eds.), *For All the People of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991* (Diliman, Quezon City: Claretian Publication, 1987), 70.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 111.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 120.

³¹ *DP* 11.

The relationship between dialogue and conversion gives rise to problems in the relationship between the Christian and the followers of other traditions. Dialogue can be considered as conversion in its specific meaning, so to speak, its aim is to proselytize them to adhere to Christianity. They are wary of dialogue as a new, more subtle form of Christian mission.

Meeting one another as the adherents of various faiths obviously means moving beyond the boundaries of one's group. Yet this meeting will only be true if two or more persons open sincerely to each other without denying what they are, if they can establish new bonds without breaking the old ones. In dialogue a Christian must come as a Christian who wants to meet others his brother, and vice versa.

The Christian point of view is this: dialogue does not intend to convert any of the partners to the other's religion. That "interreligious dialogue is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission"³² is true. In this case it is necessary, that the followers of traditions do not read this to mean that they are "objects" of Christian mission; nobody is an object but rather a partner in the Asian community who must give mutual witness.

The relationship of dialogue to conversion must be seen in its concern with what each religion understands by conversion, that is, "a turning to God in response to God's turning"³³ to man. Interreligious dialogue aims at stirring *metanoia* in the self of each interlocutor. This *metanoia* should happen through dialogue. The participants engaged in dialogue should bring with themselves a sincere desire to seek for reconciliation not only among themselves, but reconciliation with God with themselves and with all mankind. Reconciliation as such, wherein the participants respond to God's varied dealings with them and, then, renew their relation with and commitment to God, should bring about a new

³² RM 55

³³ J.B. Taylor, M.H. Siddiqi, *Understanding and Experience of Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, in vol. "Dialogue between Men of Living Faiths", edited by S.J. Samartha, Geneva 1973, 64.

dialogical spirit to accept each other and to communicate with each other.³⁴

Dialogue and Life

The most fundamental form of dialogue which encompasses "the whole range of dialogue"³⁵ and gives basis to other forms of dialogue is dialogue of life. It is to say that there must be a close tie between dialogue and life. Dialogue, in whatever form, is of service for life.

As religion is for life,³⁶ so also is interreligious dialogue. Dialogue is an essential part of the human life, and of course of religious life itself.³⁷ Talking about the realities of Asia as the cradle of all the great religions, where dialogue is a key-word by which the churches of Asia is to be recognized³⁸ and which it is to become the pattern life of the people of Asia, Archbishop Angelo Fernandes contends that "the agenda will have to do less with Church and religion and more with life as it is experienced in Asia. The true concern of religion is not religion, but life to the full with God, with oneself and for and with all our sisters and brothers."³⁹

Dialogue is as wide as the reality of life. All life can become issues in dialogue. This is so because dialogue is primarily the meeting between

³⁴ Cf. Gaudencio Rosales and C. G. Arevalo (eds.), *For All the Peoples*, 168; J.B. Taylor, M.H. Siddiqi, *Understanding and Experience*, 61.

³⁵ T. Michel, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue in a Changing World*, in "Theology Digest", vol. 39 (1992), no. 4: 315.

³⁶ Cf. A.I. Fernandes, *Religion is for Life*, in "Buletin", XX/I (1985), n. 58: 27-37.

³⁷ C.M. Rogers, S. Prakash, *Hindu-Christian Dialogue Postponed*, in vol. "Dialogue between Men of Living Faiths", edited by. S.J. Samartha, Geneva 1971, 26.

³⁸ Cf. M. Zago, *Dialogue in the Mission of the Churches of Asia*, in "Omnis Terra", 16th (1982), n. 132.

³⁹ A. Fernandes, *Dialogue in the Context of Asian Realities*, in "East Asian Pastoral Review", vol. 27 (1990), n. 3/4: 213. What Fernandes assesses is based on passage of the Gospel of John 10;10: "I have come that they may have life and have it in all its fullness".

human beings. Christian-Muslim dialogue, for instance, is not so much the meeting between Christianity and Islam as between individual Christians and Muslims, each professing his own faith. Putting it in another way, dialogue derives from a profound recognition of a real reciprocity and complete mutuality of the participants for their common life. Dialogue should spring spontaneously from life, taking roots in the deeper being of man.

Therefore, the interlocutors involved in dialogue cannot restrict themselves to a discussion of theological problems or religious matters only. A theological talk is just one point of dialogue and therefore of life; dialogue is not as much a discussion and talk as a matter of living together. It was an issue of the 1982 meeting of South Asian Bishops which has this to say:

Since the religions, as the Church, are at the service of the world, inter-religious dialogue cannot be confined to the religious sphere but must embrace all dimensions of life: economic, sociopolitical, cultural and religious. It is in their common commitment to the fuller life of the human community that they discover their complementary and the urgency and relevance of dialogue at all levels, socio-economic and intellectual as well as spiritual, among the common people in daily life as among scholars and the people with deep religious experience.⁴⁰

However, we should not deny or underestimate the values and contributions of theological discussions for life, because "theological concepts, inasmuch as they are crystallizations of the original religious experiences, can make distinctions and similarities between different religions more explicit and comprehensible."⁴¹ The Second BIRA of the FABC which talked about a special role of theological dialogue between Christianity and Islam as one of its pastoral orientations, reads:

⁴⁰ Quoted from M. Alamadoss, *Faith Meets Faith*, 375.

⁴¹ M. Doi, *Dialogue between Living Faiths in Japan: A Beginner's Report*, in "Dialogue between Men of Living Faiths", ed. by S.J. Samartha, Geneva 1971, 37.

...the real differences which exist between Christianity and Islam must be acknowledged, but these differences must not be exaggerated or distorted. This attempt to clarify misunderstandings and to delineate the areas of convergence and divergence between Christianity and Islam is a goal of formal, theological dialogue.⁴²

It is to express that there are many theological concepts which cannot be bridged, but the participants may arrive at agreement in disagreement. The irreconcilable differences are admitted and accepted not as an obstacle to dialogue but as a path toward a mutual understanding, respect and acceptance. These are terms used not primarily for similar things but for different things. Thus, to understand, respect and accept the other is not only to help the other but also ourselves to grow in life.

Another element which indicates the close relation between dialogue and life is the goals of dialogue itself. Some may contend that dialogue aims primarily at the conversion of heart. Such a conversion is rather a conversion to deeper levels of thought and of spiritual experience of the Absolute. Dialogue should help one to acknowledge more deeply the mystery of the Spirit in his or herself.

Moreover, the final line of the Declaration *Nostra Aetate* statement on Islam, urges Christians and Muslims to move beyond the past, to be reconciled with each other, and to join hands in four key areas as their common mission in today's world.

Over the centuries many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between Christians and Muslims. The sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding; for the benefit of all men, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.⁴³

⁴² Gaudencio Rosales and C. G. Arevalo (eds.), *For All the Peoples*, 116.

⁴³ NA 3.

Life is a dialogue and dialogue is for life. Life must be shared, loved, fostered, and nurtured. One way of achieving this is dialogue. Dialogue is therefore not a thing to be discussed from time to time but a thing to be done from time to time since it is an integral part of life. The ultimate purpose of dialogue is not primarily learning more truth, but rather practicing more truth.

Conclusion

- 1) An answer to the questions at the beginning of this presentation seems to be found in the Exhortation EA in which John Paul II shared his experience of coming together with the world religious representatives which took place in Assisi in 1986. "The memorable meeting held in Assisi, the city of Saint Francis, on 27 October 1986, between the Catholic Church and representatives of the other world religions shows that religious men and women, without abandoning their own traditions, can still commit themselves to praying and working for peace and the good of humanity. The Church must continue to strive to preserve and foster at all levels this spirit of encounter and cooperation between religions" (EA, 31). This, however, is not the whole answer because the explicit proclamation of Jesus the Christ was abandoned. Hence, the question remains unanswered. "How to proclaim Christ as the Savior and as the only Savior in Asia?" This difficulty is compounded by the fact that Christ is perceived as foreign to Asia as a Western rather than as Asian figure.
- 2) Communion is strongly stressed in the Exhortation EA. The Exhortation boldly underlies that the each particular Church should be a communion of communities in which each community, at whatever form should be solid. I presume that many Catholics in Asia become satisfied with simply "going to church" on Sunday rather than "being the Church." Being the Church implies that each member consciously acknowledges himself or herself as a missionary sent by Jesus the Christ. We need to educate our people to view 'church gathered' as a time for worshipping Jesus and being equipped by Him so that they come prepared to not only worship,

but to learn how to “be like Jesus” to those around them. In addition, we need to teach our people to be able to view themselves as those who have been transformed by Jesus in order that they begin to see what Jesus sees, to love like Jesus, to serve like Jesus, to forgive, to care, to relate to others – to “be Jesus” to everyone.

- 3) Phan explores four features of the new way of being Church in Asia one of which is prophecy. He says: As far as Asia is concerned, in being ‘a leaven of transformation in this world,’ Christianity must give up its ambition, so enthusiastically endorsed in many missionary quarters at the beginning of the twentieth century, to convert the majority of Asians to Christ... The objective of the Church’s mission of “making disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19) in Asia cannot therefore be adding as many members to the Church as possible, even though baptism “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19) remains the desirable outcome of the Church’s mission. Rather, the primary task of the Church is to become a credible prophetic sign of the coming reign of God. This new focus of the Church’s mission must be the light guiding the ordering of its priorities and the choice of its policies which must not aim at serving the internal interests of the Church but the proclamation of the Gospel through the triple dialogue with cultures, religions and Asian themselves, especially the poor.⁴⁴
- 4) On the basis of communion of communities the Exhortation EA highly recommends that the Churches of Asia should form Basic Ecclesial Communities, and recognize renewal movements and on the basis of dialogue, Basic Human Communities.

In order to fuel missionary movements across Asia, believers in local churches must align themselves with Jesus’ mission in their own neighborhoods and communities.

⁴⁴ Peter C. Phan, “Ecclesia in Asia: Challenges for Asian Christianity” in *Aquinas Memorial Lecture* Australian Catholic University McAuley Campus Library, 2002, p. 3

Abbreviations

BIRA	<i>Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs of the FABC</i>
CEP	<i>Congregation for Evangelization of Peoples</i>
D&M	<i>Dialogue and Mission</i> (The Secretariat for Non-Christians Document, 1984)
DP	<i>Dialogue and Proclamation</i> (Joint Document issued by the PCID and the CEP, 1991)
FABC	<i>Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences</i>
NA	<i>Nostra Aetate</i>
PCDI	<i>Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue</i>
RM	<i>Redemptoris Missio</i>

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