Since the arrival of the new millennium the talk of the new evangelization has become common in Catholic missiology. Yet a careful analysis of the origin of the phrase will show that it cannot indiscriminately be applied everywhere in the Catholic world. As far as Asia is concerned, though we could speak of the need for a new paradigm of evangelization, unqualified discourse on a new evangelization would prove to be counterproductive. This paper will speak about the help that Asia can receive from an understanding of the new evangelization and the need to go further to make the ecclesial community the salt, light and leaven to the Asian society.

The Origin of New Evangelization

Ever since Pope John Paul II spoke to the Latin American Bishops at Haiti in 1983 of the need for a new Evangelization, rather than a re-evangelization in the context of the bishops’ preparation for the quincentenary celebration of the evangelization of the Americas,¹ New Evangelization has assumed a central role in the Catholic Church’s missiological literature. The Pope qualified the “new” in terms of ardour, methods and expressions in evangelization. John Paul II repeated the invitation in his homily at the Marian sanctuary of Our Lady of Grace, Haiti, during the actual celebration of the five hundredth anniversary in 1992. The Pope could have been influenced also by the Puebla Document that spoke of the need for a new evangelization in Latin America in the context of the new realities (n 366).

New Evangelization was a part of John Paul II’s plans for welcoming the third millennium. In his Apostolic Exhortation Tertio Millenni

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In the post Asian Synod Apostolic Exhortation, Ecclesia in Asia, apart from a general reference to the challenges of the new evangelization in the introductory section, later in the document the Pope hardly makes mention of it. Here the major theme is evangelization as such, especially the proclamation of Jesus Christ as the only Saviour and his mission of love and service in Asia, though this may require a “new pedagogy” (EA 20). The urgent issue in Asia, as the Pope puts it, is: “the encounter of Christianity with ancient local cultures and religions” (n 2).

Pope Benedict XVI also ardently advocated the new evangelization and even instituted a new dicastery for new evangelization, especially since he was dedicated to the cause of reviving the church in Europe. In a homily on 29 June 2010 Benedict XVI declared:

> The principal task will be the promotion of a renewed evangelization in countries where the first announcement of the Gospel has already been sounded and where churches of ancient foundation are already present, but which are experiencing a progressive secularization of society and a kind of “eclipse of the sense of God,” which constitute a challenge as to how to find means which are adequate to propose anew the perennial truth of the Gospel of Christ.²

² Quoted by Fisichella, The New Evangelization, 5.
The Asian Context

The Christian percentage in Asia has always been very low and the Christian reality in Asia is different from that of the West or even of Latin America. Asian countries, except the Philippines, never were Christian countries. True, Asian countries also are affected by the impact of a consumerist culture, but this has not seriously affected Christian life or the spirit of other religions, at least for the present. Unlike the West, the progress of science and technology has not weakened religious commitment in Asia. As Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil has insisted: “Even under pressure from outside, we cannot deny that the values of religiosity, communitarian sense, respect for authority and tradition, attachment to culture and family are still evident in Asia. If they are destined to die out in human society one day Asia will be the last continent they will meet with extinction.”

Most Asian countries due to their religious and political contexts would be apprehensive of phrases such as new evangelization, making Christians objects of suspicion with the agenda of a large-scale conversion that has always been perceived as an attack on the majority community.

New Paradigm of Evangelization

What John Paul II described as the qualities of the new evangelization—fresh commitment, different methods and expressions—is valid everywhere. This calls for a new paradigm of evangelization in Asia.

Vatican II rediscovered the missionary nature of the church which makes every Christian a missionary by his/her baptism. This has actually to trickle down to every Christian so as to discover oneself as a bearer of the good news by virtue of one’s baptism, to follow Jesus in his mission, rather than situating baptism primarily as a sacrament of salvation. Salvation is a gift of God that God gives to all those who do God’s will, as Jesus assures us (Mk 3:35) or to all those who trustingly surrender themselves to God’s will as St Paul reminds us (Rom 2:6-7), as Abraham did (Gen 22:1-11). This implies that every Christian realizes how through baptism he/she is incorporated into

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the church, the community on mission, in which “all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel” (Evangelii Gaudium 20).

**Become a Transforming Presence**

It is a call for a re-evangelization of all Asian Christians, leading “to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them” (EG 3). “At the heart of evangelization,” as Mary Carol Kendzia has emphasized, is the Great Commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ ... ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

Through this love and service Christians are called to become transforming agents like salt, light and leaven (Mt 5:13-16). Local churches in Asia can never cease to remind themselves of this basic Christian call to be the salt, light and leaven to Asia. Even the Easter experience of the disciples which spurred world mission, in the Matthean gospel, refers them back to this mission mandate of the Lord. They are to give rise to new communities in all cultures by teaching them all that the Lord has taught (Mt 28:19-20) and in the Matthean gospel this teaching, above all, is the Sermon on the Mount, the core of which is the missionary obligation of the community to become the salt and light to society and thus be a transforming presence in each culture. Salt, light and leaven are images of a minority but with a transforming service to the rest.

As far as Asia is concerned what we experience is not so much a disappearance of faith as in the West, but a spiritualization of the gospel, making it something that prepares one for an exotic other-worldly salvation. The Gospel of Jesus Christ must become a corrective to rediscover the biblical perspective of integral fulfilment of God’s purpose for God’s creation. There is need for the re-reading of the bible and its call for human flourishing so that all can have an abundance of life through the deeds of light (Jn 3:18-20).

At present there is a lot of ill-will against Christian presence in some places, caused in some instances by the Christian involvement

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4 Mary Carol Kendzia, *Catholic Update Guide to the New Evangelization*, Cincinnati: Franciscan Media 2012, viii. Though Kendzia rightly gives reference to Mk 12:30-31, Jesus was quoting Dt 6:5 & Lev 19:18. Placing them together as one commandment is Jesus’ newness apart from Jn 13:34 where Jesus commands us to love one another “as I have loved you.”
to improve the social and economic situation of the disadvantaged, in others because of the Christian effort to convert others. The spread of the theology of liberation and the support Christian social activists extend to the socially and economically marginalized, like the outcasts and the tribal groups, have angered those who traditionally have been exploiting them. A fair amount of the anti-Christian feelings in India is triggered by these groups.

**Through Interreligious Dialogue**

While Christianity cannot tolerate any discrimination of human beings on any count, Christians can try to win the support of others for the cause of social transformation through dialogue and acknowledging the past mistakes like the disregard for religious pluralism. Hindus in general must be convinced that the Christian discourse of dialogue is not an old hook with new bait but the expression of a genuine respect for the values of other religions, brought about by the Second Vatican Council. The fact that most Asian communities with so much contemplative background could look at Christianity only with contempt speaks for itself. This has to change.

Any paternalistic and triumphal claims of Christianity as the only true and God-intended religion have to be abandoned by confessing that all peoples have a common origin and a common destiny (NA 2) and how the Christians “acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral good found” in other religions (NA 3), which also have “a clearly soteriological character” (EA 2). This leads us to go along with John Paul II who has emphasized, “dialogue is the characteristic mode of the church’s life in Asia” (EA 3).

In this context it is good to remember that the St. Thomas Christians in India are the only Christian community that all through its history has existed in living dialogue with the followers of other religious traditions. Sadly, there is no existent historical record of the community’s theological articulations as they were all burnt at the “synod” of Diamper (1599). Act III, Decree 4 of that Synod states: “Each one can be saved in his own law, all laws are right: This is fully erroneous and a most shameful heresy: There is no law in which we may be saved except the law of Christ our saviour.” The condemned position was that of the community that Dom Alexio de Meneses, the Archbishop of Goa, the organizer of the synod, was trying to correct, as it was in sharp contrast to the then held view of the Western

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church. The St. Thomas Christians, while they adhered to their faith in Jesus Christ that they celebrated in their liturgy, held also that the God who sent Jesus Christ is the God of all, and reaches out to all peoples through their own religious traditions. This was based on their living experience of these traditions.

It was only logical that the first Plenary Council of India (1950), the decrees of which were approved by Pope Pius XII, produced the first official church document offering a clearly positive approach to the spiritual values of other religious traditions. The Council acknowledged that “there is truth and goodness outside the Christian religion, for God has not left the nations without a witness to Himself, and the human soul is naturally drawn towards the one true God.”

The same spirit of openness to the followers of other religious traditions was manifested both by Paul VI and John Paul II during their pastoral visits to India. Paul VI in December 1964 at Bombay described himself as a “fellow pilgrim” with the followers of other religious traditions of India “that sought God with a relentless desire, in deep meditation and silence.”

This spirit of openness and “fellow pilgrim” mentality must permeate the new paradigm of mission in Asia. Any vestige of conquering and displacement, characteristic of colonial mission, must give way to a genuine spirit of dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, bearing in mind the personalistic understanding of revelation and faith leading to salvation. *Dei Verbum* 2 shows how God in God’s goodness and wisdom chose to reveal the God-selves and to make known to humans the hidden purpose of God’s will. This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity. Then number 3 *Dei Verbum* asserts that creation is revelation in deed: “[T]o make known the way of heavenly salvation, He went further and from the start manifested himself to our first parents.” The story of revelation and salvation begins with the first parents and continues ceaselessly in order to give eternal life to those who perseveringly do good in search of salvation.

Prompted by these guidelines of Vatican II and aware of the vibrancy of the religious experience of the followers of Asian religious traditions, we Christians must refrain from slogans like “New Evangelization” and “Prophetic Dialogue,” which can be intimidating to

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7 *The Christian Faith*, 43.
8 To indulge in the new phrase “Prophetic Dialogue,” forgetting its background, can not only spell disaster but also it goes against the very spirit of
these people. “Our starting point,” writes Archbishop Menamparampill, “ought to be the world of interests of our interlocutors, the ‘other side’s concerns’: their anxieties, their interests, their needs, their vision of realities, their priorities, their vocabulary: which means, we become ‘other-focused, other-centred.’ We in Asia do not begin with a defeatist mentality that led to the coinage of the new evangelization, but with gratitude to God for the impact that the Good News of Jesus Christ has effected in the Asian culture—even while Christianity remained a negligible minority—and search how this can be taken further to make the Asian society more conformed to the divine reign, more concretely, by rooting out caste and social discrimination and fighting corruption at any level. Today this needs the dialogue and collaboration of the followers of all religions.

As the sacrament of the divine reign (LG 1) the church has to be present in all cultures and thus baptism is part of the church’s mission and all have the right to follow the religion of their own choice. Yet, mission is not directed against the followers of other religions nor should the church consider any particular geographical region exclusively as “a mission” as it did in previous times.

Prophets of the Human Person

In the same spirit the Asian church’s new missionary paradigm does not consider the boundary between the church and other religions as the cutting edge of mission, rather it lies anywhere where there are non-Kingdom situations. Jesus’ ministry was one of transforming the non-Kingdom realities of the blind, the crippled, the bound, the poor (Lk 4:16-19). Jesus was, without denying whatever he is believed to be, a social prophet in the line of the Old Testament dialogue. What the SVD General Chapter 2000 did was just putting together two streams of thought that came from two different contexts, viz.: the delegates from Latin America rightly spoke of a prophetic mission in the context of injustice and exploitation and the Asian delegates emphasized the need for dialogue in the context of religious pluralism and the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences’ call for the triple dialogue. Putting them together as “prophetic dialogue” was unfortunate in the context of religious pluralism as it implies a “donor mentality” and goes against the very spirit of interreligious dialogue as an expression of rootedness and openness leading to equality and vulnerability—change. In interreligious dialogue there is mutual acceptance and witnessing, but there is no room for unilateral judgement from one side and that is the core of propheticism, in the face of injustice.

9 Menamparampill, New Evangelization to Respond to the New Realities of Asia, 66.
prophets. So also humanizing life for the dehumanized of Asia is the missionary priority in Asia. Through that the Asian church makes Jesus’ messianic presence ever actual (Lk 7:21-23).

One of the clearest “signs of the times” of the post-World War II era is the UN Declaration of Human Rights 1948. It is an assertion of the biblically understood dignity of the human person into whom God breathed God’s own life (Gen 2:7) and with whom God entered into a covenental relationship (Gen 9:8). God’s sovereignty and concern for humans is the root of Incarnation. Jesus manifested this through his ministry of the divine reign. The call of the disciples and the creation (epoiesen) of the church (Mk 3:14) in the context of the message of the Kingdom (Mk 1:14-20) with the invitation to follow him, has to be the core consciousness of the Asian church.

The Incarnation is God’s solidarity with the dehumanized and all those who are pushed to the edge of human society. In contrast to the then prevailing notion of holiness as separation, for Jesus holiness is relationship, solidarity. He is a friend of sinners and publicans (Mt 9:11) and is nicknamed a glutton and a drunkard (Mt 11:19). He invites to him all those who labour and are heavily burdened (Mt 11:28). Jesus came to share the life of ordinary people and to liberate them from the woes of exploitation. Donal Dorr has expressed it well: “We can take the word ‘solidarity’ as a key to the understanding of the mission of Jesus.”

Retrieval of that solidarity and ministry is the urgent need of mission in Asia. Paradoxically, though, this solidarity has been the major reason for the persecution of Christians in Asian countries like India. The recently martyred Thomas Pandippally CMI was killed, not for proclaiming Jesus Christ as the only Saviour or that the church is the only means of salvation, but for his solidarity with the poor tribal people of Chanda, Andhra Pradesh, to whom he tried to give a top class education. Through that he proclaimed Jesus and stood for the cause of Jesus. The prophetic mission of the church, of which Fr. Pandippally is an example, is ever so significant for the Asian church.

If mission in the past was geography-centred, today it has to be people-oriented. In contrast to the salvation motive, today we speak of life in its wholeness, including the humanization of life for all as the purpose of mission. The millions in Asia that include those working in the sanitation sectors, such as scavengers and manhole cleaners, battered women, single and unwedded mothers, victims of child

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and sexual abuse, AIDS-affected, child-labourers, Dalits and tribal people, those whose human rights are violated in any form, victims of violence and victimization, all could find the church a sign of hope.

An associated aspect of mission in Asia is the simplicity of lifestyle of the church personnel that has been the watchword of Pope Francis. The simplicity and non-formality of Francis along with his passionate appeal for openness to the poor has made the Pope a friend of Asia. It has proved to be a “soft power” for the evangelization of Asia.

In Asia we experience a collective anger against the corruption and lavishness of the powers that be, adding misery to the life of the poor. In this context church personnel in Asia have to shun any ostentatious and extravagant lifestyle and inordinately expensive celebrations such as ordinations, Episcopal consecrations, jubilees and birthdays. In most instances the resources spent on such celebrations belong to the church and accountability to the poor must serve as a deterrent against such bashes.

Service to the poor in Asia has often been construed as part of the design to convert the poor to the church, though, frequently based on prejudice rather than proved facts. Even Mahatma Gandhi, already in 1926, responding to a missionary friend's claim of Christian social work, said: “I must own that missionaries have founded many leper asylums and the like. But even such noble service loses its nobility when conversion is the motive behind it. That service is the noblest which is rendered for its own sake.” On another occasion, responding to a question by A. A. Paul of the Federation of International Fellowships, about the Christian missionaries, Gandhi said: “It is a conviction growing daily upon me that the great and rich Christian missions will render true service to India if they can persuade themselves to confine their activities to humanitarian service without ulterior motive of converting India or at least her unsophisticated villagers to Christianity.”

By and large even today most Christian humanitarian work is seen from this conversion perspective. Though it is largely a motivated perspective Christian social service has to be in the spirit of the Indian ideal of disinterested service (nishkama karma). This is becoming a common channel of evangelization in several parts of Asia, especially through social activists and consciousness raising groups.

Encounter with Local Cultures

To quote Ecclesia in Asia, encounter with local cultures is “a major challenge” for evangelization in Asia. A striking aspect of Asian cultures is hospitality and tolerance for pluralism. This was manifested in ancient times when hospitality was extended to the followers of Zoroastrianism in western India and to the Christians and Muslims in south India. True, at present this is disfigured by capricious politicians whose only motive is that of power, politicizing religion and fomenting trouble to criminally polarize society so that they can garner votes.

As we pointed out earlier, this respect for pluralism was constitutive of Indian Christianity until the arrival of the Portuguese in India. That spirit has to be retrieved through an evangelization that captures “the innate spiritual insight and moral wisdom in the Asian soul” that is expressed not in confrontation and opposition, “but in the spirit of complementarity and harmony” (EA 6). “In this framework of complementarity and harmony the Church can communicate the Gospel in a way which is faithful both to her own Tradition and to the Asian soul” (EA 6). The church, as Michael Amaladoss writes, “has a special awareness of the plan of God for the world, a special motivation to work for it and the support of the Spirit.”

Christianity alone cannot claim the meaning dimension of culture and society as proved by the recent history of Christianity and Western society. Yet, Christianity can instil a spirit of other-centredness into human souls as Christian history in Asia proves. This probably would be the greatest contribution that Christianity can make to Asian culture. Evangelization of that sort, as Pope Paul VI wrote, can transform humanity from within, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage and the lives and concrete milieus which are theirs (EN 18).

Catholicism is not a fossil fuel as far as religious faith is concerned; rather it is a renewable resource, in so far as at its roots it is the renewal movement of Jesus Christ. The church’s mission in Asia becomes a restorative journey that can be qualified as redemptive since it was the practice of Jesus in his ministry. One aspect of this restorative approach to Asian cultures is the attitude and approach towards the dehumanizing discriminations based on caste, gender and other subtle dominating social structures, depriving the victims

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of genuine freedom and equality. The restoration has to begin with the ecclesial community itself so that it can become a true sign of inclusion and equality.

Each local church is “called to a missionary conversion” (EG 30), by becoming an authentically catholic community, without any taint of discrimination or warring groups. In Asia where women are victims of a double discrimination, in the society and in the church, especially important are demands that “the legitimate rights of women be respected, based on the firm conviction that men and women are equal in dignity” (EG 104). A theological principle that can illumine the church’s approach to gender is to realize how God is spirit (Jn 4:24), and in resurrection (including the resurrected Lord!) there is no question of male and female (Mt 22:29-33).

A leading aspect of the Asian culture is the role of advocacy both in religion and in society. The Bhagavad Gita, the most significant Hindu scripture at the popular level, is Lord Krishna’s advocacy with Arjuna, in the context of the battle of Kuruksetra. Similarly, throughout Asia the greatest expression of women power is their advocacy, especially at home, though many would argue that it should go beyond. Advocacy is not foreign to the biblical spirit either. An effective field of the Asian church’s evangelization has been advocacy and this must become all the more vibrant in the context of the ever burgeoning violence as well as when political and religious powers are exploiting and marginalizing the powerless.

The God whom Moses encountered at the burning bush and who sent Moses to Pharaoh for the sake of the afflicted Israelites, with the words, “I have seen their affliction, I have heard their cry” (Ex 3:9), and the Lord Jesus who said: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor” (Lk 4:18) must become experiential to the suffering masses of Asia, through Christian advocacy. Pope Francis reminds us: “If we, who are God’s means of hearing the poor, turn deaf ears to this plea, we oppose the Father’s will and his plan; the poor person ‘might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt’ (Deut 15:9)” (EG 186).

Advocacy is not built on power but on a position of weakness, to become leaven in the Asian cultures. It is not a one-sided proclamation, but becoming good news involving also the people who are suffering, “the least of those.” It is a mission not to the margins, but
from the margins.\textsuperscript{15} It is evangelization with having a “good eye” for the suffering.\textsuperscript{16}

\textit{Concluding Remarks}

The church’s life and mission in Asia becomes a way of life, following the Lord in his mission of love and service.\textsuperscript{17} The heart of Christianity, as Marcus Borg has put it, is following the path (\textit{halaka}) of Jesus.\textsuperscript{18} It is a way of loving and caring, it is a way of empowering and accompanying, it is a way of advocacy and protest, it is a way of dying for others with the Lord. It is a way of proclaiming Jesus Christ through continuing his mission.

\textbf{Abstracts}


Desde inicios del nuevo milenio, el discurso de la nueva evangelización se ha tornado común en la misionología católica. Sin embargo, un análisis cuidadoso del origen de la expresión va a mostrar que no se la puede aplicar sin pensar por todo el mundo católico. En lo que se refiere a Asia, bien se puede hablar de la necesidad por un nuevo paradigma de evangelización, pero un discurso impreciso sobre una nueva evangelización probablemente resultará contraproducente. Este artículo trata de la ayuda que Asia puede recibir cuando se entiende la nueva evangelización y la necesidad de ir más allá para hacer que la comunidad eclesial sea sal, luz y levadura de la sociedad asiática.

\textsuperscript{15} Eva Christina Nilson, \textit{Application of Together towards Life to Policy Making: International Review of Mission No. 397} (November 2013) 162.


\textsuperscript{17} The theme of the Asian Synod and the Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation \textit{Ecclesia in Asia}.

Depuis l’arrivée du nouveau millénaire, la discussion sur la nouvelle évangélisation est devenue un lieu commun en missiologie catholique. Pourtant, une analyse attentive de l’origine de cette expression montre qu’elle ne peut s’appliquer de la même manière dans tout le monde catholique. En ce qui concerne l’Asie, bien que nous puissions parler de la nécessité d’un nouveau paradigme, un discours sans nuances sur la nouvelle évangélisation se révélerait contreproductif. Cet article s’étend sur l’aide que l’Asie peut tirer d’une intelligence de la nouvelle évangélisation et de la nécessité d’aller plus loin pour faire de la communauté ecclésiale le sel, la lumière et le levain de la société asiatique.