

TOWARDS HARMONY OF FAITHS

‘*MISSIO INTER GENTES*’ PARADIGM OF DIALOGUE

Dr M. D. Thomas

Introduction

What is the rationale of life? What is the ultimate value that guides its destiny? What are its essential ingredients? I believe, faith has fairly the best known answers for these foundational questions. First and foremost, faith gives an orientation to life. Secondly, it supplies a vision that sees life at a glance, along with all its elements. Thirdly, it motivates and facilitates meeting other dimensions of faith.

In point of fact, faith is only one. It has immense facets. The diverse traditions serve the locus of dialogue. One cultural setting cannot be transferred to another place. Mission, in the right sense of the word, cannot be one that imports or transplants faith, as visualized by ‘*Missio Ad Gentes*’. ‘Faith meets faith’ is the road to ‘harmony of faiths’.

The interactive processes among the diverse facets of faith have necessarily to involve the grass roots of life, here and now. Mission emerges from life contexts, individually and collectively. ‘*Missio Inter Gentes*’ is the ‘dialogical paradigm’ for ‘harmony among faiths, traditions and cultures’, as well as mission in general. ‘Harmony of faiths’¹ is an all-inclusive, participatory, interactive and innovative way of living as well as understanding one’s faith.

This paper attempts to survey the various arenas and nuances of human faith, religious and non-religious as well as vertical and horizontal. It sails through the glaring reality of plurality and diversity of the Indian and Asian contexts in particular. It seeks to highlight a perspective that underscores faith as necessarily a ‘dynamic and dialogical reality’ and life as a ‘mutually inclusive’ and ‘inter-related experience’ of growing together, along the lines of the spirit implied by *Missio Inter Gentes*.

1. KEY CONCEPTS AND THEIR LARGER IMPLICATIONS

1.1. Faith

The old French terms, ‘*feid*’² and ‘*foi*’, denote ‘faith, belief, trust, confidence and pledge’. The Latin ‘*fides*’ signifies ‘trust, faith, confidence, reliance and belief’. The Latin ‘*fidere*’³ also means ‘to trust’. Observably, the etymological roots and connotations of the word ‘faith’ apply equally to divine and human contexts. They are also common to all religious traditions and social ideologies.

Faith is a core phenomenon in the lives of all human beings. While the religious way pivots around God, Creator or Higher Power, the non-religious approach focuses on a Cosmic Energy or the Yet-to-be-Known. Besides, the above vertical and horizontal aspects are inter-connected, like two sides of the same coin. God’s image is reflected in the humans and in the creation. The Yet-to-be-Known is inherent in the already-Known. One mirrors the other. Therefore, faith is an applied and inter-connected reality.

1.2. Religion

The Latin root ‘*religare*’⁴ means ‘to bind’, ‘to unite’ and ‘to connect again’. Another Latin root ‘*religio*’⁵ signifies ‘to unite’ or ‘to place an obligation on’, according to the World Book Dictionary. The ‘obligation’ or ‘duty’ would indicate ‘a thing to be done or the right thing to be done’. Both words indicate ‘getting related and performing the obligation to the divine and to the human’.

Religion is a system of affiliation to the Creator and to fellow human beings and the entire creation. It is not a compartmentalized entity. It motivates one to get connected to other affiliations of faith and do one's duty to them as fellow travellers in life. It vouches to imbibe the universal values of all religious and even non-religious traditions and to get enriched towards fuller degrees. It nurtures the essential spirit of faith in life.

1.3. Dharma

The Sanskrit and Hindi word '*dharma*', deriving from the Sanskrit root '*dhr*'⁶, suggests 'to hold', 'to bear', 'to carry' and 'to support'. The Sanskrit root definition '*dhaaranaat dharmah*'⁷ stands for Hindi '*dhaaran karna*' or 'to hold together'. It also means 'to receive', 'to own' and 'to feel responsible for'. '*Dharma*' refers to 'the duty one has to perform'. It signifies 'conscience' as the motivating element, too. Dharma denotes also 'nature', which is the essential character of one's self, as well.

Dharma highlights the core logic of life. 'Feeling bound by one's conscience and feeling responsible for one's life and that of others' is the sum total of life. This is the 'right conduct' or 'right way of living', in all its dimensions. Dharma represents an integral approach to life from the stance of one's duty. For that reason, it makes complete sense to people of all persuasions of faith, religion and ideology.

1.4. Harmony

The old French '*armonie*'⁸ and Latin-Greek '*harmonia*'⁹ indicate 'agreement, accord, concord, order, integration, co-ordination, fastening, joint, fitting together, unity, balance', and the like. The Hindi synonym for the word 'harmony' is '*samanvay*'¹⁰ and it has two parts, '*sam*' and '*anvay*'. '*Anvay*' means 'agreement, co-ordination', etc. and '*sam*' means 'on equal footing' or 'equally' and 'in totality' and 'completely'.

Harmony is a word grounded in the world of music. It is the 'pleasing effect' that emerges from a group of musical sounds as they are sounded all together. A single note cannot produce harmony. The concord among many notes does. Solo players conduct themselves in such a way in the orchestra that they make a single musical effect and create fine and sublime sentiments. The co-ordination of melody and rhythm offers a perfect model for harmony of faiths as well as harmony in all the elements of life.

1.5. Mission and Christian Mission

The word Latin words '*mittere*'¹¹ and '*missio*'¹² means 'to send' and they refer to the 'sending of the Holy Spirit'. 'Mission' would mean being sent to any part of the world for performing a task or set of tasks that accomplishes a purpose or duty. It is an assignment set by an employer. It is a 'special task' to be fulfilled in life.

Christian mission¹³ is an organized effort to share the good news or propagate the teachings and values, lived and announced by Jesus Christ. It involves sending individuals and groups of missionaries to foreign countries and to places in their homeland. This includes humanitarian work, especially among the poor and the disadvantaged. Promoting economic development, literacy, education, health care, orphanages and other special services also are covered by the Christian mission. The last half a century has broadened the idea of Christian mission by initiating dialogue with people of other faiths on diverse levels.

1.6. *Missio Ad Gentes*

The Latin phrase '*Ad Gentes*'¹⁴ means 'to the nations' or 'to the peoples'. It is the Decree of the Second Vatican Council on the Missionary Activity of the Church. Going to the peoples is a 'mandate impelled by the love of Christ'¹⁵. It gives meaning and joy to the one who goes and to the one whom one goes to. The Church of Christ is pilgrim and missionary by nature. The mission of the Church takes its origin from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit.

The essential meaning of '*missio ad gentes*' is grounded in the missionary character of the Church. Addressing people of other religious communities (non-Christians) is its specific focus. It is not easy to define the boundaries between pastoral care to the faithful, new evangelization and specific missionary activity. Founding new churches in villages and communities is the basic objective of being sent to the peoples, even to the ends of the earth¹⁶. This is the visible form of the larger mission to be performed.

1.7. *Missio Inter Gentes*

The Latin phrase '*Inter Gentes*'¹⁷ signifies 'mission between or among the peoples or the nations'. '*Missio Inter Gentes*' is a mission 'from the people, of the people, by the people and for the people'. It further means that 'mission emerges or evolves from the people'. The term '*missio inter gentes*' was first proposed by William R. Burrows¹⁸. It is a concept that is advanced by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference'. This is a model that is different from the '*ad gentes*' model of the mission. It is in contrast to the previous approach to the peoples. It is ahead of it and transcends it, as well.

Missio Inter Gentes is truly an incarnate model. It recognizes religious pluralism as the true socio-cultural and religious landscape of Asia. While it does not part with sharing the good news with others, it is certainly a step much ahead of it. It does not attempt to overcome plurality, but benefits from it in an 'interactive manner'. Mission among the peoples underscores a 'spirit of solidarity and harmony with the people' of Asia and beyond. *Missio Inter Gentes* would imply 'trans' or 'going beyond' in view of a higher identity, too.

1.8. Dialogue and interfaith dialogue

The Greek '*dialogesthai*', the Latin '*dialogus*'¹⁹ and the old French '*dialoge*'²⁰ jointly mean 'across', 'with', 'through', 'between', 'among' and 'converse' or 'speak', respectively. Dialogue is a 'conversation between two or more'. It is an exchange of ideas, views and experiences. Dialogue involves both speaking and listening. It is a spontaneous interaction between ideologies and traditions as well as individuals and communities.

Dialogue or interfaith dialogue²¹ presupposes interaction on equal footing. It does not admit superiors or inferiors. It necessitates a disposition of mind that is open to accept whatever that emerges. Partners in dialogue are required to be inclined to learn from each other. It is an interface and a social exercise between persons from different backgrounds, beliefs, persuasions, interests and objectives. Being free of prejudices, fixed positions and vested interests is a pre-requisite for an honest dialogue.

1.9. Secularism and Indian Secularism

The word 'secular' originally stands for 'that which is not connected to religious or spiritual matters'. 'Non-religious, temporal, worldly, earthly, profane, etc' are its synonyms. The word 'secularism'²² asserts freedom from religious matters. It is a neutral position on matters of belief in state policies and civil space. Secularism in India, and also in Asia, has a different meaning altogether. Rather than excluding religion from life, it includes all religions in a collective sense. Secularism in India²³ would indicate the character of being 'all-embracing' and 'egalitarian'.

India²⁴ as a home to and Asia as the cradle of almost all the religious traditions of the world, detaching oneself from religious sentiments would be next to impossible. To isolate oneself from other traditions into a ghetto of a certain tradition doesn't stand to sound logic either. Secularism, as per the Constitution of India, is an 'all-inclusive perspective' that facilitates 'imbibing the spirit and values of all traditions of faith and ideology' that are present in India, whether Indic or non-Indic in origin.

1.10. Democracy and Indian Democracy

The Greek terms '*demos*'²⁵, meaning 'people', and '*kratos*'²⁶, meaning 'power' or 'rule' compose the Greek word '*demokratia*'²⁷, which means 'democracy' or 'rule of the people'. Democracy is a form of government in which an elite class of people or elected representatives, directly or indirectly, participate. Democracies generally are known for values, like social, religious, cultural, ethnic and racial equality, justice, liberty and fraternity.

Indian democracy²⁸ is the largest in the world. India is the seventh largest country by area and the second most populous country in the world. It is also one of the oldest civilizations of the world. Since Independence, the democratic set-up of the country was a one-party system. Of late, it has moved to dominant party or coalition system of democracy. The electoral system applies to national and regional parties, centre and state governments and legislatures at *raajyasabha*, *loksabha* and *vidhaansabha* levels.

1.11. Plurality and diversity of faiths and cultures in the world, Asia and India

Being plural²⁹ is part of the inner dynamics of life. To be plural doesn't mean being more than one only. It also includes being diverse, i.e., being different from the other in various qualities. The phenomenon of being plural and diverse applies to the entire creation and the world. The world history has it that diverse ancient and modern civilizations, histories, cultures, languages and philosophies have been alive all over the world. It doesn't need a mention that these components are complementary to each other.

Asia³⁰, in special, homes two-thirds of the world population and is the birthplace and cradle of varied ancient civilizations, religions and traditions of the world. It is also a living laboratory of vibrant communities, languages and cultures. Significant spiritual and ethical ideals, values and meanings give colour to the singular status of the continent. The degree and intensity of plurality and diversity in Asia are beyond description. For that matter, India stands out singular with regard to the pulsating presence of almost all the religious traditions, cultures and social ideologies. The more or less harmonious co-existence of the above plural and diverse elements in India is ever a matter of special interest.

2. *MISSIO AD GENTES* AND ITS PARADIGM OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

2.1. The ground-breaking thrust of the Second Vatican Council

The principal motive behind the Second Vatican Council was striking a note of unity among all communities of faith. A few major realizations of *Nostra Aetate* were very articulate – having a 'common origin and a common destiny' with people of other religions, recognizing the 'reflection of a ray of truth' in other religions and 'while witnessing one's own faith and way of life, Christians have to acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, together with their social life and culture'³¹. Observably, these pronouncements of the Second Vatican Council were ground-breaking and had a new way of looking at other religious traditions.

2.2. *Missio Ad Gentes* -- its larger musings

Pope Paul VI made history in 1965 by promulgating the decree '*Ad Gentes*' (To the Nations), which was decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church. The decree encourages people to live with the people they attempt to convert and to absorb their ways and culture. It also calls for collaboration with organizations and groups with other denominations as well as within the Catholic Church. *Ad Gentes* lays the foundation for larger perspectives and approaches in the Christian missionary endeavour. Some of the insights are innovative and have far-reaching implications as regards dialogue with people of other faiths.

Ad Gentes underlines the fact that the missionaries have to 'be united with other peoples and nations in a sense of esteem and love'. It requires them to be aware that they are 'co-members of the same group of humans'. It also speaks of 'sharing in their cultural and social life' through various undertakings. It instructs missionaries to be 'familiar with the national and religious traditions' of the fellow beings. It urges missionaries to 'converse with them' and to 'learn the treasures God has distributed among the nations of the earth', through a process of 'sincere and patient dialogue'³².

2.3. *Missio Ad Gentes* -- its colonial overtones

Missio Ad Gentes was based on the colonial identity of Christianity, which maintained itself as 'definitive, normative and absolute' and therefore 'exclusive, superior and unique'. It considered itself the only religion that had the divine right to exist and extend itself. As a result, Christian mission was understood to be 'conquering and displacing the other'. The Second Vatican Council stormed a revolutionary change in this way of understanding the Christian mission. All the same, it has to be admitted that the colonial spirit still lingered about the Christian mission. The implications of *Ad Gentes*, the foundational vision of mission put forward by the Second Vatican Council, is a clear proof for the above fact. The missionary thrust that is vibrant in *Ad Gentes* is 'being sent to the peoples' and for the purpose of 'sharing the good news of Christ', leading to planting the Church³³.

The basic focus of *Ad Gentes* is 'bearing more fruitful witness to Christ' and its objective of 'bringing others under the dominion of God their Saviour, showing the peoples divine treasures'³⁵. It was open to converting people from other faith-based communities to Christian community. There is no denying the fact that such an orientation is within the mainstream of the Christian mission and is certainly proper to a disciple who is committed to Jesus Christ. But, keeping oneself and one's faith at the centre and seeing others from that angle smack of highhandedness in the pretext of one's religious convictions, however honest they might be.

Besides, *Ad Gentes* paradigm of mission is a strategy for colonizing the other and making the other part of one's extended kingdom. It looks at others as objects or potential Christians. It is a one-way traffic. It is overshadowed by a giver complex. The missionaries are not anointed to give and give, as if they have with them everything that is good in the world and others have nothing good in them. Mission doesn't admit considering others mere beggars who can only receive. The realization that 'God was already there in the world before the Christian missionaries arrived there' has to motivate an interactive style with people of different sections of the society.

2.4. *Missio Ad Gentes* -- its institutional pedestal of pre-eminence

Ad Gentes recognizes plurality and diversity³⁶, but does not consider the other as he or she is. It does not have the scope of treating the other in his or her entire *sitz-im-leben*³⁷. The mission of being sent presupposes a Church that is institutional and hierarchical. *Ad Gentes* takes off from a pedestal of pre-eminence and suggests mission as a one-way activity. It views the other as an object and not as a subject, who is capable of giving something back. The one who sends and the one who goes consume all importance. The realities of the other person or community are not taken into consideration. Almost nothing is expected from the other except accepting what is imparted.

Establishing and extending the institutional framework of the Church seems to be the ulterior objective of the mission. No wonder, the action of the Spirit of God in religion and in the world is relegated to the secondary position³⁸. To tell the truth, the other is a subject with all his or her background and there is something specific to be received from the other, as well. The institutional pre-eminence and the superior feeling of the missionary are not realistic and are mostly sure to go off beat.

2.5. *Missio Ad Gentes* lags behind the spirit of the Second Vatican Council

Missio Ad Gentes has a self-absorbed concept. It imposes the ready-made Roman, European and western notion of religion and socio-cultural realities on the landscape of Asia and other areas. It has an un-negotiable understanding of Truth. By presenting Christianity as the only entity that can meet all the aspirations of human beings, it attempts to put an end to religious pluralism. It harps on the idea of Christian mission as proclamation by words. It underscores the verbal and explicit proclamation of the uniqueness and exclusivity of Christ for the salvation of people who are not Christians³⁹.

Planting the Church and forming the Christian community is the centre of attention of the decree *Ad Gentes*. The decree is heavily charged with the traditional image of mission as ‘sending out’. Jonathan Y. Tan, Senior Lecturer & Discipline Chair in Studies of Religion in the Faculty of Theology & Philosophy of Australian Catholic University, Sydney, Australia, observes the tone of *Ad Gentes* as being ‘uncomfortable with religious pluralism’ and rules out ‘such discredited missiological approaches’ as no longer useful’ to mission,⁴⁰ in the right sense of the word. The strategy of mission, as in *Missio Ad Gentes*, cannot be chalked out elsewhere and addressed to the peoples of Asia and elsewhere. The real aspiration of the missionaries cannot remain coiled around the extension of the Church. As a result, the decree *Ad Gentes* lags behind the core spirit of the Second Vatican Council.

2.6. *Missio Ad Gentes* paradigm of interfaith dialogue -- strengths

Ad Gentes acknowledges that ‘in other religions and cultures there is the presence of God, his touch of grace and the rays of light’⁴¹. It exhorts Christians to ‘deal with others in mutual respect and love’ and ‘consider themselves as genuine members of the society in which they live’ and to ‘know closely their national, cultural and religious traditions’⁴². Reiterating that ‘in other religions there is the salvific presence of God’ and valuing ‘people of other religions who listen to their conscience and live according to the good and just values in their religions’ are major achievements of the council⁴³.

Going beyond the old concept of the First Vatican Council that ‘there is no salvation outside the church’ and ‘shedding the exclusive right over the salvific grace of God’ are landmark shifts in the understanding of the mission. Considering God, faith and life inclusive of other traditions and communities denote a significant growth in the perspective of the mission. The stress on co-operating with other religious believers for the good of the larger society as well as on the need to know and understand them show great hope for a better future for the religious world as a whole.

Reviewing the grassroots, especially in India, the new wave of interfaith dialogue, which emerged from the Second Vatican Council, made a considerable momentum for developing a culture of dialogue among people of diverse religious affiliations. The missiological tree developed a new branch with the name interfaith dialogue or comparative religion. A lot of scholars emerged with expertise on interfaith dialogue, comparative religion and the religious philosophies and practices of other religions. Hundreds of articles and books on the above themes appeared in book stalls and libraries. Seminaries launched mandatory courses on different religions, interfaith dialogue, cultural adaptation and related themes. Lots of interfaith activists emerged with initiatives in fostering interactions, relations and fellowship with people of other faith-backgrounds.

No doubt, the Christian community, especially the catholic, showed the way of a larger and new way of performing the mission. The Christian initiatives paved the way for individuals and organizations from other religious communities to organize similar events. As a result, a large number of platforms today have representatives from different religious communities and socio-ideological affiliations interacting with each other or addressing the public from diverse angles. Collaborative events and schemes among persons and institutions of different communities add to the positive contribution of the interfaith movement that was pioneered by the Second Vatican Council and boosted up by *Missio Ad Gentes*.

2.7. *Missio Ad Gentes* paradigm of interfaith dialogue – Weaknesses

In spite of the commendable strengths of interfaith dialogue mentioned above, *Missio Ad Gentes* paradigm of interfaith dialogue had certain blatant weaknesses⁴⁴. From the theoretical point of view, although *Ad Gentes* recognized religious and other plurality, it had an essential contradiction with interfaith dialogue. Its ultimate focus on ‘planting the church’ is symptomatic of its one-sided approach to plurality. Considering others as objects would mean belittling them. Interreligious dialogue was almost a tool in the hands of many missionaries who had a self-righteous understanding of truth. Making dialogue an instrument for ultimately winning people of other faiths over is, in fact, an insult to the very process of dialogue, in addition to demeaning others. Various official and individual documents that had contradictory statements betrayed even the good intentions behind.

The field endeavour of interfaith dialogue suffered a setback, too. Vast majority of religious heads in responsible positions were neither informed and enlightened enough as regards interfaith dialogue, were not motivated for giving a lead or for guiding those working with them. The passivity of the top officials negatively affected several interested persons. Some persons who were open to and were committed to the mission were not technically equipped or empowered for the job. Most of the real experts of the field preferred to remain in the cosy comfort zones of writing and speaking only. Vast majority of the specialists of interfaith dialogue were west-educated and had hardly any touch with the grassroots of the mission. The theories of those who were incompetent in the regional languages and the cultural and social realities of the people did not make much impact on those in the field.

No wonder, almost ninety to ninety five percent of the people in the catholic and the Christian community do not yet feel the need of interfaith dialogue as a serious endeavour. The common thrust of the Christian mission was understood as propagating the message of Jesus and ultimately planting the church. Most of the platforms of interfaith dialogue, only one person from the Christian community is seen. In the overall context of a country like India, to observe only handful of persons going around in the field of interacting with people of other faiths and ideologies is nothing less than a tragedy. It is, indeed, unfortunate to realize that the Christian or catholic community is almost taking a backseat in the area of interfaith initiatives, even after initiating the great movement of interfaith in the Second Vatican Council. As it stands, individuals and organizations from other communities are seen involving in interfaith processes as well as taking initiatives, though much of it is on shallow levels and is motivated by varied secondary purposes.

3. *MISSIO INTER GENTES* AND ITS PARADIGM OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

3.1. The Second Vatican Council and Interfaith Dialogue

The concept of interfaith dialogue⁴⁵ in the Second Vatican Council is reflected in its documents, such as *Nostra Aetate*, *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium Spes* and *Ad Gentes*. ‘Crossing the boundaries’ and ‘going beyond itself’ could be stated as the core of *Ad Gentes* perspective. *Nostra Aetate* proposes ‘having a larger identity with other faiths, with a common origin, existence and destiny’ (NA,1), ‘having relationship, dialogue and collaboration with other faiths’ (NA,2) and ‘treating every human being,

who is the image of God, as one's brother and sister, in order to be eligible to call God our Father', as required by 1 Jn 4.8 (NA, 5)⁴⁶.

Lumen Gentium finds hope in 'those who search for God with a sincere heart and tries to fulfil the will of God through their conscience can certainly attain salvation' (LG 16) and asserts that 'beyond the visible boundaries of the church too, many elements of truth and holiness can be found' (LG 8)⁴⁷. Similarly, *Gaudium Et Spes* affirms the conviction that 'the same spirit of God is reflected in the created things and in human beings' and seekers of truth in the material branches of science are not to be discriminated from those of the religious search' (GS 22)⁴⁸. Evidently, the Second Vatican Council has significant insights for interfaith dialogue.

3.2. The Second Vatican Council reflects the Mission of Jesus as being a leaven

The Second Vatican Council reflects the mission of Jesus as being just a leaven in the society. The leaven has the inner capacity to transform the world from within. His was a universal commitment, inclusive of others. Fulfilling this commitment would mean travelling with human beings of all persuasions of life. This leaven works silently in favour of people of good will or persons on whom God's favour rests⁴⁹. The effect of the leaven is boundless and all-embracing. Jesus declares, 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full'⁵⁰. The mission of Jesus was truly the messianic mission that is summarized in his words, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight to the blind, release for the oppressed and the year of the Lord's favour'⁵¹.

3.3. The Second Vatican Council re-defines the Christian Mission as a creative presence

The church is 'pilgrim' and therefore is 'missionary' by her very nature (AG 2)⁵². She is always on the way as a pilgrim is. Her mission evolves from the respective milieu, at every step and at every moment. The mission of the pilgrim has both individual and social dimensions. The individual pilgrim is to grow, evolve, emerge and become. One has to think of oneself as individuals, families, institutions, groups and as a community of disciples. A disciple is one who learns, first and foremost. The mission of the pilgrim as a co-pilgrim with other believers is to travel together. Internal mission is pastoral care of people who belong to the church. External mission is care of the people who follow other religious, non-religious, social and cultural persuasions. Mission would mean basically being present to the other, experiencing the other, sharing in the best of what the other has and sharing with the other the best of what one has.

Missio Inter Gentes, as a mission that is different from *Missio Ad Gentes*, evolves from the people⁵³. It involves both partners as subjects, who meet each other on equal footing. Their perceptions and approaches meet; they perform a mission to each other; and they engage together in a common mission to the society. All the three dimensions of their mission are guided by the promptings of the divine spirit, through a continuous process of dialogue with each other. *Missio inter gentes* is the right spirit that is inherent in the Second Vatican Council and later pronouncements by Popes. Ecclesia in Asia culminates this perspective when it clarifies, 'the dialogue the church proposes is grounded in the logic of incarnation' (EA, 20)⁵⁴. Noticeably, incarnation would mean dying to oneself and rising to the other, rising for the other and rising with the other.

3.4. The Papal articulations and the spirit of *Missio Inter Gentes*

The underlying vision that motivated Pope John XXIII in convoking the Second Vatican Council in 1962 was the exceptional focus on 'what unites people rather than what divides them'⁵⁵. Such a lofty unity can come about only through mission among the peoples. Moreover, Pope Paul VI asserted in Bombay, 'Man must meet man, nation must meet nation, as brothers and sisters, as children of God. In this mutual understanding and friendship, in this sacred communion, we must also begin to work

together to build the common future of the human race'⁵⁶. Further, no one could articulate the divine-human dynamics of dialogue so succinctly other than Pope John Paul II. In his address at Madras, he affirmed, 'By dialogue, we let God be present in our midst, for as we open ourselves to one another, we open ourselves to God'⁵⁷. Observably, these pronouncements highlight a thorough and new way of looking at other religious traditions, in line with *Missio Inter Gentes* and observably on equal footing.

3.5. *Missio Inter Gentes* – the origin of the concept

"The word '*Missio Inter Gentes*' was first proposed by William R. Burrows, Research Professor of Missiology in the World Christianity Program at the New York Theological Seminary and Managing Editor Emeritus, Orbis Books. This was in response to the paper presented by Michael Amaladoss 'Pluralism of Religions and the Proclamation of Jesus Christ in the Context of Asia' at the Catholic Theological Society of America in its annual convention in 2001.

According to Burrows, 'Christian mission in Asia is already primarily in the hands of Asians, and is better termed *missio inter gentes* than *missio ad gentes*'. The salient insights proposed by this paradigm shift are – 'getting rooted in the Asian soil, recognizing the plural context of religions, accepting other religions as vehicles of God experience, fostering unity among believing persons rather than among religions and engaging in collaboration among people of various religious affiliations'⁵⁸.

The context of the above idea was 'Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, 1910, in which main line protestant churches and mission societies from Europe and North America discussed 'the relationship between Christianity and other world religions'⁵⁹.

3.6. *Missio Inter Gentes* – the evolution of the concept

Jonathan Tan deserves to be complemented for advancing this argument by a series of articles and lectures. The core implications of the above concept, as highlighted by him are -- 'mission to be made a positive force, mission to be performed by and among peoples, mission to be made an engagement with religions, mission to be made welcoming and homely, missionary partnership to be made collaborative and solidarity with the peoples to be strengthened in deeper dimensions'⁶⁰. Accordingly, the Christian mission in Asia, as he summarizes in crystal clear terms, is 'mission among nations' (MIG), instead of 'mission to nations' (MAG)⁶¹.

3.7. *Missio Inter Gentes* – its pluralistic approach to mission

Missio Inter Gentes recognizes religious pluralism in an 'all-inclusive way'⁶². It pays due regard for the plural setting of the cultural landscape of Asia and India in particular. It facilitates the gospel to get immersed in the given ground. It allows the Holy Spirit to act as it acted even before the missionaries ever arrived on the scene. It respects the religious sensibilities of the other. It entertains larger values of life. It is grounded in getting related to the other, in being a partner with the other, in having shared aims and in making a joint journey with the other. It believes in interacting with the other, understanding the other and establishing a fellowship with the other. The missioner has to 'discern the hand of God in the aspirations, movements and initiatives of the people', at every stage of performing the mission⁶³.

Besides, the idea of mission has to be revised. Mission is not a project of the church, it is a project of the spirit. The spirit of God plays the first fiddle and the missioners have to play the second fiddle only. 'Christianity is one among the many religions' is the genius idea of the *missio inter gentes* paradigm of thinking. FABC's perspective in this connection is very much insightful. Dialogue would mean 'being with the people, responding to their needs, with sensitiveness to the presence of God in cultures and other religious traditions'⁶⁴.

3.8. *Missio Inter Gentes* – its catholic spirit

Missio Inter Gentes has a catholic outlook of the mission,⁶⁵ by way of being universal and across-the-board. It identifies the reality that God has been present and active among the peoples ever since the creation and before Christian missionaries ever appeared on the landscape of Asia, for that matter, even anywhere else. The Christian missionaries do not start anywhere from zero. This is the major motive for the three-way dialogue with religions, cultures and the poor. Moreover, plurality, which is much more a vital reality in India and in Asia than anywhere else in the world, is not to be taken in an argumentative manner but in a spirit of relatedness.

The strategy of mission in *Missio Inter Gentes* is allowed to emerge from among the people of Asia, India or elsewhere⁶⁶. The aspiration of the missionaries is nothing other than bringing the reign of God on earth and to foster the values of God's family. An attitude of humility and *kenosis* is characteristic of it. It is a qualitative approach by way of spreading divine values experienced through Jesus. It would also mean sharing with each other a humanizing and divinizing experience. It is a way of sharing one's life, shouldering each other and taking the responsibility of each other. It is a creative and qualitative approach to life.

3.9. *Missio Inter Gentes* – its future prospects

Jose CRG Paredes visualizes *Missio Inter Gentes* not as the final stage, but as something that blossoms into the mission 'trans'. The mission is not oriented to winning over the other, religion, culture, denomination or community. The mission takes the missionary and its partner to a world that is 'beyond', yes, 'a world that is unknown' to both of them and a world that could be achieved only together. Guided by the Spirit of the Lord, they proceed to imbibe a new identity, in which all that is best is brought together, 'when God is everything in all things'⁶⁷. That would amount to say that the spirit of *Missio Inter Gentes* goes even beyond what the term implies, as a matter of future prospects.

4. *MISSIO INTER GENTES* AND DIALOGUE FOR HARMONY OF FAITHS

4.1. *Missio Inter Gentes* and the Pluralistic Idea of Religion

The popular idea of religion needs to be updated⁶⁸. A single idea of religion does not apply to all. Different perceptions on religion have to be accommodated. Religion is a positive and a constructive force when religions are united and work together. Religion is a negative and destructive force when religions are divided among themselves. Making religion the centre of life is disorientation and is a problem. Making life the centre of religion is the right orientation of life. This is what Jesus meant when he said 'Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath'⁶⁹.

Religion has performed the role of a civilizing force in the world⁷⁰. It has a humanizing mission to perform today, as well. But its definition has to change. Ritualistic and highly organized religions seem to take a back seat today. For that reason, church-going is not the definition of being a Christian, either. When religion seems to come back in a new garb and as a new power, certain amount of flexibility, as in Pentecostal and charismatic movements, seems to be more compatible with the modern world. The values of Jesus need to be stressed more. Too much of religious outlook is likely to misfire, as well.

Christianity, in line with its strong missionary fibre, has to reclaim the humanness of the society. Recovery of ethics is the path of religion. Life-affirming practices have to be accelerated. The best of religion, dharma and faith together need to assimilate each other and compose a way of life, which highlights its inner meaning and dynamics, at the same time. Dr Pushparajan sets a criterion for

measuring the worth of religion, ‘the religious parameter is, therefore, the life of attainment rather than merely the claim of uniqueness regarding a doctrine about the attainment’⁷¹.

4.2. *Missio Inter Gentes* and the paradigm of dialogue

Highlighting the innate power of dialogue, Jonathan states, ‘Dialogue has the potential to bring about opportunities for two or more parties, with their different worldviews, to enter into each other’s horizons, so as to understand each other better and create harmonious relations between them’⁷². It is more than true that dialogue implies welcoming the other, receiving the other, paying respect to the other, feeling at home with the other, feeling with the other and thinking with the other. It also means listening to the other, understanding the other, appreciating the other and responding to the need of the other.

In other words, dialogue⁷³ entails being present to the other, walking with the other, interacting with the other, learning from the other, sharing with the other, sharing in the other and working with the other. Dialogue is an opportunity to experience and appreciate the plural design of the creator and to accommodate and learn from difference in the other. Everyone has something to give and something to receive. *Missio Inter Gentes* provides for a ‘shared mission’ in life. Dialogue that is intended at converting the other to one’s own religious faith and tradition is dishonest and unethical. One-way exercise is monologue and violates dialogue. Dialogue cannot be a strategy for anything else. Dialogue is an open process. The conclusion can never be stated in advance. *Missio Inter Gentes* is a ‘two-way process’.

Missio Inter Gentes is an inter-relational approach to life. It is a mission lived in mutuality. It is we-centred, community-centred, society-centred style of life. One needs to cross over to the other side as well as being honest to oneself. One has to listen to one’s conscience and listen to the conscience of the other. Truth is multi-faceted and the partners of *Missio Inter Gentes* have to search for truth together, in oneself, in the other and beyond both of them. Michael Amaladoss, an outstanding Indian missiologist, reiterates this transcending factor of dialogue when he affirms, ‘the practice of inter-religious dialogue can help in freeing and purification of religion through pointing to its transcendent dimensions’⁷⁴.

4.3. *Missio Inter Gentes* and the culture of dialogue

Emphasizing the role of dialogue for peace among religions and among nations, Hans Kung, Professor of Ecumenical Theology and President of the Foundation for a Global Ethic, puts dialogue in the focal point when he states, ‘There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. There will be no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions’⁷⁵. Dialogue is an ‘open-ended engagement’ with the other. It means ‘being a mirror’ to each other. It is a means to purify and enrich each other. As an exercise of meeting the other face-to-face, it is a process of deep socialization. The *missio inter gentes* style of the Christian mission, especially in India and Asia, in the words of Jonathan, is ‘relational and dialogical presence’⁷⁶.

Missio Inter Gentes highlights the spirit of dialogue or interaction as the sure way to harmony. Dialogue necessitates one to open up to the other. It is not just a conversation but a positive attitude of goodwill towards the other. It involves loving, serving and promoting the other. It is a give and take; it is a question and an answer. It prompts getting into mutual relations, mutual conversion and mutual transformation. It is a co-journey in life, a joint pilgrimage to God. It is a related existence. It would also signify having a shared language, a shared ideology, a shared culture, a shared commitment, a shared faith, a shared conviction and a shared spirituality – yes, a shared life.

Missio Inter Gentes accepts dialogue as a egalitarian reality in life. It initiates a brotherly-sisterly and friendly style of living. It is a spiritual approach to life. It is a humble way of life, in the sense that it

refrains from all sorts of domination and encroachment of the other. It maintains an aesthetic view of life, by taking fine care of the reality of diversity in life. It attends to the singularity of each dimension and attempts mutuality for enrichment and for an integrated growth. Dialogue leads to harmony and harmony begins with dialogue. In other words, dialogue leads to harmony; harmony precedes dialogue, and both are complementary, too. Dialogue is an ‘inclusive, interactive, participatory, collaborative, cooperative, constructive and positive process’ of life.

4.4. *Missio Inter Gentes* and an All-inclusive Indian Secularism

Justice Markanday Katju, Chairman, Press Council of India, and Former Chief Justice of Delhi High Court, observes, ‘the only policy that will work in India is the policy of secularism and giving respect to all communities’⁷⁷. In India, people have intimate affiliation to religious traditions and they live amidst varied religious traditions. Being connected to one or none of them wouldn’t stand to any sound logic. In the Indian setting, the meaning of ‘secularism’ cannot be one that excludes religion from the public sphere, in order to be made a private affair. Secularism, as per the Constitution of India, is an ‘all-inclusive perspective’ that is capable of ‘imbibing the spirit and values of all traditions of faith and ideology’ that are present in India, whether Indic or non-Indic in origin.

Indian secularism is a broadened understanding of the sacred. It entertains a decentralized notion of the sacred. Recognizing the presence of God and the working of the spirit in all faiths and confessions only would make sense. Indian secularism offers an opportunity of interface with all faiths, ideologies, traditions and cultures. The diversities are a living invitation to broaden one’s horizons and grow to fuller dimensions – deeper degrees, higher altitudes and larger magnitudes. Henry Miller, an American writer, comments, ‘one’s destination is not a place, but a new way of looking at things’⁷⁸. Secularism in India needs to be re-understood. It would mean ‘accepting a large gamut of religious, ideological and cultural persuasions as the new way of looking at life’. From this perspective, one needs to re-understand religion from the angle of Indian secularism. The concept of mission has to be redeemed from the colonial ghettos of one-sided exercises, in favour of an all-embracing manner of being secular. *Missio Inter Gentes* carries with it the best of the spirit of Indian secularism and gives a promising boost to inter-community relations.

4.5. *Missio Inter Gentes* and the Democratic spirit

APJ Abdul Kalam, the Former President of India, comments, ‘in a democracy, the well-being, individuality and happiness of every citizen are important for the overall prosperity, peace and happiness of the nation’⁷⁹. Wherever and whenever the interests of even one individual or community are not responsibly taken care of, however trivial they may seem to be, that democracy is impoverished and it is ultimately on the way of shatters.

Missio Inter Gentes has a democratic spirit at its core. India, as a large, significant and emerging democratic country in the world, has very much to do with that spirit. India, for that matter the entire Asian continent, is the most suited milieu to experiment the paradigm of *Missio Inter Gentes*. Vice versa, the democratic climate of the country, however complex and confused it may be, has very much to enhance the quality and practice of *Missio Inter Gentes* and interfaith harmony, as well.

As a matter of fact, interfaith engagement in India⁸⁰ can provoke an identity crisis to Christianity, because much of the understanding of the mission came to India from outside India. An exclusive, isolated and insulated identity of being Christian is no more relevant to India. Mighty establishments are not relevant, either. A Christian culture vibrant with its outstanding ethical values is the need of the hour. But, the Christian culture in India is multifaceted and there are many Christian cultures, in line with the pluralistic fabric of the country. The many Christian cultures and their values have to get permeated with every local and regional culture in India, in a continuous process of honest dialogue. ‘Inter-cultural interaction and adaption’ have to be the primary concern in religious dialogue.

Commitment to the national values, along with dialogue of values, has to be at the core of the Christian cultures in India today. Only when the Christian cultures in India lose its flavour of an imported faith, assisted by the *Missio Inter Gentes* paradigm of dialogue, an incarnate form of Christianity will take shape in India. This is what is intended by Ecclesia in Asia (EA 29). Developing a multiple identity, which is essentially a related identity with all faith-based communities, is the way forward for the real identity of the mission in India. All religious traditions in India have a mission. *Missio Inter Gentes* furnishes that genuinely democratic spirit in the religious, cultural and other arenas.

4.6. *Missio Inter Gentes* and dialogue to the grassroots of the society

The *Missio Inter Gentes* spirit of mission in dialogue has to take yet a new course in its way forward. It has to imbibe the wisdom that is grounded in the daily life, the wisdom of the common man and the wisdom of life. This wisdom is of taking life as it comes across. It is the wisdom from the streets, roadsides, slums and the villages. It is the wisdom of reaching out to the harsh realities of the lowly and the suffering of the world. The mystery of life has to be discerned in the ordinary situations of life. This is what Jesus means when he thanks the heavenly Father, ‘you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children’⁸¹.

Further, Paul observes, ‘God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of the world and the despised thing – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are’⁸². Mary adds to this, ‘he (God) has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down the rulers from their thrones and has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty’⁸³. Jesus manifested an exceptional model in this mission, by ‘searching for the lost sheep’⁸⁴, staying with Zacheus⁸⁵, and the like. *Missio Inter Gentes* advances such a revolutionary and divine way of perceiving the realities of life, as underscored by Jesus and his mission of dialogue.

4.7. *Missio Inter Gentes* and a New Missiological language

Missiology⁸⁶ is overloaded with theological terminology. It is very much regulated and controlled by theology. Christianity has developed a religious theory that is absorbed profusely in pre-Christian religious, social, cultural, philosophical traditions. It is also highly influenced by Jewish religious, Roman cultural, Greek philosophical, Western ideological and similar backgrounds. It has a long way to go before it absorbs sufficiently the Indian religious, cultural, social and philosophical traditions.

A new missiological language needs to be developed that is more secular and is easily understood by common people. Concerns and sentiments of the general public have to be reflected in missiology, too. Christian missiology has to facilitate scholars of other religious traditions to develop a missiology of their respective religion. The ‘inter-missiological and inter-disciplinary language’ will serve as a common platform for dialogue and harmony. That, in turn, will boost ‘inter-community relations’ in a larger and more qualitative way. Missiology thus has to broaden to a ‘circle of all faiths’, ideologies and cultures, in view of growing towards a ‘community of communities’.

The language and spirit of *Missio Inter Gentes*, Jonathan states, ‘redefines the relationship between churches, it acknowledges the reality that religious pluralism is here to stay for the foreseeable future and proposes a new paradigm for Christianity to relate to these religions’⁸⁷. Therefore, the centre of religion requires a major paradigm shift from religion to life. Accordingly, interfaith dialogue also has to be re-understood with life at its centre. It has to be person-centred, family-centred, community-centred, society-centred and creation-centred. Interfaith dialogue has to be de-religionized, de-theologized and has to make the ‘divine, human and natural mysteries and realities of life’ as its focal

point. The *Missio Inter Gentes* paradigm of missiological language will facilitate a more qualitative and effective dialogue among people of diverse faiths and ideologies.

4.8. *Mission Inter Gentes* paradigm of dialogue is a spiritual way

Missio Inter Gentes is a spiritual perspective of life. Spirit is a live reality. It is the eternal divine spark. It is present and active in every human being. The same spirit sustains all beings. Being spiritual would mean following the promptings of the spirit, both the spirit above and the spirit in all beings. In other words, it is a way of being sensitive to the sacred that is present all over. Pursuing the dictates of the spirit within or one's conscience is the individual response to the spirit. Attempting to listen to the whisperings of the spirit in the other is its social dimension, as well.

Moreover, being 'spiritual requires being inventive, innovative, insightful and ever new'. New perceptions, new attitudes, new experiences, new ideas and insights and new initiatives are inevitable for it. It is a joint search for the spirit within, in the other, above and ahead. It would mean making a shared pilgrimage to the divine. Being spiritual is a mission in life and it cannot be done alone but always together. It celebrates the spirit of being together, as the 'petals in the flower', the 'colours in the rainbow', the 'branches of the tree' and the 'drops in the water'. The reality of life is composed of all the components together, in an equal measure. Being spiritual is an 'all-inclusive, holistic, integral and wholesome' approach to life.

4.9. *Mission Inter Gentes* and being co-pilgrims with others

Being a pilgrim signifies being on the way⁸⁸, being in the process and being part of the larger process of life. It implies declaring oneself as a being yet to be perfect or accepting oneself an unfinished product. It further means admitting oneself as still evolving, yet to emerge and still striving to reach the destiny of life. This is, in fact, a humble note in life. Church is a pilgrim church. Her missionaries have to recognize themselves as 'co-pilgrims with people of other religious persuasions'. It is a joint journey of exploring and experiencing the mystery of God and his creation. It would involve accepting, loving and serving others as 'complementary to each other'. To be a co-pilgrim is to feel essentially related to the other. It is the way to a larger communion in life.

Missio Inter Gentes style of dialogue is a pluralistic thinking that recognizes the fundamental pilgrim character of every individual and faith. It celebrates a sense of 'being one among the many'. The sense of identity a child has is narrow. It considers itself the one and only child of the mother or father. This is a childish identity and it makes sense only for a child. The understanding of identity a grown up son or daughter entertains is and has to be necessarily broader. He or she considers himself or herself one among the many children of their parents. The consciousness of having a share rootedness intertwines the children as brothers and sisters. It gives them a sense of being part of a large family. It keeps them inter-connected, as 'branches of the same tree'. It makes them a 'family of God' with several members, like a 'rainbow' with diverse colours but as an integral whole and as radiating a singular and unparalleled sense of beauty.

4.10. *Missio Inter Gentes* and a multi-religious mission

The western world, on the one hand, has a rationalist approach to life⁸⁹. It believes in one God. It considers one thing correct and attempts to bring everything into one mould. It visualizes a cosmopolitan world, but in a uniform pattern. But, the eastern world, on the other hand, sees life as multi-faceted. It holds God as many-sided. It sees many things as equally correct and leaves people to their own beliefs. Its cosmopolitan outlook is pluralistic in nature. That would amount to state that a one-angle understanding of mission defeats the very idea of the mission, especially in India as well as in Asia. Mission has to be conceived and viewed from the 'window of the other', as well. The blend of

the west and the east would facilitate ‘mission to emerge’ from a colloquium of continents, nations and communities.

Further, mission evolves from the ‘social character’ of life. It has a sense of being related to others and of being with others. It has a sense of being together and of being a community. A sense of sacred, a sense of perfection and a respect for the other are inbuilt into the mission. Therefore, one has to interact with the other, in the sense of performing a mission. One has to accommodate with each other in a spirit of mutual giving. This is the essential spirit of the mission. Such a perspective will take one to realize that, whatever is his, her or its tradition of affiliation, ‘every human being and community has a mission to perform’. As Christian has a mission to perform to people of other religious persuasions, so have people of other religious backgrounds have a mission to fulfil to the Christian. ‘Mission is a mutual engagement of sharing in the best the other has and of sharing with the other the best one has’.

The mission of interfaith dialogue for harmony, as implied by *Mission Inter Gentes*, does not make anyone to be in a no man’s land, either. It recognizes the fact that no one can be out of the proper domain of one’s own religious affiliation. Life has several aspects of belongings, major and minor. The multiple belonging of life makes it necessary for communities to criss-cross each other. Everyone has a mainstream belonging. One has to ‘remain firmly rooted in the tradition of faith, culture and values of one’s basic affiliation’. However, one belongs to other traditions, as well, though in a minor or more or less way. One has to ‘imbibe values of other religious and cultural traditions’, too. One has to visit shrines of other religious communities and even learn to pray there. ‘All traditions are gifts of the same God’ and are ‘the common cultural heritage of the human society’. ‘Belonging to each other’ and ‘belonging together to God’ is the most sublime and culminating point of faith. The multi-religious mission to each other has to reflect this spiritual wisdom of life and, markedly, *Mission Inter Gentes* makes a clarion call to such a heavenly paradigm of fulfilling one’s mission in life.

4.11. *Missio Inter Gentes* and Harmony of Faiths

Harmony is a holistic outlook⁹⁰. Wholeness is beauty. When the components are fitted together well, there is a sense of completion. It brings different aspects together in mutual association. It establishes a process of continuous sharing of existence and meaning between the given elements. It is the dynamism of many in relation to one as well as one in relation to many. Harmony would mean an integration of the varied dimensions of creation as well as human society.

Harmony is a ‘pleasant blend of diverse elements of life in a single whole’. It is an agreement between perceptions, ideas, opinions, feelings, attitudes and actions. It is an arrangement of interests and tastes, colours and shapes, traditions and practices, streams and strands, etc. It is a sense of order in the entire universe. It is the logic of proportion. It is an album of related things that agree with each other. It is a variety of parts that co-operate or work together for a common purpose and with mutual benefit. The different parts function with an equality of importance and a unity of purpose. That is why Boris Klyuev places stress on the integrative quality of unity thus, ‘unity is a qualitatively higher category than a simple sum total of various parts; to become unity, the sum should be integrated largely through human activity in time and space’⁹¹.

The *Missio Inter Gentes* paradigm of dialogue paves a solemn way for harmony of faiths. It is a non-confrontational way. It is a participatory and collaborative approach. It suggests mutual engagement in God’s work. It is a ‘Trinitarian model’, in the Hindu as well as Christian language. The members of the Trinity has equal role in performing a larger mission together as well as in sustaining the mutual relationship among them. In other words, it is unity in diversity. *Missio Inter Gentes* is an integrated approach and a holistic perspective. It sees others as ‘neighbours, guests, partners, collaborators and co-travellers’ in life. It understands ‘mission as a relational dynamics’. It celebrates a ‘sense of

togetherness' with others. The spirit of living together is its core objective. Mutuality, reciprocity and complementariness are its mottos. It believes in engaging with the other as hosts and guests.

CONCLUSION

Living together harmoniously is the real identity of being human. Thinking inclusively beyond borders is the fundamental requisite of achieving that spiritual identity. Harmony among individuals, communities, civilizations and cultures is the sign of wellbeing in social life. 'Harmony of faiths' is the first step towards that sublime goal. Open and honest interaction among people of diverse compositions is the process that leads one afar the horizons.

The mission of interfaith dialogue and for that matter Christian mission as well, in line with the mindset of *Missio Ad Gentes*, has been very much a one-way traffic. It doesn't seem to have made a substantial headway into the 'varied treasures God has spread over the creation', along the ages. It mostly failed to answer the aspirations of the pluralistic world of the east, in special. The genius of the Indian and Asian reality of diverse faiths, ideologies, traditions and cultures need to be further explored, in view of conceiving anew a dialogical style of performing the mission.

Missio Inter Gentes is the right paradigm of dialogue that is at the core of the new way of being Christian, being religious, being human and being spiritual, which emerged from the Second Vatican Council. This brilliant insight paves the way for an 'all-inclusive, participatory, interactive, collaborative, innovative, positive and harmonious way' of allowing the 'mission to evolve from the grass root realities', under the 'promptings of the same divine spirit'. Mission evolves from among the peoples, nations and situations. *Missio Inter Gentes* is the true paradigm of interfaith dialogue that is capable of ushering in a 'culture of dialogue, sharing and harmony'. It makes the dream of celebrating difference as a sure source of enrichment and growth, as well.

Obviously, the idea of interfaith dialogue as well as of mission requires being revisited in view of liberating it from outdated, one-sided and lifeless stereotypes. The missionaries have to think different, anew and applied to the context. They have to keep journeying towards broader horizons, through a continuous process of getting exposed to new realities of life, so that mission remains ever alive and ever-evolving from among persons and communities. *Missio Inter Gentes*, through its spirit of 'collective mission', is a sure way to leave the religious, cultural and ideological world of India, Asia and the world over a 'better place to live', by paving the way for a 'culture of mutually related way' of living. *Missio Inter Gentes* ignites, instils and celebrates such a sublime spirit of having a life of worth on earth.

END NOTES

1. Ram Ramakrishnan, *Many Paths, One Destination: Love, Peace, Compassion, Tolerance, and Understanding through World Religions*, Tucson, 2009, p.05
2. Terence Patrick Dolan (Ed.), *A Dictionary of Hiberno-English: The Irish Use of English*, Dublin, 1998, p.88
3. Walter William Skeat, *A Concise Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, New York, 1882, p.143
4. *Ibid*, p.398
5. *Ibid*, p.398
6. Alf Hiltebeitel, *Dharma: Its Early History in Law, Religion, and Narrative*, New York, 2011, p.59
7. R. S. Nathan, *Hinduism that is Sanatana Dharma*, Mumbai, 2000, p.06
8. Harrap's *French-english Anglias-francais Mini Dictionary*, New Delhi, 1998, p.03
9. Stuart Brown, N. J. Fox, *Historical Dictionary of Leibniz's Philosophy*, Lanham, 2006, p.188
10. Ramchandra Verma (Ed.), *Maanak Hindee Kosha*, Vol.5, Allahabad, 1993, p.280
11. Walter William Skeat, *A Concise Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, New York, 1882, p.270
12. *Ibid*, p.287
13. Douglas A. Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story: A History of the Movement*, Grand Rapids, 2005, p.100
14. Joseph Esmond Riddle, *A Complete English-Latin and Latin-English Dictionary*, London, 1870, p.303

15. Holy Bible, NIV, Michigan, 1994, 2 Cor 5.14, p.1315
16. Redemptoris Missio 34, (Stephen B. Bevans, Jeffrey Gros, Evangelization and Religious Freedom: Ad Gentes, Dignitatis Humanae, New Jersey, 1990, p.90
17. Joseph Esmond Riddle, A Complete English-Latin and Latin-English Dictionary, London, 1870, p.303
18. Stephen B. Bevans, Jeffrey Gros, Evangelization and Religious Freedom: Ad Gentes, Dignitatis Humanae, Mahwah, New Jersey, 2009, p.43
19. Walter William Skeat, A Concise Etymological Dictionary of the English Language, New York, 1882, p.256
20. Harrap's French-english Anglias-francais Mini Dictionary, New Delhi, 1998, p.99
21. David R. Smock, Interfaith Dialogue and Peace building, Washington, 2002, p.49
22. Veit-Michael Bader, Secularism Or Democracy?: Associational Governance of Religious Diversity, Amsterdam, 2007, p.21
23. Iqbal Narain, Secularism in India, New Delhi, 1995, p.79
24. Peter C. Phan, Being Religious Inter-religiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue, Michigan, 2009, p.116
25. Steven Rosefielde, Daniel Quinn Mills, Democracy and its Elected Enemies, New York, 2013, p.05
26. Ibid
27. Kurt A. Raaflaub, Josiah Ober, Robert W. Wallace, Origins of Democracy in Ancient Greece, London, 2007, p.105
28. Rajendra Vora, Suhas Palshikar, Indian Democracy: Meanings and Practices, New Delhi, 2004, p.27
29. Jean-Luc Nancy, Being Singular Plural, California, 2000, p.03
30. Peter C. Phan, Being Religious Inter-religiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue, Michigan, 2009, p.117
31. Nostra Aetate 1-2, Declaration on the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions', Second Vatican Council, 28 October, 1965, Austin Flannery, O.P., ed., 'Vatican Council II: Constitutions Decrees and Declarations' (A Completely Revised Translation in Inclusive Language), Costello Publishing, Northport, New York, 1996
32. Ad Gentes, 11, Walter M. Abbott, SJ, Documents of Vatican II, New York, 1966, p.397-402
33. Redemptoris Missio, 34) (Stephen B. Bevans, Jeffrey Gros, Evangelization and Religious Freedom: Ad Gentes, Dignitatis Humanae, New Jersey, 1990, p.90
35. Ad Gentes, paragraph 11) (Walter M. Abbott, SJ, Documents of Vatican II, New York, 1966, 397-402
36. Donatus Oluwa Chukwu, The Church as the Extended Family of God: Toward a New Direction for African Ecclesiology, Bloomington, 2011, p.136
37. Robert H. Stein, An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus, Philadelphia, 1981, p.122
38. José Cristo Rey García Paredes, Theological reflections on the mission today, Professor of Theology of Religious Life Theological Institute of Religious Life – UPSA, p.10
39. Ibid, p.11
40. Jonathan Y. Tan, 'Missio Inter Gentes: Towards a New Paradigm in the Mission Theology of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), Mission Studies, 21.1, 2004, p. 88
41. AG 3, James B. Anderson, A Vatican II Pneumatology of the Paschal Mystery: The Historical-Doctrinal Genesis of Ad Gentes 1,2,5, Rome, 1988 p.283
42. AG 11, Walter M. Abbott, SJ, Documents of Vatican II, New York, 1966, p.397-402
43. George Tothamkara, CM, 'Church Documents on interreligious dialogue', Vincentian Charism and Formation in Asia Pacific, <http://cccprf.wordpress.com/2011/02/05/church-documents-on-interreligious-dialogue>
44. Mary Ann Walsh, John Thavis, John Paul II: A Light for the World, Lanham, 2003, p.237)
45. David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt, David Thomas (Ed.), Understanding Interreligious Relations, Oxford, 2013 p.200
46. George Tothamkara, CM, 'Church Documents on interreligious dialogue', Vincentian Charism and Formation in Asia Pacific, <http://cccprf.wordpress.com/2011/02/05/church-documents-on-interreligious-dialogue>
47. Ibid
48. Ibid
49. Holy Bible, NIV, Michigan, Lk 2.14, p.1164
50. Ibid, Jn 10.10, p.1220
51. Ibid, Lk 4.18-19, 21 p.1168
52. James B. Anderson, A Vatican II Pneumatology of the Paschal Mystery: The Historical-Doctrinal Genesis of Ad Gentes 1, 2, 5, Rome, 1988 p.283
53. Jenny Daggars, Postcolonial Theology of Religions: Particularity and Pluralism in World Christianity, London, 2013, p.146
54. Kurien Kunnumparam, S.J., The Indian Church of The Future, Mumbai, 2007, p.53
55. Robert T. Elson, 'Pope John XXIII: A Humble Man of God, Calls a Historic Council in Rome', Life, Vol. 53, No 15, New York, p.93
56. Claudia Carlen, The Papal Encyclicals: 1958-1981, vol.5, Ypsilanti, Michigan, 1990, p.191
57. Address to Members of Other Religions, Madras, 5 February 1986, no. 4; L'Osservatore Romano, English edition, 10 February 1986, p. 14
58. Jonathan Y. Tan, Rethinking the Relationship between Christianity and World Religions, and Exploring Its Implications for Doing Christian Mission in Asia', Missiology: An International Review, Vol. XXXIX, No.4, October 2011, p. 502

59. Ibid, p. 497
60. Ibid, p. 502
61. Ibid, p. 502
62. Jenny Dagers, *Postcolonial Theology of Religions: Particularity and Pluralism in World Christianity*, London, 2013, p.02
63. José Cristo Rey García Paredes, *Theological reflections on the mission today*, Professor of Theology of Religious Life Theological Institute of Religious Life – UPSA, P.12
64. FABC V, art. 3.1.2, Jonathan Y. Tan, 'A New Way of Being Church in Asia: The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) at the Service of Life in Pluralistic Asia', *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol XXXIII, no. 1, January 2005, p.74
65. Jenny Dagers, *Postcolonial Theology of Religions: Particularity and Pluralism in World Christianity*, London, 2013, p.146
66. David Jacobus Bosch, *Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture*, Valley Forge, 1995, p.27
67. José Cristo Rey García Paredes, *Theological reflections on the mission today*, Professor of Theology of Religious Life Theological Institute of Religious Life – UPSA, P.12
68. Jenny Dagers, *Postcolonial Theology of Religions: Particularity and Pluralism in World Christianity*, London, 2013, p.159
69. Holy Bible, NIV, Michigan, 1994, Mark 2.27, p.1138
70. Huston Smith, *The Way Things Are: Conversations with Huston Smith on the Spiritual Life*, London, 2003, p.13
71. A. Pushparajan, *From Conversion to Fellowship: The Hindu-Christian Encounter in the Gandhian Perspective*, Allahabad, 1990, p.162
72. Jonathan Y. Tan, 'Missio Inter Gentes: Towards a New Paradigm in the Mission Theology of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), *Mission Studies*, 21.1, 2004, p.92
73. Louise Phillips, *The Promise of Dialogue*, Philadelphia, 2011, p.31
74. Michael Amaladoss, 'The Spirituality of Dialogue: An Indian Perspective' in 'Spirituality of Dialogue: Indian Experiences', Augustine Thottakata, CMI (Ed.), Bangalore, 1994, p.15
75. John H. Berthrong, 'All under Heaven: Transforming Paradigms in Confucian-Christian Dialogue', New York, 1994, p.22
76. Jonathan Y. Tan, 'Missio Inter Gentes: Towards a New Paradigm in the Mission Theology of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), *Mission Studies*, 21.1, 2004, p.85
77. Justice Markanday Katju, 'What is India', *Frontline*, 10 February 2012, p.95
78. Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch, New York, 1957, p.2)
79. S. Vijai Kumar, 'On a mission to promote peace in Sri Lanka: Kalam' (interview), *Hindu*, 21 January 2012, p.
80. Ian Copland, Ian Mabbett, Asim Roy, Kate Brittlebank, Adam Bowles, *A History of State and Religion in India*, Abingdon, 2012, p. 267
81. Holy Bible, NIV, Michigan, Lk 10.21, p.1180
82. Ibid, Rom 1. 27-29, p.1297
83. Ibid, Lk 1.51-53, p.1163
84. Ibid, Lk 15.4, p.1188
85. Ibid, Lk 19.5, p.1193
86. Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, Cambridge, 2000, p.21
87. Jonathan Tan, 'Rethinking the Relationship between Christianity and World Religions, and Exploring Its Implications for Doing Christian Mission in Asia', *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XXXIX, No.4, October 2011, p. 503
88. Brendan Lovett, *For the Joy Set before Us: Methodology of Adequate Theological Reflection on Mission*, Bern, 2008, p.207
89. Berard L. Marthaler (Ed.), *Introducing the Catechism of the Catholic Church: Traditional Themes and Contemporary Issues*, New Jersey, 1994, p.83
90. Paul G. Crowley, *Rahner beyond Rahner: A Great Theologian Encounters the Pacific Rim*, Oxford, 2005, p.60
91. Boris Klyuev, *Religion in Indian Society: The Dimensions of 'Unity in Diversity'*, New Delhi, 1989, p.02

Dr M.D. Thomas

Founder Director, Institute of Harmony and Peace Studies

Floor 1, A 128, Sector 19, Dwarka, New Delhi 110075

Tel.: 09810535378 (p), 08847925378 (p), 011-45575378 (o)

Email: mdthomas53@gmail.com (p), ihps2014@gmail.com (o)

Website: www.mdthomas.in (p), www.ihpsindia.org (o)

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/mdthomas53>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/mdthomas53>

Academia.edu: <https://independent.academia.edu/MDTHOMAS>