

Mission in Asia: Role of Ecclesial Movements

January 24 to 26, 2010 at Pattaya Thailand

The Final Statement

Responding to the invitation of the Evangelization Office of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC – OE), 60 of us from 17 countries, representing 25 Ecclesial Movements and Associations gathered at the Redemptorist Centre, Pattaya, Thailand, from 24 to 26 January 2010. We felt a deeper bond in our common concern: commitment to evangelisation in Asia.

Coming Together

With immense gratitude and joy we received the cordial greetings and Apostolic blessing from His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI. His words that the movements are like an "inrush of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in contemporary society" engendered in us fresh enthusiasm and joy in our evangelising mission in Asia.

Similarly, the inspiring message conveyed on this occasion by Stanislaw Cardinal Rylko, the President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, and by Most Rev. Archbishop Salvatore Pennacchio, the Apostolic Nuncio, who inaugurated the first ever such Asian level gathering, came to us as an encouraging expression of the universal Church's pastoral concern to accompany the Movements. The stirring reflections of Archbishop Thomas Menampampil, the Chairman of the FABC-OE strengthened and challenged us all to live our mission from the depth and in dialogue.

The three days of spirit-filled sharing, prayer and joyful fellowship provided us with orientation and clarification for future direction of mission in this vast continent

The Blessings

We reflected on the unique identity and mission of the Ecclesial Movements, with particular reference to Asia. We acknowledge the many blessings they have brought in the lives of individuals and communities through a revitalising of Christian life, renewed experience of Church, discovery of one's vocation and awakening to mission. In many places, they have been eagerly welcomed as true gift of God for new evangelisation and renewal of Christian life in contemporary times. Many of these lay initiatives with the active support of clergy, religious and bishops have been rightly acknowledged as "private associations of the lay faithful" and promoted by the hierarchy. For some others, it has been a difficult journey in search of acceptance. Yet, with their creative fervour for mission and capacity for calling & forming lay people, there is a growing consciousness of their specific contribution within the Church, that "it is no longer possible to think of the life of the Church of our time without including these gifts of God within it." (Pope Benedict XVI)

Embracing the Challenges

Contextualising these movements' evangelising engagement in the local Churches in a spirit of ongoing dialogue with the peoples, realities and cultures of Asia is what we discerned as the most urgent need. We felt enriched by the insights from the 40-year long reflections of the FABC on the Church's missionary mandate and mode of evangelization. The challenge was posed to all movements to embrace mission in all its dimensions in Asia; and to overcome the tendency to focus exclusively on our own Christian experience, or at times, the hesitation to collaborate with other ecclesial realities or the local Church. The sharing of the charism and missionary efforts by each movement deepened the bond among us and stirred us to work in greater collaboration and mutual support. We feel urged to work in partnership with one another, with the efforts of the Church in Asia to effectively face the immense challenges of the contemporary times. The passion for mission evidenced throughout the gathering will continue to be an enduring inspiration for us.

Reflecting on our Mission

To 'renew every strata of the society with the message of the Gospel', the movements need to keep alive the evangelistic fervour to 'whisper the message of Christ to the peoples of Asia'. We were awakened to the importance of attentiveness to the life situations and cultures of the peoples. Asians in general admire persons of depth and hence the missionary efforts in our land need to be undertaken with great sensitivity. Like St. Paul, the missionary has to approach the task with intense prayer, tireless urgency, and abundant creativity, giving sufficient attention to the interests and needs of the people.

The life of the lay missionary also received special attention throughout the interactions. The fast emerging forms of lay missionary vocation and a variety of challenges associated with it were highlighted. Distinct from the general Christian call, the lay missionary discerns a particular call to set apart his or her life for mission and to follow a specific charism through a movement. A holistic spiritual formation for mission of each and every member of the Movements adapted for mission in Asia is of utmost importance.

Recognition and promotion of these emerging forms of lay vocations particularly at local levels is a truly felt need. We became aware of the urgency of sensitising the wider Church on the issues and challenges emerging from the fast changing and complex social realities of Asia. A search for creative and innovative response to these new world realities by Ecclesial Movements will open the eyes of many in the Church to the relevance of the emerging Ecclesial Movements.

Building Together

We are grateful to the FABC-OE, especially Archbishop Thomas Menampampil SDB, & Fr Jacob Theckananth for having taken this initiative to invite and reflect with us on such an important topic. This first gathering of the Ecclesial Movements in Asia, we hope, will contribute to an ever growing internal dialogue that bear fruits in our movements and in the entire Church in Asia.

We, the leaders and representatives of the participating Movements realise the joy and fruitfulness of mutual encouragement and cooperation in the daily lives of the movements and in our fields of mission. We eagerly invite the participation of other similar movements in Asia in this joyful fellowship. We realise the need for accompanying others who are called like us into new forms of contemporary Christian mission. Praying for one another, visiting each other even during significant programmes, sharing of resources in the form of inspirational materials and personnel and a networking news and views bulletin were proposed as follow up initiatives.

We have also taken an initiative to form a Fraternity of Ecclesial Movements in Asia with a view to collaborate and strengthen one another to intensify our efforts of evangelization in the continent and to promote communion among us.

We journey forward treasuring the words of Pope Benedict XVI, that we are called to play a pivotal role thanks to our “vigorous missionary impetus, motivated by the desire to communicate to all the precious experience of the encounter with Christ, felt and lived as the only adequate response to the human heart’s profound thirst for truth and happiness”.

We are grateful for the guidance as well as the encouragement of our pastors and look forward to mutually enriching relationships as part of the Catholic family.

We appeal to our pastors, our priests, and the Religious to help us grow in our charism and our identity, and put ourselves ever more effectively at the service of the Church and her mission. We are eager to participate in the life and mission of the Church at all levels, and to place our charisms and gifts at the service of mission in our continent.

As we go forth from here with renewed fervour and commitment, may Mary the Queen of Apostles be the model and intercessor in our mission of love and service in Asia.