

Witnessing to the Light: From Everywhere for Everyone— Mission Perspective

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Paul VI wrote, “the first means of evangelization is witness of an authentically Christian life” (EN 41). His often-quoted sentence is, contemporary men and women listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if they listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses (see EN 41). The underlining aspect is the authenticity of Christian life. To continue God’s mission both witness and proclamation are significant; mission is carried out by word and deed. There is no witness without proclamation. There should be no proclamation without witness, otherwise it will be an empty noise. Pope Francis said that witness is leaven in the church today.¹ Witnessing by our life and presence itself proclaims. It reminds us of the famous words of Francis of Assisi, “Preach always and if necessary, use words.”

The term “witness” means testimony; hence a person who has seen, heard, or touched a reality gives a testimony. For a Christian, giving witness to the Trinitarian God through his/her life is the first step of evangelization. The Bible is a story of witness.² The different models in the Bible inspire us to bear witness to the Trinitarian God.³ Jesus’ bearing witness to God is the culmination of witness. Jesus says, “For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to bear witness to the truth” (Jn 18:37). Through his life, death, and resurrection, he reveals the love of God to the world, hence the truth is God’s love to the world. Throughout his life we see that Jesus bore witness to

¹ Pope Francis’ homily during the Vespers of Presentation of the Lord on 1 February 2025.

² Sinto Jose Porathur, “Witness in the Bible,” *Vidyajothi* 86, no.9 (2022): 681.

³ Porathur, “Witness in the Bible,” 281-297.

God's love, concern, and justice for the people. Our mission is "to be the witnesses of the primacy of God's love."⁴

The Society of the Divine Word celebrates its 150 years of its foundation, the theme of the celebration is "*Witnessing to Light: From Everywhere for Everyone*." In this article, I try to explore the missiological perspective of this theme not only for the Society, but for the whole church.

Witnessing to the Light

In the gospel of John (1:7-8), we read, "He (John the Baptist) came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light but came to bear witness to the light." The phrase "witnessing to the Light" is in testifying about Jesus Christ, who is described as the true light coming into the world. "The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world" (Jn 1:9). Jesus is the light that revealed the immensity of God and showed the love of God in tangible ways through his words and deeds and the healing and forgiving nature of God. He expressed who God is.

Christian witness is first and foremost about Christ who revealed God's love. "Christian witness is always a sharing in his (Christ) witness."⁵ Our primary message is not about why one should attend our church, or how one should vote, but about Jesus Christ. Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, "Let your light shine before others in such a way that they see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven." This call is to do good works that God wants us to do. We are called not to shine our own light, but Christ's light. We are to fill our lamps with a fresh supply of His grace and mercy as we depend upon our fellowship with Christ through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. The good news is that the light of Jesus is for everyone. Jesus offers eternal life to everyone who believes and does the will of the Father – "whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mt 12:50).

Witnessing to the Light involves proclaiming, living, and sharing the Light of Christ through individuals and institutions, social transformation,

⁴ Superior General of the Daughters of the Church on 4 February 2025, *Vatican News*, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2025-02/prayer-consecrated-life-daughters-church-interview.html>

⁵ The document on "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct," 2011, accepted by Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, World Council of Churches, World Evangelical Alliance. This gives a broader outlook to witness to Christ and our responsibility in the multi-religious context.

cultural engagement, and even suffering. *Missio Dei* is a call to make Christ known in every nation, culture, and situation so that all may walk in His Light and through this Light, everyone will find the right way. Witnessing to the Light means actively participating in God's mission by testifying to Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, through word, deed, and presence. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (Jn 14:6). The World Council of Churches described witness as "those acts and words by which a Christian or community gives testimony to Christ and invites others to make their response to him."

In his Message for World Mission Day on Sunday, 23 October 2022 on the theme "You will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8), Pope Francis reminded us that "Every Christian is called to be a missionary and a witness of Christ. ... And the church, community of Christ's disciples, has no other mission than that of evangelizing the world by bearing witness to Christ. The identity of the church is to evangelize." To bear witness to Christ is embodying his manifestation of God's love, because through his life, death, and resurrection, he has shown this loving God. This also implies that we are called to go deeper into the Word as "it manifests itself in the various forms, places, persons, and realities. Discovering the Word is an exercise that animates our life."⁶

Four Aspects of Witness

Witnessing to the Light can be done in various ways, let me give four aspects of witness which Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroders' have portrayed.⁷

Witness of Individuals

For an authentic Christian witness what is indispensable as the inner awakening resulting from an encounter with the Divine. The experience of God as *Abba* shaped the life of Jesus and remained a dynamic force that led him to commit himself fully to the mission of bearing witness to God. An authentic life of a Christian by being prayerful, honest, and sincere in his work, being faithful to his/her spouse, willing to listen to friends and enemies, caring sincerely for the sick, poor, and marginalized and so forth evokes attention. The love of God is transmitted through actions, e.g., Mother Theresa, Charles de Foucauld, Carlo Acutis, Pope Francis, and so forth. Individual Christian

⁶ Society of the Divine Word, *In Word and Deed*, Documents of the 18th General Chapter SVD 2018, No. 6 (2018), 53.

⁷ Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2005), 353-357.

witness exposes the depth of relationship one has with Jesus. It is like salt, though little, but it is essential.

Individual Faith Communities

Mahatma Gandhi, while addressing a group of protestant missionaries, succinctly told them, “Let your life speak to us, even as the rose needs no speech, but simply spreads perfume. Even the blind who do not see the rose perceive its fragrance.... If the rose needs no agent, much less does the Gospel of Christ need any agent.... All I want them to do is to live Christian lives, not to annotate them. I have come to this view after a laborious and prayerful search.”⁸ Various communities strive to do their best to witness to Christ by involving in many activities. This can be done only by evolving a mystical fraternity and contemplative fraternity that translate into action with the neighbors, and they experience the love of God being manifested through the Christian community. “We are called to bear witness to a constantly new way of living together in fidelity to the Gospel... Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of community” (EG 92). For the Society of the Divine Word (SVD), *interculturality is part of our DNA*. This has been promoted over the years. This intercultural living must be authentic and intentionally promoted. By being intercultural community and doing intercultural mission, we become contrast communities so that others wonder, express wow, and being attracted to this community.

Institutional Witness

The church is more than a local community, whether Catholic or Anglican or Lutheran church, she is universal in nature and has both global structure and local structures—schools, hospitals, orphanages, etc. The witnesses of these institutions are powerful. The *All India Seminar on The Indian Church in the Struggle for a New Humanity* made a pertinent observation long ago: Her (the church’s) mission requires that she herself embody in her own life and structures the Kingdom values of freedom, fellowship, and justice. It also requires that she contributes to the promotion of those values in the ordering of society.⁹ Only in this embodiment, the church can stand out as an authentic witness. Hence, this has to be shown in action, not with pompous celebrations and mighty buildings, but working for the core values of liberation of the

⁸ M.K. Gandhi, *Harijan*, April 17, 1937, quoted by S. Devaraj, “Witness of Life: Our Mission Today,” *Sedos* 45, nos. 11-12 (2013): 255.

⁹ D.S. Amalorpavadoss, ed., *The Indian Church in the Struggle for a New Society* (Bangalore: NBCLC, 1981), 62.

people from injustice and caring for the poor and excluded. When institutions had tolerated sexual abuse cases or involved in corruption or not caring for the poor and vulnerable, we slam the door at the face of Jesus. We have been counter-witness in some places and now, it is time to regain our core value of institutional witness, and this has power to change, challenge and transform the world.

Common Witness

Common witness is that various Christian traditions come together and engage in effective missionary work in transforming the world. We have been talking about ecumenism for a long time; this has to be translated into action. At the Synod of Bishops on the *New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith* in 2012, the presence of the Patriarch of Constantinople, His Holiness Bartholomaios I, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, His Grace Rowan Williams, was a precious Christian witness (EG 25) of showing that we need to create more occasions like this. Pope Francis has taken a lot of initiatives to bring unity and promote ecumenism, but it has to percolate in the local level showing common witness. David Bosch had given this common witness as one of the paradigms of mission. He said, “we have to confess that the *loss of ecclesial unity is not just a vexation but a sin*. Unity is no optional extra. It is, in Christ, already a fact, a given. At the same time, it is a command: ‘Be one!’”¹⁰

From Everywhere for Everyone

The understanding of *missio Dei* today leads to broader perspectives. God has created everyone in his own image and likeness and God is the creator, father, mother, and protector and he accompanies everyone. He is the creator, and this drives us to recognize the revelation in Others—in other religions and cultures. The question is how to understand the work of God in the Other and recognition of God’s truth as revealed in the Other. Every religion or culture has a dark side in its history, including Christianity. Vatican II has affirmed, “the Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in the other religions, but respects the presence of grace, truth and holiness in other religions” (NA 2). It offered a positive description of the values found in Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism (NA 2-4). The Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conference

¹⁰ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 467.

(FABC 1974) said, “We accept them (other religions) as significant and positive elements in the economy of God’s design of salvation. In them we recognize and respect profound spiritual and ethical meanings and values. ... How then can we not give them reverence and honour? And how can we not acknowledge that God has drawn our peoples to Himself through them?”¹¹

Antonio Pernia emphasized, “Missions implies that we recognize the work of God in others as part of the *missio Dei* and enter into it.”¹² Pascal proposes to understand God in others, we need *hermeneutics of perception*.¹³ Perceiving the works of the Holy Spirit, perceiving the presence of Jesus Christ is a discovery that leads to affirm our commitment to the other. The Peter and Cornelius encounter in Acts 10 unravels the presence of the Spirit in others. To understand deeply of the presence of the Divine in others, Pascal says, “Engaging in the hermeneutics of perception in recognizing God’s work in the other will impact the way we respond to the other. As the Holy Spirit helped Peter to overcome cultural and theological barriers, may he also erase our exclusive mindset.”¹⁴

Mission is carried out today with others because of the recognition of God in others and the working of the Holy Spirit. The truth and holiness is found; thus, mission is not from Christians alone to witness to the truth, but together with others. Therefore, mission done with everyone enlarges the sphere for all the people. “Christian missions *with* the people express a new mission approach for our present-day pluralistic context. Inherent in this approach is the actual attempt to grasp God’s saving grace in the other – including the religious other – and simultaneously remain grounded in the truth which is wholly revealed in Jesus.”¹⁵ In this jubilee year, the challenge is to recognize the presence, power and actions of God being manifested through the Holy Spirit in other places, religions, and cultures. The risen Christ is present in all. How can we identify his presence and give glory?

Mission *ad gentes* is mostly identified with mission *ad extra*, out there; it is going out to the “pagan nations” or “pagan communities” or “not baptized people,” Recognizing the Divine and the Holy Spirit in others, Mission *inter gentes* broadens the understanding of mission and gives emphasis to dialogue *with* people, encounter *between* people, and finding a home *among* the

¹¹ FABC, *Statement of the Plenary Assembly of the FABC*, Taipei, 1974, nos. 14-15.

¹² See Antonio M. Pernia, “The State of Mission Today,” *Verbum SVD* 55, no.1 (2014): 20.

¹³ OFM International, “Recognizing God in the Other: Christian Missions with a Multi-religious World,” March 18, 2019, <https://omf.org/recognizing-god-in-the-other-christian-missions-with-a-multi-religious-world/>

¹⁴ OFM International, “Recognizing God in the Other.”

¹⁵ OFM International, “Recognizing God in the Other.”

people.¹⁶ Recognizing the goodness, truth and integrity in others, our mission cannot be of superiority complex, but we share the truth with others. This signifies a collaborative attitude of sharing or dialoguing with others. Thus, *from everywhere* signifies the power of the Divine from all. Christians too need to deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ and with humility we share the love that we experience, and others too share their divine experience. *For everyone* signifies whoever is lacking the thirst for the Divine, the experience of the love of God, the unfathomable mercy of God, Christians together with other religions and cultures show forth with certain actions bringing peace and harmony in the world. This serves as light dispelling the darkness. The reaching out, serving, and healing them signify as light of Christ.

Understanding the present realities, former superior general Fr. Heinz Kulüke, SVD said, “*Inter Gentes* was given preference over ‘*Ad Gentes*’ in order to emphasize that our way into the future can only be a way *with* and *among* the people... *Inter Gentes* is a reminder that our life as religious missionaries should be near to the people.”¹⁷ In this context, the religious communities promote interculturality, in its deeper implication, everyone has mission for others. Thus, recognition, respect and dignity are given to all peoples and cultures, and our mission is an invitation to do together towards building a joyful community. Over the years, the church has engaged in dialogue with states, cultures, sciences, and other religions (EG 238), but now, it sees the urgency as well as the intensity of doing mission in this way. The church no longer can think of building the reign of God on its own; it must always be invitational, relational, and nonviolent with the other.¹⁸ This is the way of realizing it.

Paradigms of Witnessing to the Light Among Everyone

The essence of the mission is to bear witness to Christ, that is, to his life, passion, death, and resurrection for the love of the Father and of humanity. This witness to Christ stands as bright light, not flickering light, shows the path with wider perception of the cultures, religions, and peoples because there is presence of Christ everywhere and in everyone. To be effective in this mission of bearing witness, the following paradigms are significant.

¹⁶ Pernia, “The State of Mission Today,” 15-17.

¹⁷ Society of the Divine Word, *Arnoldus Nota* (August – September 2013): 1.

¹⁸ Synthesis of IACM Conference on “*Missio Inter Gentes*: Challenges and Opportunities,” Kenya, July 15-21, 2013.

Kenotic Spirituality

Kenosis is emptying oneself and placing oneself at the feet of the Lord as a powerless person, and this enables the person to receive the power and strength of the Spirit. “(Jesus) emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men (Phil 2:7);” this portrays the submission to the Spirit. Kenotic spirituality is acquainted with the experience of God’s hiddenness, taking a posture of watching and prayer within the silence of God. Kenotic spirituality is to primarily identify with the crucified Christ; This involves suffering with him and embracing fellow human beings on the grounds of grace.

The kenotic virtues of compassion, hope, patience, and humility will conspicuously change one’s moral psychology (perceptions, inclinations, and sense of identity). An emerging kenotic ethic will prioritize fellowship with those who are different and radical solidarity with the suffering Other. It overcomes alienation of others by way of authentic relationships.¹⁹ “His/her approach to mission will be to share the faith as a gift received from God through others, conscious of himself or herself as merely its steward or servant and never its owner or master.”²⁰

When one lives a kenotic spirituality of intimate identification with the crucified Christ, it is likely that one’s inclinations to simply tolerate the other will die. The love of God dislodges us from our self-centeredness so that we may enter into the joys and sorrows of another. The virtues of compassion and hope would drive the person for impending action for anyone. He/she will not distinguish based on nationality, color, or religion. The divine in a person invites the Spirit-filled person for authentic relationship and attends to the immediate needs of the person. This serves as witness to Christ who emptied himself. This has mission of attraction because kenotic spirituality is a model of Christian discipleship.

Transformative Social Action

The church has been involved in charity or social work activities for many ages. It continues to do so. This is needed because of the context of certain places and countries. The question is whether charitable activities bring transformation into society. One of the critiques in India, Swami Agnivesh once told us in Pune, “I don’t like Mother Theresa, but I love Oscar Romero”

¹⁹ Kerry Kronberg, “Kenosis as a Spirituality and an Ethic: The Church and Secularity,” Saint Paul University, Canada, 2018.

²⁰ Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, eds., *Mission for the Twenty-First Century* (Chicago: The Center for Global Ministries, 2001), 19.

because of their approach to the people. Well, Mother Theresa was responding to certain context in which others were not doing—a kenotic spiritual action of compassion to the wounded, excluded and living in utter poverty. Oscar Romero, through his prophetic voice, aimed at transformative action of respect, dignity, and freedom for the people. Both are valuable, but what is needed according to the context of each country/place and how can we witness to Christ?

Transformative social action is key for witness today. Alleviating poverty would certainly fill empty stomachs and give the poor a better human condition. Charity is inevitably necessary, but moving from charity syndrome to social action, to affirmative planning and action are also necessary. Education, self-empowerment, and one's identity in the cultural sphere lead to social activism and social action. In these respects, addressing gender-based violence, gender inequality, and human rights concerns take a central stage.

Working for justice, creating an atmosphere of peace and joy among people, being with them in their suffering and pain, helping them to cast away the slave mentality and to assert their cultural identity are some of the ways of helping them out of their entrenched situation and making them more human. This transformation of the poor could be done by networking with other NGOs and with groups of similar mindsets from other religions and cultures. Thus, Christians and people of other faith can work together for an alternative society, giving testimony to people that God is alive, and his love is magnificent. Most importantly today, the poor have to be active participants in this transformative process. The planning, execution and evaluation are to be made together with the poor and marginalized people. "The Church needs passionate missionaries, enthusiastic about sharing true life" (*Gaudete et Exsultate* 138).

Social activists in mission have basically an implicit or personal faith and an explicit one of faith-in-action. Implicit faith requires that he/she be a believer and can grow in faith. Explicit faith makes a person live out his/her faith in relation with vulnerable people, with people of other faiths and work with others for the development of the people. When poor people and their situation are transformed, they experience the tangible love of God. Transformative social action *is mission* which calls for creative *ahimsa* (non-violence) and a radical compassion. It calls for a spirituality of authentic discipleship through active involvement, and a prophetic challenge to unjust structures.

Missionaries of Hope

Pope Francis said, while addressing the capitulars of the 19th SVD General Chapter, “You must be the hope for every culture. On the eve of the Jubilee Year, in this wounded world, our communities must become signs of hope.”²¹ Our union with Jesus give this hope in each of us. Paul describes Jesus Christ as “our hope” (1 Tim 1:1) and “the blessed hope” (Titus 2:13). Jesus not only came to bring hope, but he is also our hope. Jesus Christ is the hope of the world, but you must put your hope in him personally. To hope in Christ means recognizing and personally trusting him as God’s salvation. “By his (God’s) great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet 1:3). We have hope because Jesus forgives us and transforms us into his likeness. Knowing Jesus brings contentment regardless of our unworthiness and gives joy despite difficult circumstances.

David Bosch articulates “mission as action in hope” in his discussions of the many elements of the emerging ecumenical missionary paradigm.²² The theology of hope emerged in the 1960s. Its leading proponent was a German theologian, Jürgen Moltmann, who believed that God’s promise to act in the future is to be considered important. He urged the church to act in public life, and to participate actively in the world for a better future. “The Christian is to be regarded as a ‘hoper’ who is impatient with evil and death in this present age. This theology has had much influence and impact in the third-world churches.”²³ The mission of the church today is to be impatient with injustice, exploitation and suffering in the world and giving hope. The world order is slowly changing today. Some countries want to protect only their interest and close their eyes to the sufferings of their neighbors, to some extent, they even ill-treat others. Let us look at the sufferings of the Rohingyas in Myanmar, the Christians in Nigeria, the Muslims in Gaza, the civilians in D.R. Congo and Somalia, the migrants in Europe and United States and so forth. Giving hope is establishing justice, valuing human dignity and rights, giving respect, and finding solutions for better living.

The image of hope has been given by K. Koyama in his article, “The Happiness of Hope,” that God is the God who runs from the center to the periphery, thus transforming the periphery into the center and the God who turns the

²¹ *Faithful to the Word*, Documents of the 19th General Chapter SVD 2024, No. 6, 2024, 71.

²² 1 Bosch, *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 368-507.

²³ Thinandavha Derrick Mashau, “Mission as Action in Hope in the Context of White Poverty in Pretoria: A Case for Bethlehem Mission Centre in Pretoria West,” *Acta Theologica* 16, no. 1S (January 2009): 54–69, <https://doi.org/10.4314/actat.v32i1S.4>.

invisible into the visible. The disciples of Jesus, who lived through the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus, learned that, when God seems most absent, he is closer to all, and when God looks so powerless, he is most powerful. When God looks most dead, he is coming back to life. They had learnt never to count God out.

Pope Francis' Address at the Opening of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, 3 October 2018 was precisely giving hope to the youngsters, he said, "(Synod of Bishops is) to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another, and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands." This is exactly what our mission is, wherever we are, teach people to dream and find ways that their hope is being fulfilled.

The central theme of the Jubilee 2025 is "Pilgrims of Hope." This Jubilee invites all Catholics to embark on a journey of faith and transformation. This is a year of hope for a world suffering the impacts of war, the ongoing effects of COVID-19 pandemic, and the climate crisis. Pope Francis asserts, to hope is to begin again and again, to be united with Christ and find new ways of living. Here, to give this vitality to hope for is the role of the missionaries, thus our mission is not of doom, but of hope—a realistic hope.

Synodality – a Mission Approach

Synodality is not a question of being in fashion because everyone is talking about it in the church. If one executes it in real life, this is a game changer in our mission. Pope Francis says, "Synodality is essentially missionary and, vice versa, mission is always synodal." (Message for World Mission Day, 20 October 2024). Again, he reiterates to the SVDs, "to be missionaries of synodality."²⁴

The Document of the General Secretariat of the Synod: "How to be a synodal Church on mission?" says, "If the drive for mission is constitutive of the Church and marks every moment of her history, missionary challenges will change over time. An effort must, therefore, be made to discern those of today's world: if we fail to identify and respond to them, our proclamation will lose relevance and attractiveness. Rooted in this need is the focus on young people, on digital culture, and the need to involve the poor and marginalized in the synodal process..."²⁵ The depth of witness comes from this process of

²⁴ *Faithful to the Word*, No. 6, 2024, 72.

²⁵ Document of the General Secretariat of the Synod: "How to be a Synodal Church on Mission? Five Perspectives for Theological Exploration in View of the Second Session of the

synodal approach with the young, poor, and marginalized. Is the church ready for this?

The Final document of the Synod of Bishops on Synodality (2024) says that formation of candidates for ordained ministry should be undertaken in a synodal way. There should be enough representatives of women, ecumenical dimension, taking the concerns of digital age, human rights, integral ecology and culture of safeguarding in the church.²⁶ “The Church’s synodality, thus, becomes a social prophecy for today’s world, inspiring new paths in the political and economic spheres, as well as collaborating with all those who believe in fellowship and peace in an exchange of gifts with the world.”²⁷

The ultimate meaning of synodality is the witness that the church is called to give to God who sent his Son, expressing his love to the world. Witnessing to Christ entails that the life of the church becomes synodal. As missionaries, we are urged to be synodal—“missionaries of synodality.” We are called to listen, dialogue, and discern with the people. Then, our approach and lifestyle changes. Our way of formation, running a parish, working in social action or educational institutions and centers of retreat or counselling will change. Are we prepared for this? Or are we willing to change? Today, synodal must be part of life. What people experience today is that the church talks about synodality loudly, but on the ground, hardly any change has happened. Analyzing how the recent Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI 2025) was organized, the status quo was kept, nominal participation of women and laity, but being open to the media, involving more members of women and laity and listening to them were missing. The theme was “Discerning Synodal Paths for the Mission.” This should have included listening to the poor, other religions, and cultures. A collective discussion and discernment would have shown that the Indian church is true to its theme.

Promotion of Peace and Harmony with Other Religions

Inter-faith dialogue has been evolving over the years with better understanding of religions and thus our approach has been changing, but the doctrine has remained the same. The earlier approach for diversity of religions was, looking for commonalities to engage in dialogue and for certain actions. Pope Francis, in his *Fratelli Tutti* encyclical changes this perspective to focus

XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops,” 14.03.2024, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2024/03/14/240314g.html>

²⁶ *Final Document*, 148-151.

²⁷ *Final Document*, 153.

on common issues of humanity that needs attention today.²⁸ He says, “religious convictions about the sacred meaning of human life permit us to recognize the fundamental values of our common humanity, values in the name of which we can and must cooperate, build and dialogue, pardon and grow” (FT 283).

In a world where secularization is advancing more and more, “the only antidote to this is encounter and dialogue marked by friendship and respect between persons of different religious traditions.” This “can help us to overcome a further suspicious attitude which sadly we see increasingly in highly secularized societies, namely the suspicion or even hostility directed not only towards particular religious traditions, but toward the religious dimension as such,”²⁹ said Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle at Abu Dhabi on 4 February 2025.

Our mission from everywhere for everyone calls to the attention of *synodality with other religions*. This “takes expression in interfaith interaction and harmony among religious, national, and cultural communities.”³⁰ Here, religion will not be the center of life, but life will be the center of religion. Thus, listening, sharing, discussing, and discerning the Divine for harmonious living and promoting peace is the future. This is a mission paradigm from everywhere for everyone. Today people need peace and harmony; they suffer too much from an exclusive approach, ego-centered leadership, and parochialism.

In many countries, the religious fundamentalists create havoc, terrorize the Christians, use violence, and even kill many believers. This happens in North African countries, India, Indonesia and so forth. Religion is used as a political tool to gain power and alienate others at any cost. Human freedom and values are put under the carpet, but they thrive on political power which in turn holds on to social and economic power. Ideologies are created in such a way that suits their goal. Here, our mission is to witness to the Light by promoting peace and harmony from everywhere for everyone. The brighter we are in showing the Light with our approach, method, and life towards peace and harmony, the better we can succeed in building the reign of God. In this process, suffering and martyrdom are to be part of our missionary journey.

A Catholic-run hospital and a college in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, India have offered free meals to Hindu devotees as millions gather to attend the Kumbh Mela, dubbed the world’s largest religious gathering in

²⁸ Felix Wilfred, “Pope Francis and Interreligious Dialogue,” <https://books.google.it/books?hl=en&lr=&id=gWrwEAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA284&dq>

²⁹ Agenzia Fides, “SIA/UNITED ARAB EMIRATES - Cardinal Tagle: Dialogue as an Antidote to Distrust and Hostility towards the Religious Dimension,” *Fides News Agency*, February 4, 2025, <https://www.fides.org/en/news/75993>.

³⁰ M.D. Thomas, “Synodality with Other Religions,” *Vidyajyothi* 88, no. 3 (2024): 183.

February 2025.³¹ Christians working for refugees of Rohingya or civil war in Sudan are some of the examples of reaching out to them in need, this is charity that leads to respect for others. Peace and harmony come through relationships, friendship, and reaching out to those in need.

Being Prophetic Witness

Prophets' life speaks, inspires, and challenges others. They announce what God is saying to the people. They seek conversion of the people, protest evil deeds, sow dissent, and more importantly indicate a change or show an alternative way of life. They inaugurate a new path, a new movement, and a new society. Today, the church needs such prophets to protest evil and to show an alternative way of life. A prophet is a whistle-blower as he alerts people, and a sentinel. Prophets are friends of truth, friends of peace. "Apart from the difficulties and contradictions inherent in the prophet's mandate as a witness to the truth, he/she also appears as a torchbearer, a bearer of hope, the one who is the voice of the voiceless, the one who voices aloud what people are mumbling from fear of reprehension."³²

Being a prophet itself is a witness. Today prophetic witness stresses more in the context of being light and standing out in society where there is rampant injustice, conflicts, and wars. Through prophetic witness, one sees Jesus who liberated the people from the unjust customs, oppression, and sickness. His actions spoke louder than the words. People could not avoid his presence, his contact, and his message. Thus, as missionaries, being witness to Light calls us to be prophetic witness like Jesus.

Pier Luigi Maccalli, SMA was kidnapped in 2018, and he was in chains for two years; later he was liberated. His crime was being a missionary in Niger and Ivory Coast. He says, "my legs were chained, but not my heart." Being a witness in the conflict zones is challenging. Conflicts and wars are not synonymous. "One need not fear conflicts. One must fear violence and war and learn to disarm it. As an ex-hostage and a free man, I say and repeat: let us disarm the word! The word is the spark that ignites every conflict."³³ Prophetism comes from how we use our words, how we speak with one another. Jesus spoke kind words to the sinners, poor, and outcasts, and he spoke harsh

³¹ "Indian Catholics Lend Helping Hand to Kumbh Mela Pilgrims," *UCA News*, February 6, 2025, <https://www.ucanews.com/news/indian-catholics-lend-helping-hand-to-kumbh-mela-pilgrims/107801>.

³² Dieudonné Cardinal Nzapalainga, "Temoignage Prophetique pour la Communion Universelle Mission dans les Zones de Conflits et Guerison," *Sedos*, 56, nos. 9-10 (2024): 9-10.

³³ Pier Luigi Maccalli, "Mission in Conflict Zones and Healing," *Sedos*, 56, nos. 9-10 (2024): 33.

words to exploiters of the law and discriminated. His orientation was clear, sharing love of God with everyone but with prophetic witness.

For this, we need prophetic courage—standing for the truth, being with the exploited people, and raising the voice again unjust systems and structures. John the Baptist was a witness to the truth, could not say anything other than the truth contemplated, the truth encountered, the truth proclaimed as he indicated Jesus: “Behold, the Lamb of God” (Jn 1:29). This prophetic courage is like a bright light, and it comes only through personal conviction and sacrifice. Conviction comes through contemplation and union with Jesus.

In this jubilee year, prophetic courage and prophetic witness are powerful medium of pointing to others that the Divine is present, tangible, and active. Through our prophetic witness, they see Jesus in us, his thirst for justice and peace. Pope Francis said, “life only has value if we give it, if we give it in love, in truth, if we give it as “the sincere gift of self to others” in daily life (FT 87). This is the way of mission Jesus has shown us. In certain countries, the realities are different, violence dominates, and it destroys the people. Cardinal Dieudonné Nzapalainga, Metropolitan Archbishop of Bangui who has seen the violence in Central African Republic says, young boys are made military generals and handed over the guns to kill the enemies.³⁴ Being a missionary of prophetic courage and prophetic witness is a challenge, but it has to be our way of life not only in this jubilee year but for the future.

Conclusion

Many wonder why the SVDs took the theme of Light and from everywhere for everyone. The 2024 SVD General Chapter’s part of the theme was “‘Your Light Must Shine Before Others’ (Mt 5:16).” It gave the direction of *missio dei* and *missio lucis*, indicating how Mother Mary gave witness to the Light; thus, we too bear witness to the Light and this should be a powerful spark in carrying out God’s mission in this wounded world. We want to continue this approach in the coming years. Normally *from* is associated with *to*—a normal grammatical line, but with the understanding of there is the presence of Light everywhere and by recognizing this Light, we collaborate with those persons and exercise our mission. Thus, this cannot be *to* but *for* everyone, indicating everyone has Light and is capable of receiving more Light to be united with the one Divine, so that this Divine is glorified through life. This is a mission approach—a collective approach in this pluralistic world.

³⁴ Dieudonné, *Temoignage*, 11.