The Catholic Church in Bangladesh and its Mission of Integral Evangelization as Envisioned by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* and the FABC Documents

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Introduction

The Catholic Church in Bangladesh (CCB) is a missionary "little flock" striving to give a living witness to Jesus Christ in obedience to his command: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19-20). In spite of the many challenges that it faces as a local Church, it follows the path of renewed missionary evangelization in the life of the Church described by Pope Francis in Evangelii Gaudium when he said that "each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the peripheries in need of the light of the Gospel" *(Evangelii Gaudium 20).*

Following this vision of Pope Francis, integral evangelization in Bangladesh presupposes a thorough understanding of the theology of mission and evangelization. This article explores the biblical foundations and meaning as well as the Church's renewed understanding of mission and evangelization as expressed by the Second Vatican Council, the recent popes, and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences

(FABC). In summary, it identifies the principal elements of a contemporary understanding of integral evangelization and its potential application to the CCB.

Biblical Foundations of Mission

The common understanding of mission is the proclamation of the Gospel to all nations for human transformation and salvation as a way to advance the Reign of God. Its Latin root (*mittere*) corresponds to the word "send" in English; mission is also a Scriptural term. Biblical scholarship relates "mission" and "sending" to the equivalent Hebrew term *Shalach* and *Apostello* in both the Septuagint and Greek New Testament.[1]

The biblical foundation for the universal mission of the Church has been investigated by two prominent scholars, Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller. They note that "Mission is the God-given call to appreciate and share one's religious experience and insights, first within one's own community and tradition, and then with people and communities of other cultural, social, and religious traditions."[2] The Bible not only contains a rich idea of mission but also lays the foundation for the mission.

Old Testament

In the introduction of the book, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission,* Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller state that "the explicit mandate to bring the message of salvation to the ends of the earth is, of course, found only in the New Testament. But the roots of the Church's mission go deeper, even beyond the history of Jesus and the early Church. The

1 Joy Thomas, "The Evolution of the Concept of Mission in the Bible," *SEDOS Bulletin* 26:8 (September 1994): 239.

2 Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1983), 3.

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taproot of the Church's universal mission can be traced within the Old Testament."[3] Since the mission is *Missio Dei*, God himself is a missionary. He crosses the frontiers towards the world in creation with his Word and Spirit (Gen 1:2-3). However, the chosen people of Yahweh, the Israelites, were not sent across geographical, religious, or ethnic boundaries.[4] There is no indication of preachers being sent to a foreign land to proclaim the salvation of God. Israel was a rather ethnocentric people. They tended to be centripetal or inward (Gen 12:2-3, 9:25-27; Deut 7:1-2, 6-8) because they considered themselves a single elect people and never felt the need to include the non-elect for salvation.[5]

On the other hand, the prophets (2 Chr 24:19; Jer 7:25; Is 6:8f) would later affirm the idea that the Gentiles are part of the saving plan of God. In line with this, they felt the call of Yahweh, who was sending them on the mission. Thus, they became "missionaries," by their vocation of hearing and spreading the Word of God by preaching and writing, speaking boldly for the poor, and exercising God's justice on behalf of his people.[6] In the songs of the Suffering Servant, God said: "I will give you as a light to the nations that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth" (Is 49:6).

The Old Testament, however, does not contain "mission" in the sense of "sending" and going out to preach. The mission of Israel was centripetal[7] since Israel was not called to go to the nations on the mission, though the nations were permitted to come to Israel. "So, if there is a true missionary in the Old

3 Senior and Stuhlmueller, *Biblical Foundations for Mission,* 2.

4 David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 17.

5 Senior and Stuhlmueller, *Biblical Foundations for Mission,* 10.

6 Is 61:1 indicates "the anointed of God" as one sent by God to proclaim the good news to the poor.

7 Thomas, "Concept of Mission in the Bible," 241.

Testament, it is God himself who will, as his eschatological deed *par excellence,* bring the nations to Jerusalem to worship him there together with his covenant people."[8] Nonetheless, "mission" itself belongs to salvation history. "The action of God in the Old Alliance is essentially promise; what Israel experienced with God in history is open to the final fulfillment which is realized in Christ in the New Testament."[9]

New Testament

Born in an Israelite context and climate, Jesus takes upon himself the full realization of God's missionary plan in terms of the authentic Old Testament tradition.[10] The Old Testament is vital for understanding the mission in the New Testament, which is about the mission of Jesus and of the Church. By his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus overcomes all national, religious, ethnic, and geographical boundaries, paving the way for the universal mission.[11] Thus, the person and ministry of Jesus become the cornerstone of the Christian mission for every time and place.

Jesus declared that he was sent by the Father on mission (Jn 10:3). Likewise, he sent his disciples as the Father had sent him (Jn 20:21); he sent the twelve like sheep among wolves (Mt 10:16; Lk 10:3); and he sent the seventy-two disciples into all towns and places that he himself would visit (Lk 10:1). Evidently, Jesus' own mission in the world becomes the ultimate basis for the mission of the disciples (Jn 17:18).

Looking at his public ministry, however, it seems that Jesus continued the centripetal missionary orientation of Israel. He

8 Bosch, *Transforming Mission,* 19.

9 Karl Müller, *Mission Theology: An Introduction* (Druck: Steyle Press, 1987), 57.

10 Bosch, *Transforming Mission,* 20.

11 Bosch, *Transforming Mission,* 20.

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is not, at first, a missionary to the Gentiles, for as he himself declared, he is sent by the Father primarily for "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt 15:24). In a similar way, he limits the mission of the apostles to Israel (Mt 2:1-12; Jn 4:1-42; Acts 8:36). Nevertheless, Jesus' words and actions had a witness value among the Gentiles, and the miracles he performed extended to the Gentiles too (Mt 8:5-13; 15:21-22; Mk 7:24-30). Furthermore, the proclamation of God's reign, in particular, brings about eschatological salvation to all nations, including the Gentiles (Mt 8:10-11; 11:20-24; 25:31-32). Still, this universal vision of mission was fully understood and practiced by the disciples only after Jesus' death and resurrection.

Therefore, from an initially centripetal notion of Israel in the Old Testament, the mission shifted significantly to a more centrifugal notion in the New Testament. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, and especially in light of the descent of the Holy Spirit, Christ's mission was carried on by the early Christian community in a manner that would become totally universal.

The mission is accomplished through evangelization. In the New Testament, evangelization is about witnessing, teaching, preaching, proclaiming, baptizing, and much more.[12] From this, it can be understood that from the beginning, the Church was always aspiring to add newness to the task of evangelization. The New Testament is a book of mission and Jesus is the very first evangelizer.[13] A solid biblical foundation is necessary to get the proper meaning and theological understanding of mission and evangelization.

12 Jacques Dupuis, "Evangelization and Mission," in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology,* edited by Rene Latourelle and Rino Fisichella (New York: Crossroad Publication Company, 1994), 279.

13 Bosch, *Transforming Mission,* 18.

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Biblical Meaning of Evangelization

Evangelization is a relatively new word. The word "evangelization" is not found in the New Testament; however, *euangelion*, meaning "gospel" or "good news," occurs 72 times, 54 of which are in the Pauline corpus, and carries a wide range of meanings: the whole Christian message (Mk 1:1); the good news of Jesus (2 Cor 4:4); it is meant for all (Mk 13:10; 16:15); it is a revelation of God (Gal 1:11-12) which is to be believed (Mk 1:15) and proclaimed (1 Cor 9:14, 16, 18,). One must risk all for the Gospel (Mk 8:35; Rom 1:16), serve it (Rom 1:1, 15:16), and defend it (Phil 1:7, 16). *Euangelion* is the good news of truth (Gal 2:5, 14), of hope (Col 1:23), of peace (Eph 6:15), of immortality (2 Tim 1:10), of the risen Christ (1 Cor 15:1ff; 2 Tim 2:8), and of salvation (Eph 1:13). In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis also cites several New Testament passages that speak of joy and the Good News: rejoice (Lk 1:28, 47, 10:21, Jn 20:20, Acts 8:39, 16:34), joy (cf. Lk 1:41, Jn 3:29, 15:11, 16:20, Acts 8:8, 13:52).[14]

In light of this, evangelization can be "an all-inclusive term used to describe the entire range of activities by which the Church proclaims and communicates to the world the saving message of Jesus Christ."[15] This term, deriving from the Greek word *euangelion* (good news or gospel), denotes the entire process of making the good news known. Based on its biblical notion, the evangelizing mission of the Church cannot be reduced only to explicit proclamation but must be considered holistically, including proclamation, teaching,

14 James Kroeger, "New Evangelization Today: Exploring Key Themes and Asian Links," *Landas* 28:2 (2014): 79.

15 *Our Sunday Visitor's Catholic Encyclopedia,* s.v. "Evangelization," edited by Peter Stravinskas (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 1991), 376.

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baptism, witness, human promotion and liberation, and interreligious dialogue.

Meanwhile, the Greek word *euangelistos* means one who announces good news. Originally, the term referred to those who proclaimed the Gospel in apostolic days. For instance, Saint Paul called Timothy an evangelist (2 Tim 4:5).[16] Its modern terminological usage, however, is of Protestant origin in the nineteenth century and refers to the attempt to re-proclaim the Gospel to the Catholic population of southern Europe with the aim of converting them to Protestantism. Thus, the Catholic Church was reluctant to use the term for a long while. The Second Vatican Council, and especially Paul VI's apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi,* would make the term popular in the Catholic milieu.[17]

Church's Vision of Missionary Evangelization in the Vatican II Era

Vatican Council II Documents

One important goal of the Second Vatican Council was to open the Catholic Church to the whole world. Pope John XXIII wanted to "open the window" of the almost 2,000-year-old Church to the rapid changes happening in the modern world. This evangelizing and missionary emphasis is palpable in the council's final documents. Clearly, a unique shift has taken place in the Church's understanding of mission.

16 *Our Sunday Visitor's Catholic Encyclopedia,* s.v. "Evangelization," 376.

17 Karl Muller, "Missiology: An Introduction," in *Following Christ in Mission: A Foundational Course in Missiology,* edited by Sebastian Karotemprel and others (Pasay City, Metro Manila: Paulines Publications, 1996), 29.

Lumen Gentium sees the origin of the Church in the Trinity: "The Church has been seen as a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (LG 4). Participation through Baptism in the very life of the Trinity makes the Church "missionary by its very nature" (*Ad Gentes* 2, *Nostra Aetate* 2, and *Redemptoris Missio* 1, 4, 32, and 46, *Evangelii Gaudium* 179). This powerful emphasis on the Church's missionary nature as rooted in the Trinity also appears in the Decree on Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*. Reading the Council's documents from a missiological/ecclesiological perspective reveals just how central the mission was to the Council and its vision of the Church.[18]

The documents of Vatican II speak of evangelization in a variety of contexts: it is especially the bishops' task to promote evangelization by the faithful (cf. CD 6); it is associated with the mission of the laity (cf. AA 2, 6, 20, 26; LG 35); priests are to learn the methods of evangelization (cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 19); the Eucharist is the source and summit of all evangelization (cf. PO 5). The Decree on Mission (AG) is expectedly full of references: "the specific purpose of missionary activity is evangelization and the planting of the Church" (AG 6); "the Church has the obligation and the sacred right to evangelize" (AG 7); catechists have an important task to evangelize (AG 17), as do the laity (AG 21); the call to evangelize arises from a charism of the Spirit (23); various roles are fulfilled by missionary institutes (AG 27), by the *Propaganda Fidei* (AG 29), by the People of God (AG 35, 36), by bishops and priests (AG 38), by religious institutes (AG 40), and by young Churches (LG 17).[19]

18 Stephen Bevans, "Mission as the Nature of the Church: Developments in Catholic Ecclesiology," *Australian eJournal of Theology* 21:3 (December, 2014): 184.

19 James Kroeger, "To Live Is to Evangelize: Recent Popes and Integral Evangelization," *Landas* 16:1 (2002): 83.

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From all of these, it can be deduced that evangelizing mission is the work of the Holy Trinity extended to the Church, that is, to all the baptized everywhere and at any time in the world.

Pope Paul VI

Seeing the urgent need for evangelization, the 1974 Synod of Bishops reflected on "Evangelization of the Modern World." The post-apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN), authored by Paul VI, is the product of the Synod of Bishops which became the *Magna Carta* for Catholic evangelization. Without a doubt, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is one of the important ecclesial documents of the post-Vatican II era. The term "evangelization" was used in the Catholic Church through *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. As a witness to the enduring relevance of this landmark document, Pope Francis has quoted it thirteen times in his recent Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*.

Pope John Paul II

Saint Pope John Paul II (canonized April 27, 2014) is widely acclaimed as a missionary Pope whose pontificate extended over 26 years (1978-2005). James Kroeger notes that under this Pontiff's leadership, the papal ministry became primarily focused on evangelization and mission as he traveled to numerous countries, strengthened local Christian communities, encountered the followers of other religions, spoke on the social teaching of the Church, and so on.[20]

According to him, the missionary task is for all the faithful: "Since they are members of the Church by virtue of their Baptism, all Christians share responsibility for missionary activity" (RM 2, 77). In *Ecclesia in Asia,* he also expressed that

20 James Kroeger, "Saint John Paul II and *Redemptoris Missio,*" *East Asian Pastoral Review* 52:1 (2015): 26.

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the evangelizing mission of the Church can be accomplished only in obedience to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, who is the primary agent of the mission. Committed to being a genuine sign and instrument of the Spirit's action amidst the complex realities of Asia, the Church must discern, in all the diverse circumstances of the continent, the Spirit's call to witness to Jesus, the savior, in new and effective ways (cf. EA 18).

Pope Benedict XVI

In his message for World Mission Day in October 2011, Pope Benedict XVI noted that the Church has the urgent duty to proclaim the Gospel in new situations that require a correspondingly new evangelization. He stated clearly the scope of the mission of evangelization: The universal mission involves all, everywhere, and always.[21] Quoting John Paul II's *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (NMI 40), he anticipated that the new evangelization must rekindle three elements in Christians: the impetus of the origins of mission, a new missionary approach that involves all the members of the People of God, and a new apostolic outreach (New Evangelization *Lineamenta*, 24).

Pope Francis

Pope Francis brought fresh air into the Church's missionary work through his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, which he addressed to all Christians. In this document, the Pope invites all Christians "to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by joy" (EG 1) and underlined that "the heart of its message will always be the same: the God who revealed his immense love in the crucified and risen Christ" (EG 11). He re-emphasizes the imperative of evangelization

21 Kroeger, "New Evangelization Today," 77.

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for every baptized person, as previously affirmed in *Evangelii Nuntiandi:* All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization (cf. EG 19-24, 120). Thus, in continuity with his predecessors, he ushered in a new phase of evangelization.

Missionary activity today is a real challenge for the Church. Still, it must remain foremost as missionary pastoral ministry, which is a source of immense joy for the entire people of God. Missionary outreach is paradigmatic for all the Church's activity (cf. EG 15). Evangelization is not an isolated individual work but rather a communitarian activity. As such, while the mission is accepted by every baptized, it is always accomplished as a community. Therefore, communion and mission are interconnected. An evangelizing community acts by word and deed to touch and transform human lives. Pope Francis insists that evangelizers must have the "smell of the sheep" (EG 24) and underscores the involvement of evangelizers in people's lives.[22]

In this way, Pope Francis invites us to consider the life of the Church and her mission through the lens of missionary evangelization and to use that perspective to assess our ministries and activities today. All the integral elements of evangelization are also present in *Evangelii Gaudium* to bring transformation within the Church and the world with the joy of the Gospel.

FABC Perspectives on Evangelization

From its very beginnings, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) has been committed to evangelization from an Asian perspective. The first Plenary Assembly in 1974 had its theme: "Evangelization in Modern Day Asia." Its

22 Matthew, "*Evangelii Gaudium*: Pope Francis' *Magna Carta*."

deliberations and final statement reveal the urgency of the task of proclaiming Jesus to the Asian continent. The mission aims to share the Christian faith with our Asian brothers and sisters in answer to their many quests. Evangelization also seeks to offer dignity, freedom, and communion to all peoples (*For All the Peoples of Asia* I, 13). Moreover, "new evangelization" reflects on the new contexts, namely, the task of evangelizing consciences and cultures which challenge the Church today.[23]

Likewise, the special Synod on Asia held in Rome in 1998 with the theme, "Jesus Christ the Savior and His Mission of Love and Service in Asia, " explored this concept. It was an occasion to articulate the struggles and hopes of the Asian Church. Archbishop Tagle observed that the FABC's reflections gained recognition from the universal Church as the Synod endorsed the evangelizing perspectives of the FABC. The FABC reflections on evangelization were re-echoed in some of the 59 final propositions made by the Special Synod on Asia (1998):

> The need for an Asian approach to Church, theology, mission, etc. Acceptance of the triple dialogue with cultures, religions and the poor as a way of mission. The FABC focus on a "New way of Being Church" as a "communion of communities." Restraining from applying a uniform pattern of evangelization in Asia, yet, stressing on the centrality of Jesus as a savior. Emphasis on authentic witnessing and spirituality for evangelization. The missionary and evangelizing role of the laity with special focus on women, family, and the youth.[24]

23 Herve Carrier, "Evangelization and Mission," in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology,* edited by Rene Latourelle and Rino Fisichella (New York: Crossroad Publication Company, 1994), 286.

24 The Synod of Bishops for Asia, "The Synod's Propositions," in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries,* edited by Peter Phan (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 140-165.

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The mission of the Asian Church is to proclaim Christ. The vision is to give abundant life to her people (Jn 10:10) in Asia's multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious context. The Church of Asia seeks to respond to this call of new evangelization as a "whole People of God; the clergy and laity, as it acknowledges the unique role of the laity in evangelization,"[25] through the witness of lives in harmony with the message they preach (cf. EA 42).

The FABC's proclamation thrust is done through a triple dialogue: with religions, cultures, and the poor (FAPA I, 280). In line with the document on evangelization, *Evangelii Gaudium*, it identifies four clusters of crucial challenges: a) *Mission mindset* means to be transformed with a missionary focus and need to create awareness that we are permanently in a state of mission; b) *Mission-in-dialogue* challenges to accept, respect, and encounter other faith traditions as well as dialogue with the Church for mutual enrichment; c) *Formation of the laity,* especially children and youth; d) *Networking* among minority Churches to share effective ministries of mission (cf. FAPA 6, 144-145). At the same time, the FABC explores opportunities to implement in Asia the missionary vision of *Evangelii Gaudium*, from which the universal and local Church has received a fresh impetus for the renewal of the Church and the world by means of evangelization.

A Paradigm Shift

From here, we can appreciate how Vatican II signaled a paradigm shift in the theology of mission and evangelization. Theologians have contributed much in the field to eventually articulate a vision of mission and integral

25 The Synod of Bishops for Asia, "Message of the Synod of Bishops for Asia," in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries,* edited by Peter Phan (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 166-172.

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evangelization that embraces all people in the salvific plan of God. Looking through this paradigm shift in the theology of mission and evangelization, one can see how the focus of mission has shifted from "the missions" to "mission," from a Christomonistic understanding of salvation history to a more Trinitarian one, from the Church to the Reign of God, and from the implanting of the Church to integral evangelization.

Five Principal Elements of Integral Evangelization

1. Christian Presence and Witness of Life

The witness of the Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of integral evangelization (cf. RM 42; EN 21, 41 EG 13, 121, 174). Today too, people also prefer to listen to witnesses: they thirst for authenticity and call for evangelizers to speak of a God they know and are familiar with as if they were seeing him (cf. EG 150). Here and now, especially where we are a "little flock" (Lk12:32), the Lord's disciples are called to live as a community that is the salt of the earth and the light of the world (cf. Mt 5:13-16). We are called to bear witness to a constantly new way of living together in fidelity to the Gospel (cf. EG 92).

2. Commitment to Social Development and Human Liberation

A genuine service to humanity for harmonious coexistence is also essential to the evangelizing activities of the Church based on a mutual commitment to social development and human liberation. Observing the current reality of human society, Pope Francis dedicated the fourth chapter of *Evangelii Gaudium* to this social dimension, which consists of four parts: communal and societal implication of the *kerygma*,

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the inclusion of the poor in society, the common good, and peace in society, and dialogue as a contribution to peace. In line with this, he said that "… if the social dimension is not properly brought out, there is a constant risk of distorting the authentic and integral meaning of the mission of evangelization" (EG 176).

3. Interreligious Dialogue

Any effort initiated to establish and foster mutual understanding among peoples of different faiths on the basis of common grounds is called interfaith dialogue: a heartening sign of human fraternity and a promise of world peace and harmony. Pope Francis identifies dialogue as one of the elements of integral evangelization (EG 238). To promote full human development and the common good, he underlines three key areas for dialogue: (a) dialogue with states (cf. EG 240-241); (b) dialogue with society—including dialogue with cultures and the sciences (cf. EG 242-243); and (c) dialogue with other believers (cf. EG 244-258). The latter refers to interreligious dialogue—especially with Jews and Muslims—and dialogue with those who "do not consider themselves part of any religious tradition, yet seek truth, goodness, and beauty" (EG 257).

In the Asian context, looking back at the First FABC Plenary Assembly, Amaladoss comments that the Asian Bishops saw the mission as a dialogue with the threefold realities of Asia, namely its rich cultures, its ancient and great religions, and the poor: inculturation, interreligious dialogue,

and liberation.[26] For the FABC, dialogue is clearly "an integral part of evangelization" (BIMA II, 14).[27]

Dialogue with Cultures

Dialogue with cultures, as an essential component of missionary evangelization in the Church, can be understood as the process of inculturation. Pope Francis affirms: "Through inculturation, the Church introduces peoples, together with their cultures, into her own community, for every culture offers positive values and forms which can enrich the way the Gospel is preached, understood and lived" (EG 116). Asia is a cradle of many diverse cultures that contribute much to the richness of the Universal Church.

Indeed, as Christianity dwindles in traditionally Christian countries, it also thrives today in new frontiers, including some parts of Asia.

Dialogue with Religions

Asia is a religiously pluralistic continent where other religions are usually more dominant than Christianity. The mission is urgent and crucial in Asia. Dialogue with peoples of other faiths is indispensable for coexistence and fulfills the missionary plan of God. Dialogue with religions implies interreligious dialogue or interfaith dialogue. It means: "all the positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment, in obedience to truth and respect for freedom. It includes both witness and the exploration of respective religious convictions" (DP 9).

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26 Michael Amaladoss, "The Challenges of Mission Today," in *Trends in Mission: Toward the Third Millennium,* edited by William Jenkinson and Helene O'Sullivan (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 362.

27 FAPA I, 100.

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Pope Francis asserts that "Evangelization and interreligious dialogue, far from being opposed, mutually support and nourish one another…. In this dialogue, ever friendly and sincere, attention must always be paid to the essential bond between dialogue and proclamation, which leads the Church to maintain and intensify her relationship with Non-Christians" (EG 251). "Interreligious dialogue is a necessary condition for peace in the world, and so it is a duty for Christians as well as other religious communities" (EG 250).

In Asia, where less than three percent of the population is Christian, the Church actively promotes interfaith relations. "It is therefore important for the Church in Asia to provide suitable models of interreligious dialogue—evangelization in dialogue and dialogue for evangelization—and suitable training for those involved" (EA 31).

4. Explicit Gospel Proclamation and Catechesis

Proclamation is always the primary concern in the missionary evangelization of the Church. Kroeger explains proclamation with the following words: "In mission and evangelization today, there is the role of explicit Gospel proclamation and catechesis. This dimension of evangelization includes preaching, catechesis of Christian life, teaching the content of faith; in a word, this means 'telling the Jesus story'."[28] He adds that "through proclamation, Christians themselves are further instructed in their faith; this is the process through which the Christian faith is communicated to the next generation of believers" (cf. RM 44-51; EN 22, 27, 42; EG 3, 12, 24, 110-111, 246).[29]

Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* shows the primacy of this element as he states that "there can be no true

28 Kroeger, "*Redemptoris Missio,*" 36.
29 Kroeger, "*Redemptoris Missio,*" 36.

evangelization without the explicit proclamation of Jesus as Lord, and without the primacy of the proclamation of Jesus Christ in all evangelizing work" (EG 110).

5. Liturgical Life, Prayer, and Contemplation

Integral evangelization includes liturgical life, prayer, and contemplation; they are the natural fruit of the proclamation of the Gospel. This implies the continuing growth of the faithful in holiness and spirituality integrated with the scriptures, the sacraments, and prayer life. Spirit-filled evangelization is one that is guided by the Holy Spirit, who comes to renew the Church, to stir and impel her to go forth boldly to evangelize all peoples (cf. EG 261).

Pope Francis also emphasizes that Spirit-filled evangelizers are people of prayer and deed. In addition, he recommends that without adoration and prayerful encounter with the Word, as well as dialogue with the Lord, our work easily becomes insignificant. Thus, the Church must pray, study the Bible, and spend time in adoration of the Eucharist in order to grow in faith (cf. EG 262). Prayer and contemplation are essential for missionaries as they venture to all the nations to proclaim the Gospel. Through prayer-sacramental-liturgical worship, the Church is granted God's abundant love and grace. The love and grace push the Church to participate in God's mission, evangelize the world, and share the Trinitarian love with all creation.

Implementation of Integral Evangelization in Bangladesh

Thus far, we have identified the five key elements of integral evangelization based on its biblical foundations articulated by the Second Vatican Council, by recent popes, and by the FABC. We will now strive to apply what we have drawn

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out in this paper as we see to connect doctrine and experience and integrate theological insights and pastoral praxis in the particular context of the Church in Asia, specifically of the Local Church in Bangladesh.

Renewal of Integral Evangelization in the Local Church

Renewal of faith brings about renewal in mission and integral evangelization in the Church. To renew is to return to the source and embark with freshness and innovation by studying the signs of the times. It also enriches mission and integral evangelization. The letter to the Romans calls for renewal: "Do not conform yourself to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good, pleasing and perfect" (Rom 12:2).

Cardinal Tagle explains the New Testament root of renewal: "We learn that the renewal of the world and of humanity is a gift that has already been offered by the Triune God, thanks to the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The renewal of the world and humanity is the fruit of *missio Dei*" (*FABC Papers 91* [2000], 4). Following the Trinitarian theology of mission and renewal found in Vatican II, Pope Francis states that: "Whenever we make an effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today's world. Every form of authentic evangelization is always new" (EG 11). Hence, renewal in integral evangelization will bring about a corresponding transformation in the local Church and society.

Through the years, the CCB has been engaged in evangelization based on an older concept of the Church's mission.

This older concept was often restricted to "explicit Gospel proclamation and sacramental life" as constitutive of the mission. Other aspects, such as social justice, interfaith dialogue, peace-building, education and health care, life witness, etc., were "preparatory" to evangelization.[30] Thus, it appears that approaches to mission and evangelization taken by the Church in Bangladesh are frequently and largely focused on preaching and catechesis, baptism of converts, and the administration of sacraments.

The CCB continued to practice the three elements of integral evangelization: presence and witness of life, explicit Gospel proclamation and catechesis, and liturgical life, prayer, and contemplation. Likewise, it has also carried out noteworthy elements of human development and liberation like education as well as medical and charitable work, but only as preparatory areas for evangelization. Meanwhile, the inter-religious dialogue aspect was neglected and often ignored by pastors. Therefore, in addition to the older vision and evangelization strategies, the local Church in Bangladesh today needs a paradigm shift to renew herself with a new, holistic and integral view of evangelization, with a corresponding updating in terms of approaches and activities. To promote this and make efforts on the mission and integral evangelization, the CCB must engage in self-renewal in accordance with the documents of Vatican II, EN, DM, RM, DP, and the missionary vision of Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*.

Transformation among the Agents of Evangelization

The People of God are all agents of evangelization in the contemporary world. They are composed of professionals (bishops, priests, religious men and women, catechists,

30 James Kroeger, "The Mission Vision of Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi,*" *Vidyajyoti* 78 (2014): 52.

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religious educators) and non-professional workers of the mission. In light of this, it is impossible to truly attain integral evangelization without genuine transformation among the agents of evangelization first. While it is the bishop's role to promote, to direct, to coordinate missionary activity" (AG 30), the work of evangelization is a basic duty of the entire People of God. All are invited to a deep interior renewal, so having an awareness of their own responsibility for spreading the Gospel, they may contribute to the work of mission among the nations (cf. AG 35).

Pope Francis affirms the Trinitarian foundation of mission and evangelization and notes that "Jesus is the 'first and greatest evangelizer.' Therefore, in every activity of evangelization, the primacy always belongs to God, who calls us to cooperate with him and who leads us on by the power of his Spirit" (EG 12). He adds that "All the baptized … are agents of evangelization…. Every Christian is a missionary … [who has] encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus; we no longer say that we are 'disciples' and 'missionaries,' but always 'missionary disciples'" (EG 120). All the baptized need to be renewed in their self-understanding as agents of evangelization.

Courageous Christian Presence and Witness

The Risen Lord said to his disciples, "You are witnesses of these things" (Lk 24:48) and he added, "And you also testify, because you have been with me from the beginning" (Jn 15:27). Christian presence and witness are the first and irreplaceable form of evangelization. Today, people prefer to listen to witnesses: they thirst for authenticity and call for evangelizers to speak of a God they themselves know and are familiar with as if they were seeing him (cf. EG 150).

The CCB is a witnessing community. To live as a Christian, one has to be a courageous witness to the Gospel. One of the pastoral priorities identified in the PPCB (1985) is formation, and one goal of formation is witness of life, especially given the multi-cultural-religious reality in the country. Formation leads to witness of life. There are many ways to proclaim the Good News to the people of Bangladesh, but the CCB chooses the method of "witness of life — silent proclamation in announcing the Good News of Christ."[31] This method is both sound and efficacious and the beginning of all evangelization (cf. EN 21).

Pastoral Workers for Explicit Proclamation

The explicit proclamation of the Gospel is the fourth and central dimension of integral evangelization. Proclamation is always a main concern in the missionary evangelization of the Church. This explicit proclamation is both verbal and non-verbal. Among Christians, explicit verbal proclamation is more effective, while among people of other religions, non-verbal proclamation is possible through attraction but not proselytizing (cf. EG 15). An attractive Christian living presence is the way of Jesus Christ to offer salvation to all.

Pastoral workers are the primary and professional agents of explicit proclamation. They are responsible for the effective communication of the Good News, first to Christians and afterward to all people in Bangladesh. It is definitely very challenging for them in the context of Bangladesh, where the majority of the population is composed of followers of other religions. Christians are only a tiny group of people among the poor and large population where injustice is all around. At times, they also tend to stay in their comfort zone. Facing the

31 Marcello Storgato, "Remarks on the Church Vis-à-vis Her Mission and Bangladesh Society," *Prodipon* 9:1-2 (1986): 109.

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challenging situation, they need an encounter with the Lord Jesus to be renewed and steadfast in the proclamation. They need to go out to the peripheries as Pope Francis directs: "I prefer a Church [pastoral workers] which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and clinging to its security" (EG 49).

Dialogue in a Multi-Cultural and Religious Context

The third dimension of integral evangelization is "Interreligious Dialogue." Dialogue is an important and necessary attitude on all levels in the Church today. To carry out the mission of evangelization, local Churches have to identify situations where they are called to respond to the invitation of God through prophetic dialogue with the poor, with people of different cultures, as well as those of other religious traditions. In this sense, the "triple-dialogue" advocated by the FABC in Asia is truly relevant to the particular context of the local Church in Bangladesh. "In the Asian situation, the three paths of mission, namely, proclamation, dialogue, and human promotion, are fulfilled in the 'triple dialogue' with cultures, religions and the poor" (*FABC Papers 90* [2000], 4). James Kroeger notes: "No evangelization will be lasting and fruitful if it does not travel the path of this threefold dialogue."[32]

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis emphasizes dialogue as an element of integral evangelization. For him, "dialogue is much more than the communication of a truth. It arises from the enjoyment of speaking, and it enriches those who express their love for one another through the medium of words" (EG 142). Evangelization also involves the path of dialogue. It is

32 James Kroeger, *Living Mission: Challenges in Evangelization Today* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publication, 1994), 68.

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one of the most applicable and suitable elements of evangelization in the context of Bangladesh. Despite the many challenges confronting it, the CCB has to engage in evangelizing dialogue with cultures and religious traditions by keeping its eyes fixed on Jesus.

Promotion of Unity, Peace and Justice

"Human Development and Liberation" is the second dimension of integral evangelization. The social dimension of evangelization is a large concern in the universal and local Church. Both spiritual and social aspects of human life constantly seek total human development and liberation. In a world marred by division, war, injustice, oppression, misery, people are hungry for unity, peace, harmony, and justice. As such, the people of Bangladesh have been persistently fighting against the evils of its current society. The Church is in the world and for the world, it shares with humanity its historical condition. Therefore, the Church seeks to enter the world and participate in the service of society to transform the world.

With a renewed spirit for effective evangelization in the service of humanity, the CCB needs to form people's social and apostolic conscience, namely, to practice the social doctrine of the Church. Pope Paul IV (EN), Pope John Paul II (RM), and Pope Francis (EG) all recognized the social dimension of evangelization and have given guidance for the transformation of humanity and society through their teachings. Pope Francis has dedicated chapter IV of *Evangelii Gaudium* to the social dimension of evangelization. Among these social aspects, the promotion of unity, peace and justice is urgently needed in the world and certainly necessary in the situation of Bangladesh.

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Although the CCB has many achievements and is very active in the social dimension of evangelization, this is not sufficient in comparison to the large population of Bangladesh. Therefore, all Christians on the personal and community level also need to engage in "social" missionary evangelization.

Inclusion of the Poor in Human Liberation

Integral evangelization of the Church will never be complete if poor people are excluded from the schema of the mission. The poor have always been included and are considered in the scripture and teaching of the Church because the salvific plan of God is to liberate and redeem humanity. Jesus proclaims his mission to bring Good News to the poor and oppressed (Lk 4:16-21). Following the Word of God from the very beginning, the Church hears the cry of the poor and continuously strives to be the shelter of the poor in her missionary journey so that the mission of Jesus might be accomplished for the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Based on the renewed teaching of Vatican II and recent Popes (Paul IV, John Paul II, and Francis), the Church has emphasized human development and liberation from poverty and all oppressive situations. A major part of the mission is the social dimension of evangelization that remarkably points to the inclusion of the poor. For Pope Francis, "Inclusion of the Poor in Society" is one of the four parts of the social dimension of evangelization, which he elaborates at length in *Evangelii Gaudium* (cf. EG 186-208).

The CCB is a community of the poor. At the same time, she works from her very existence for the poor to liberate them from all oppressive structures. In 1985 the CBCB identified "preferential love for the poor" as one of the priorities

in its pastoral plan. At present, the CCB continues the work of human liberation among the poor, regardless of religion.

Necessity of Care for the Environment

Care for the Environment is a vital issue in the world as well as in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is one of the countries most affected by climate change and global warming. This country has been called the "ground zero" of climate change. Both human life and nature in Bangladesh are under an alarming threat of damnation. The whole country has been suffering from floods, drought, cyclones, storms, salinity intrusion, and extreme temperatures each year. This is a clear warning to have special care for creation. Scripture says that God made the heavens and the earth, and it was good (cf. Gen 1:1-31). Humans are commanded to care for God's creation (cf. Gen 2:15). Recognizing the love of God, both in and for creation, all people have the duty to love and care for the world as God loves and cares for all his creation (cf. Mt 6:25-34).

Unfortunately, while all people in Bangladesh are victims of climate change, few are aware and conscious of the need to love and care for creation. In many ways, people, knowingly or not, participate in the destruction of nature, e.g., deforestation, pollution, soil degradation, erosion, and so on. Thus, the ecological issue is indeed a challenge in Bangladesh and the Catholic Church can play an important role in restoring our common home.

Social Communication and Contemporary Evangelization

Social communication is one of the pivotal factors in today's world through which people relate to one another. In this age of globalization, the influence and necessity of social

communication are extremely strong; without it, the exchange of education and information is almost impossible. People have benefited from this in their individual, family, and social life. The very purpose of communication is to create unity, harmony, union, and an understanding community. No one can remain closed up in oneself. Communication brings the meaning and connection that we need as social beings.

In line with this, the basic charism of the Church is to be a missionary, to communicate with Jesus who is the Father's communication to the world. Communication is a basic medium for evangelization to carry the message of Christ to the whole universe until the end of time, leading to its eternal fulfillment.[33] Thus, to enhance the work of evangelization in Bangladesh, the Church has to develop its mass media and social communication systems. In the country, many people still lack access to contemporary social communication. Christians have to become channels of communication by networking in the mission of evangelization. Therefore, training is essential for Christians to be skillful in using the modern tools of communication and discerning against various forms of deceit and manipulation rampant today, such as fake news. For instance, it would be desirable to establish a communication and media center in every diocese in Bangladesh.

Liturgical Life, Prayer, Contemplation, and Holiness

The last dimension of integral evangelization is "Liturgical Life, Prayer, and Contemplation." These three are the natural result of explicit Gospel proclamation and are essential to the

33 Joseph Nycy, "Social Communication and Evangelization," Unpublished paper, (Mawlai, Shillong: Sacred Heart Theological College, March 2015), https://dannysteve.wordpress.com/2015/06/05/social-communication-and-evangelization/ (accessed July 11, 2018).

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mission. The new converts need to be nourished constantly by God's grace and love which is given through prayer and sacramental-liturgical life. A prayerful liturgical and contemplative life leads both the evangelizers and the converts into a mature, spiritual, and holy life in Christ. It also sparks a zealous fire for the faithful to devote themselves to the continuation of Christ's mission of evangelization, which is to lead humanity to holiness. As Jesus says, "Be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 6:16). Without holiness or perfection of life, the mission of evangelization becomes meaningless and separated from the salvific plan of God.

Since Christianity came to Bangladesh soil, liturgical life, prayer, contemplation, and holiness have been a usual part of the missionary activities of the CCB. Unfortunately, it often follows a pre-Vatican II style. Prayers frequently appear to be oral recitation, sacramental practices stress *ex opere operato* and lack transforming effects for the moral life of the People of God. Likewise, liturgy, at times, seems to be a routine and mechanical performance that lacks dynamism and indigenization. To address these problems, the CCB needs to promote a renewal of prayer, contemplative life, and sacramental-liturgical reform.

In line with this, the integration of Catholic feasts and celebrations with Bangladeshi traditional festivals and rites can be an innovative opportunity for sacramental-liturgical reform. The CCB has to go through these spiritual exercises to implement integral evangelization, and by doing so, she can transform her current challenges and difficulties into evangelizing power and pastoral inspiration in order to progress in genuine transformation that will lead to a dynamic missionary local Church in Bangladesh.

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Pope Francis' Missionary Vision in *Evangelii Gaudium*

Going deep into the very moving document, *Evangelii Gaudium*, one can affirm that the "missionary outreach is paradigmatic for all the Church's activity…. We need to move 'from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry'" (EG 15). Evangelization is the central theme of the apostolic exhortation, encompassing all other themes in the universal and local Church. As Pope Francis emphatically exhorts us, "Throughout the world, let us be 'permanently in a state of mission'" (EG 25).

Firstly, the multifaceted "culture of encounter" with Lord Jesus Christ (cf. EG 1, 3) is a significant and convincing insight for integral evangelization. As Pope Francis notes, "If we are not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully: 'We have found the Messiah!'" (Jn 1:41; EG 120). Secondly, a unique and pivotal insight of his is the baptismal missionary discipleship (cf. EG 24, 40, 50, 120, 173) of the Christian faithful who are all entrusted with missionary responsibility. Missionary discipleship will inspire the Church and motivate the laity to become more involved in the Church's mission because "missionary disciples accompany missionary disciples" (EG 173). Thirdly, the proclamation of the Gospel with joy is a powerful learning experience in this age of scientific and technological advancement. Evangelizers must be courageous, committed, genuine, honest, and joyful to counteract many individual and social evils as they seek to establish the Kingdom of God. Lastly, Pope Francis' vision for the renewal and transformation of the Church and society is a brave insight.

In this sense, the key missionary insights in *EG* are certainly relevant to the Church in Asia and to the local Church and society of Bangladesh in particular. This document is kindred with the FABC's "ground up" or "emerging from below" pastoral-missionary praxis.[34] The triple-dialogue of the FABC receives attention in *EG*. In view of these insights, the Catholic Church in Bangladesh should foster missionary outreach with the help of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of Mary, the Mother and Star of Evangelization.

The Catholic Church in Bangladesh and Integral Evangelization

Bangladesh is a vast and fertile mission field where the CCB can implement all elements of integral evangelization in order to bear much fruit. Although it may be "small" in relation to the population of the country and considering the difficult challenges that it confronts, the renewal of its efforts in terms of mission and evangelization bears much promise in the service of God's Kingdom, like the proverbial mustard seed in the Gospel. This innovative vision of evangelization incredibly widens the scope of mission and evangelization. Integral evangelization is a total and practical approach for the CCB to bring salvation to all the people of Bangladesh.

Conclusion

The documents of Vatican II, the recent Popes, and the FABC from an Asian perspective all hold a sound and renewed concept of the missionary nature of the Church with all her

34 James Kroeger, "Always Alert to God's Signs: Exploring the Vision of *Evangelii Gaudium*," in *Evangelii Gaudium: Voices of the Universal Church,* edited by Klaus Kramer and Klaus Vellguth (Quezon City, Philippines: Claret Publishing Group, 2015), 94.

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members as evangelizers (cf. AG 2). For Pope Francis, all baptized members are "missionary disciples" by virtue of their baptism. These are further developed in *Evangelii Gaudium* in its Trinitarian, Christological, Pneumatological, Ecclesial, and Missiological aspects. Nevertheless, these insights need action in order to empower and engage all members of the Church for integral evangelization.

The foundation of faith enables the faithful to proclaim the Gospel with joy. Considering the life of faith and mission, it can be said that there is much hope and many possibilities for the "little flock" of Bangladesh. Under the dedicated leadership of its shepherds, the Church has progressed in many ways. Today, the CCB continues to strengthen the faith of her people and enables them to translate that faith into action. The growth and maturity of the Church are obvious in her commitments and missionary-pastoral ministries. Nonetheless, there are also many avenues and opportunities for growth and renewal in the various aspects of evangelization.