



# CCA NEWS



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CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE OF ASIA • ASIA MISSION CONFERENCE • DIAMOND JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS

## Churches mull mission and prophetic witness to the truth and light in Asia

**Churches in Asia come together in a common obedience of witness to God's mission in the world.**

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## Christians do not have the monopoly of God's mission:

*Mathews George Chunakara*

The theme chosen for the AMC 2017, "Journeying Together Prophetic Witness to the Truth and Light in Asia," resonates with the contemporary situation in Asia and in the world. As the world faces with more grave realities, the theme will be an helpful indicator for reflecting on the Christian witness in the midst of adverse realities.

Every moment we are made to understand, realize and recognize that Christians do not have the monopoly of God's mission. This conviction humbles us to understand ourselves as people of God in the midst of peoples of God in Asia.

What is the nature and goal of Christian mission in contemporary situation? What are the directions with which we continue our Christian witness are the questions that we need to address in emerging in Asian context.

The Asian Mission Conference organized by CCA is our humble efforts to come together in a common platform to contemplate and dialogue with each other on mission and witness of churches in Asia.



**CCA General Secretary Dr. Mathews George Chunakara in his welcome address to Asia Mission Conference, which opened October 12th, urged Asian Churches to remain grounded on missions while journeying together.**

The opening service of the mission conference, led by a group of Asian ethno musicologist and liturgists, included moving litanies of prayers, lamentations, cries and hopes from the churches in different corners of Asia. An Indonesian dance troupe from the Jakarta Theological seminary presented a performance during the worship service.

Attended by more than 600 registered delegates and participants representing CCA member churches and councils as well as representatives of ecumenical organisations and mission partners, the weeklong AMC will focus on the theme, 'Journeying Together: Prophetic Witness to the Truth and Light in Asia'.

Archbishop Willem T.P. Simarmata, moderator of CCA in his opening address spoke about the challenges Asia and Asian churches face today, and he called for 'Asian churches' participation in God's mission and prophetic witness.

In his introductory address CCA General Secretary Dr. Mathews George Chunakara stated that every moment we realize and recognize that Christians do not have the monopoly of God's mission. What we experience today is a mission in the midst of missions. Several Asian countries have become missionary battlefield and experiencing aggressive missionary evangelism. This situation urges us to be seriously and constantly



**"The AMC organised by the CCA is a humble effort for Asian churches to come together in a common platform to contemplate and dialogue with each other."**  
- CCA General Secretary  
**Dr Mathews George Chunakara.**



**From left: Rev. Dr. Yam Kho Pau of the Myanmar Baptist Convention, Patrick Laing Tone, President of the Myanmar Council of Churches, Rev. Grace Moon, CCA, Archbishop Willem T.P. Simarmata, moderator of CCA & Vice Moderator Rev. Diana Tana.**

engaged in reflecting on God's mission in this world.

The CCA General Secretary added that "the AMC organised by the CCA is a humble effort for Asian churches to come together in a common platform to contemplate and dialogue with each other on mission and witness of churches in Asia. He added that "this is an integral component of the life and witness of the Asian

ecumenical movement."

Mathews George expressed deep appreciation and thanks to the Myanmar Churches for their gracious hospitality and welcome.

Vice Moderator Rev. Diana Tana, in her homily at the

opening service said, the future of the Christian mission in Asia, asking, "What does the Lord require?" She emphasized the need for partnership to find the new right path and the importance of listening to God's voice for the challenges ahead and for liberation from oppression.

Describing what true partnership in mission entails, she said, "Heading in the same direction, sharing equal responsibilities, listening to each other and respect for each other's abilities."

Representing the host committee leadership, Patrick Laing Tone, President of the Myanmar Council of Churches, and Rev. Dr. Pau of the Myanmar Baptist Convention welcomed delegates and participants to the AMC and the Diamond Jubilee celebrations of CCA.



## Pomp and pageantry with drums, cymbals and songs at opening

The day dawned bright and clear as opposed to the thundershowers and rain-drenched streets on October 11 – a good omen for CCA's and the ecumenical movement's bright days ahead.

The delegates were taken from their respective hotels to the Franc auditorium in Yangon in chartered buses from 8 a.m. onwards. The opening worship began at 8.30 a.m. with a procession carrying cross, candles, banners and symbols of Asian churches. Giving thanks and praises for God's marvellous works, the worship leader celebrated God for inspiring churches in Asia to affirm that they belong together.

Drums, cymbals and beautiful hymns filled the air – from mystic Bamboo Song to Siyahamba of South Africa, it was melodious to hear them in between prayers. A statement of the challenging issues in Asia was read aloud. A candlelight procession to the stage and an Indonesian dance were delightful to watch.

Rev. Diana Tana, Vice Moderator of CCA, gave the sermon. The Lord's Prayer in respective mother tongues by those gathered was followed by the theme song "Follow Christ, walk in the light". The people dedicated themselves to carry the Cross, journeying with the struggling people to witness to the Word in faith; to carry the True Light to dispel darkness and to give hope to people in the midst of hopelessness.

# Carrying the True Light



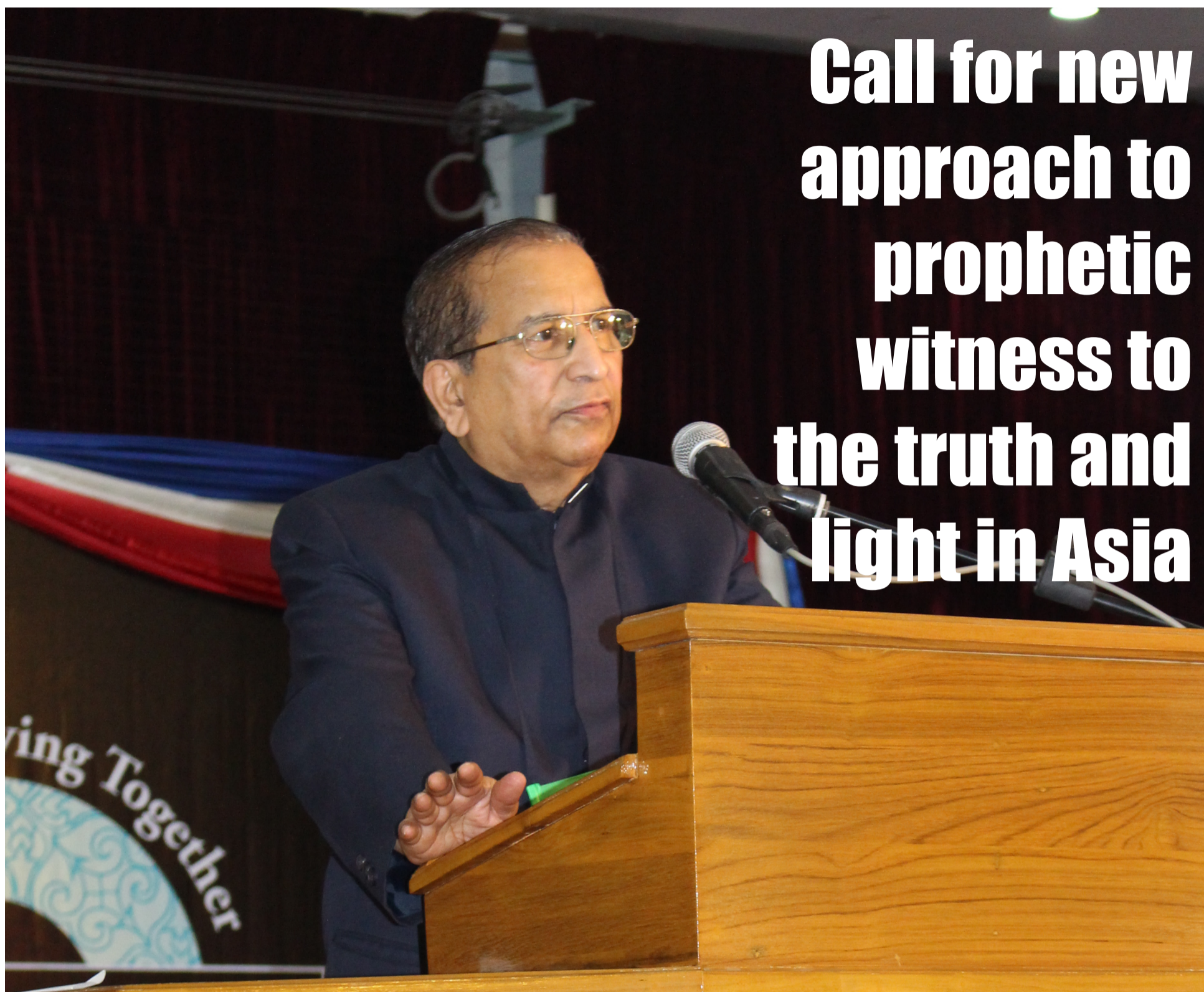
## Christian unity and cultural identity important for Asia

"In Asia's multi-religious context - the Asian reality being unique and different from the European context - our culture, identity, and Christian unity is important and we should be able to give a unified testimony. In the complex situation of poverty and religious pluralism, our churches should stand together. This is a theological necessity and an existential need. There is a historical significance when an event of this scale is being held in Myanmar. It will give a message to the whole world."

**- Dr. Kuraiyose Theophilose Metropolitan, Prof. & Resident Metropolitan of The Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kerala, India.**



# Call for new approach to prophetic witness to the truth and light in Asia



**Rev. Dr. Wesley Ariarajah says churches in Asia need to bear witness to the truth based on favouring equality among all people.**

**C**hristian Conference of Asia [CCA] Moderator and Archbishop Batak Protestant Christian Church in Indonesia Willem T P Simarmata formally opened the Asia Mission Conference 2017 on October 12. The keynote of the conference's theme 'Journeying Together: Prophetic Witness to the Truth and Light in Asia' gave momentum to discussions on mission work on the first day.

Keynote speaker Rev. Dr. Wesley Ariarajah, Professor Emeritus of Theology, Drew University and former Deputy General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, shared his thoughts on the theme and the challenges it raises for churches in Asia and their mission.

In his discussion, he addressed the conference theme and identified four key elements - 'Truth,' 'Light,' 'Prophetic Witness,' and 'Journeying Together' - that constitute it. He said churches in Asia need to bear witness to the truth based on favouring equality among all peoples, being responsible for each other, fighting inequalities and injustices and protecting all creation. Christians in Asia in order to be the 'light of the world' must be able to let their light shine before others, "so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." It is only through their lives as Christians and faithful disciples of Christ that they can

show others how to "walk in the light."

He also called on Asian churches to join hands and 'journey together' so that they can truly become prophetic witnesses amidst issues and problems that "tear our communities apart and stand in the way of the fullness of life that God intends for all." He noted that CCA and its members are no strangers to prophetic witness as it has been playing this role and calling for justice and peace, respect for the rights of people especially women and children, just social development, and the practice of non-violence as part of the ministry of the ecumenical movement.

He emphasized that the element of journeying together needs to be fully explored, especially during this Asia Mission Conference. He said, "It is in becoming a much more inclusive community than we presently are- in many areas of religious and public life, that we can become a relevant minority; and in engaging in prophetic witness with all who share our concerns, irrespective of their religious identity, that we can enter into a fuller understanding of the truth and light to which we have been called to be witnesses."

New Perspectives on Mission Theology and Practice

Before reflecting on each of the elements, he also introduced four new perspectives that need to be

taken in mission thinking. These new ways of looking at missions, according to Dr. Ariarajah, is important in order to have meaningful Christian witness in the context of Asia.

Churches in Asia, first of all, need to change their colonial view of their mission theology and missionary practice, which is based on a "sense of superiority of Christianity over the other religions," something that is not missed by other religious traditions. Secondly, mission theology and practice has to indigenize itself and draw on the experiences of other religious traditions in the region. This is also related to getting rid of the colonial mindset that Christianity is the only way to salvation and the only source of truth.

The purpose of mission for Christian churches must move away from targeting other religious traditions. Instead, it should learn to be closer to the mission of Jesus, which was for the poor, the marginalized and for the healing of others. Tied to this is a change in the view that in order for Christianity to be successful, it must strive to become a "majority community." He reminds us, "Time has come for us, Christians, to get over our the anxiety to convert the whole world, and to humbly and joyfully accept that we, even we, as weak and tiny minorities in Asia, are part of God's healing and redeeming work in the world."



# 'I have lived a thousand lives and died a thousand deaths'

One woman's voice has become the collective voice of an entire community's women force. "Nari Gunjan" or Women's Voice, the brainchild of "Padma Shri" Sr Sudha Varghese, has emancipated a whole community of girl children and women from Bihar's Musahar community, facing the worst forms of sexual exploitation and oppression.

The Musahars, who subsist on rats, are the most downtrodden among India's downtrodden or dalits – and they would have remained so if it had not been for the efforts of this earnest and unassuming lady who made it her life's mission 20 years ago to uplift them. The Musahar people are landless agricultural labourers who were never paid adequately for their work; their other occupations include cleaning toilets or brewing liquor for the dominant castes. Their women and children worked in the upper caste homes and were often sexually exploited. Schools were out of bounds for them; the ones who dared to go dropped out owing to the ridicule and neglect they faced from upper caste classmates and teachers.

Child marriage was rampant. Girls were married off at 10 and had 3-4 children by the time they were 20 and barely old enough to look after one child. And that was the first issue that Sr Sudha had to surmount when she wanted to start a school for girls – the mothers said that at 10 the girls got married, not started school.

She started with 20 girls at first – they not only learnt from the books but learnt to draw, colour, and sew. And in a year and half when UNICEF heard about her programme for adolescent girls, it

supported her team in 50 centres. The girls went on to join mainstream government schools after Class 6; tuitions were arranged to help them pass Class 10 Board examinations.

After the two "Prerna" (Inspiration) boarding schools for girls in Danapur and Bodhgaya, she started "Joyful Learning Centres" for small children. The elderly received clothes and health care.

There was no stopping her. Her next focus was the Musahar boys who spent their time drinking and gambling. She found they were interested in cricket and got them bat, ball and cricket gear. Soon they became proficient enough to win tournaments with other teams.

The Musahar men, for their part, ran out of business when the Bihar government banned liquor. Alcohol brought the upper caste men to their hamlet, and rape of the women often followed drinking. Untouchability ironically did not extend to the liquor they consumed or the women they raped.

The Musahar women took it as their fate until Sr Sudha came to the scene in 1986. She persuaded them to file a case at the police station and taught them to recognise their dignity.

In return they gave her food, love and loyalty – she was their "Cycle Didi" who travelled as far as 50 km in a day. She lived in a mudhouse in their midst until it became unsafe for her on account of



**Sr Sudha Varghese rode a bicycle over 50 kms everyday and lived in a mud-house among poor people until death threats calls grew shrill.**

death threats.

"I have lived a thousand lives and died a thousand deaths." She learnt not to show fear. "If you kill me, there will be hundreds to take my place," she told her detractors.

From a young girl who wanted to dedicate her life in service of the poor, Sr Sudha has become a colossal figure of love and hope for India's marginalised sections. Leaving her native Kerala after Class 10 against her family's wishes to become a teacher at a school run by Roman Catholic nuns in far-away Bihar, she searched out the poorest of the poor to dedicate her life to.

Thanks to the Indian government

honouring her with the Padma Shri, she gets ample support from the State government and the State Police. The Police even bring trafficked girls they rescue from bus stops and elsewhere to the centre for trafficked girls she started last year.

For now, she will leave the Asia Mission Conference a couple of days early because her girls need her. Some have fallen sick.

Their welfare takes precedence over any accolades and publicity she and her organisation gets. A truly great soul who practises the selfless life that Christians are expected to take up!

## Churches are challenged to hear the groans of creation and act for economic justice

As the Asia Mission Conference began to discuss important areas of concern for the mission of the churches in Asia, it brought together major areas of ecological and economic concerns as part of emerging mission concerns in Asia.

In a plenary session dealing with "Groaning of Creation, and Economic Justice: Prophetic Witness." In a plenary session, presentation Rev. Dr. Naoya Kawakami, Dr. William Stanley and Rev. Dr. Ronald Laldinsuah presented their views on how the church can become a prophetic witness and act on problems related to ecological and environmental degradation and economic injustice.

Rev. Dr. Kawakami spoke about his and his church's experiences in disaster relief network. He also shared church's response to the Fukushima nuclear

disaster in 2011, which includes providing counseling support for mothers who have deep anxiety over the radiation exposure after the disaster.

Dr. William Stanley of the Ecumenical Council for Drought Action and Water Management in India, in his presentation, challenged the churches to read the signs of the times, which all point to a prevailing global economic system that benefits a few, marginalizes many sectors and destroys the earth's resources.

He specifically calls on the churches to question the prevailing economic system and to "take issue-based activities with direction to bring change in power equations." Myanmar Evangelical Graduate School of Theology's Rev.

Dr. Ronald Laldinsuah said that the issue of economic justice should be followed up closely within the biblical



concept of justice. The biblical concept of justice focuses on relational justice, where there is equality for everyone and

everyone has access to capital income. According to him, this is what economic justice should mean for the churches.



# Interfaith leaders say truth and light surpass religiosity

**T**ruth and light are the two key components of spirituality surpassing all forms of religiosity, which most of the people are not aware of. Thus, all need to strive to attain such spirituality that liberates human beings. This can enable all to lead a life of peace, unity, love and happiness which are propounded by different religions," stated Swami Navanama Janana Thapaswi, Director of Santhigiri Ashram, Kerala, India.

Speaking about the Truth and Light from the viewpoint of Hindu religion at the second day of the Asia Mission Conference (AMC) in a hearing session on "Witness to the Truth and Light: Religious Perspectives" on October 13, based on spirituality of truth and light, human society could be a better place to live in for one and all, Thapaswi stressed.

Speaking on "Buddhist Perspective on Truth in life" Venerable A Shin Pannajota, lecturer at Sitagu International Buddhist Academy, Yangon said every one wishes to possess peace and happiness so also there is no being without facing problems such as family, political, social and economical, racial and religious problems.

To end these problems, it is hard to solve. However, nowadays most people are trying to sell sold these problems with the help of religions. To liberate from

all problems and sufferings, spiritual leaders in the world teach their doctrines to their followers.

Today the world witnesses the unfair competitions based on racial and religious sensitivity. For that matter, people belonging to different faiths of religion are attacking, fighting, and quarrelling each other without considering real reason. So there is need to understand the sufferings and problems as fact clearly and completely and face and eliminate them, he added.

Whatever religion one accepts should try to learn to be understood rightly intrinsic meaning of one's religion, practice and follow it accordingly, said the Buddhist monk.

People who lack in observing the noble teachings of their respective religions cannot experience peace and happiness in human society and its surroundings.

Today human world is mentally poor because of people who are in the absence of knowledge about the essence of their respective religions and fail to observe noble teachings of their religions. So all spiritual leaders must strive to lead people in the right direction to be mentally rich, said Pannajota.

"Human life is short. So everyone must not waste time in disputes, fightings, conflicts, disappointments, discontents, worries and worries, rather in order to live a meaningful life, one must establish a peaceful

and happy life knowing and analyzing the Truth expounded by one's respective religion," Pannajota said.

Speaking Addressing from the view point of Islam on "Witness to the Truth and Light", Professor Musdah Mulia, Council of Indonesian Ulema, said different religions have common enemy in society that is injustice. Religions could be strong basis for the promotion for any nation in maintaining peace and establishing a solid civilization.

Muslims, Christians and others need to work together to continue the efforts of cultural reconstruction through education beginning from family and later in formal educational institutes stressing on the efforts to promote peace, respect, tolerance and inclusiveness. This will enable to reduce prejudice behavior in society and embrace multiculturalism, so education is a means to a harmonious intercultural society, she said.

People of different religions needs to collaborate reforms laws and public policies which are not conducive to the establishment of peace and justice as well as upholding human rights and democratic principles, Mulia added.

All efforts should be made to have healthy interpretations of religious texts which will lead to end all forms of prejudice, hatred and violence, she added.



Professor Mammen Varkey and Rev Dr Huang Po Ho gave an overview of the drafting committee's work on the Asia Mission Statement.

# Draft panel urges all to 'help build Asia Mission Statement'

The drafting committee has been working on the Asia Mission Statement since its first meeting in July said Rev Dr Huang Po Ho on Friday, the second day of the Asia Mission Conference being held at the Franc Auditorium in Yangon, Myanmar.

"It is encouraging to see such participation for the AMC and together, we can put together the final statement," said the Chang Jung Christian University in Taiwan.

"We adapted the following process for the drafting of this statement. Seven scholars formed the committee, and suggestions will be collected and incorporated from the conference programmes – all speeches and panels, presentations and group discussions, bible studies, and so forth."

On Saturday, there will be a group discussion allocated for the discussion of the Asia Mission Statement. From there, the final statement will be adopted at the end of the Asia Mission Conference, he said and urged the participants "help us to build the statement and provide us your group output".

Professor Mammen Varkey, representing People's Reporter in India introduced the proposed structure of the statement.

"The decision to adopt after discussions and deliberations a statement at this Asia Mission Conference is itself a great act of faith," he said.

"It boldly proclaims that this conference should continue to speak to the churches and all concerned people in Asia and beyond. It proclaims that this AMC should blossom into a great mission movement. With this hope, we are presenting some elements of the draft because of constraints in time."

This statement has four sections, the first is on the theme: Journeying Together: Prophetic Witness to the Truth and Light, in Asia. This theme is inspired by the biblical verses familiar to all of us taken from John 8:12, 18:37 and John 14:6.

"I can only bring to your attention four aspects of this theme. The theme affirms that the followers of Jesus have been called to be on a journey and to be witnesses to the truth," said Dr Mammen Varkey.

"This theme speaks to the realities of mission. Asia is the home of all major religions. So, we have to be accompanying them and that must be in a Matthew 16:13. Another Asian reality is the poverty and exclusion - what is done to the least is done to all. The Lord Jesus is with the hungry, the weak, and the sick. Affirmation of profoundly understanding of our mission practices, we proclaim that the lord is with the vulnerable," he said.

The third aspect of the theme is that the theme emphasizes that our witness to the truth and light has to be perfect. The CCA has been unwavering in this aspect. Asian churches and all disciples of Jesus in the face of injustice, inequality, massive exclusion, etc., we are called to be involved unchallenged, he said.

"The fourth aspect is that the state-

ment calls us to embody the spirituality of the cross. The truth and the way given to us by the crucified God engages us to embody the spirituality of the cross. We have identified four sub themes within the theme: prophetic accompaniment, affirming the servanthood, participating in the reign of God, and embodying the spirituality of the Cross.

1) Don't just wait for the anti-God context, or for being called, but we have to enter and confront those who corrupt justice.

2) The mission that is entrusted with us is inescapably the mission of the servant, not the master.

3) Mission is participation in the kingdom of God, that is the reign of God. By joining in prophetic witnessing, we are participating in the reign of God. The Kingdom of God that Jesus asserts in our father who is in heaven. We have to join in reign with the father, the parent, anointed with the holy spirit. It brings in radical changes and practices

4) The mission is the embodying the spirituality of the cross – we have to reject that tone and accept servanthood, reject the thrones and accept servanthood and embrace the cross.

"Following these four sub themes, there are six mission concerns: Groaning of Creation: Our Stewardship and Kinship, People on the Move: Embrac-

ing the Stranger, The Excluded and the Marginalized: Accompanying People and Communities, Economic Injustice: Prophetic Witnessing, Religious Intolerance: Nurturing Interfaith Harmony, and Geo-political Turmoil: Building Peace.

"The fourth section is the affirmation of our commitment. The last section is our formation of our covenant. With indestructible hope, we commit ourselves to journey together to partake in the mission of prophetic witness to the truth and light, in Asia. Our faith and commitment inspire and strengthen us to be sojourners in God's mission and to follow the way revealed to us by Jesus Christ

"We do hope that people who walk in darkness see a great light. Those who live in darkness, a great light will shine on them. Our prophetic witness, the Holy Spirit will guide and power us to walk in God's mission.

"We embrace the spirituality of the cross and believe in and look forward to the assurance of the parents of new heavens and new earth.

"Let us sincerely pray and ardently hope that there will be radical reformation of mission and that we will be empowered by the Holy Spirit that we can have a fundamental recommission of mission, that this mission conference will initiate the beginning of a new mission movement and inaugurate a new power in the history of Christian movement.

"As this is a historical document for Asian churches, we hope that it will be used both individually and collectively. We appreciate any suggestions and contribution so that we can incorporate your wisdom in the statement," Dr Mammen concluded.

**"Seven scholars formed the committee, and suggestions will be collected and incorporated from the conference programmes – all speeches and panels, presentations and group discussions, and bible studies."**