

CATHOLICITY & MISSION

- Topic: The Prophetic Imperatives of Dialogue: Mission in Nigeria, Romania, and India
- Convener: Gerald Boodoo, Duquesne University
- Moderator: Elochukwu Uzukwu, Duquesne University
- Presenters: Marinus Iwuchukwu, Duquesne University
 Radu Bordeianu, Duquesne University
 Sebastian Madathummuriyil, Duquesne University

Presenting on “The Prophetic Imperatives of Dialogue: The challenges of Missions in northern Nigeria Lessons For Muslim-Christian Dialogue in the United States”, Marinus Iwuchukwu asserts that since 1979 northern Nigeria has almost perennially experienced some form of violent religious conflict between Muslims and Muslims or between Muslims and Christians, which have resulted in the loss of thousands of lives and billions of dollars worth of economic destruction. He explored the reasons for this by briefly tracing the history of northern Nigeria from pre-colonial times, with the aim of giving insight to the persistence of these violent religious conflicts. He then focused on exploring the mission and prophetic elements of dialogue from both Christian and Islamic theological world-views. Finally, he proposed effective implementation of the dialogue of life and the dialogue of action as the two forms of dialogue that have the propensity of mitigating the ongoing religious conflicts between Muslims and Muslims as well as between Muslims and Christians in northern Nigeria. In addition, Dr. Iwuchukwu proposes that American Muslims and Christians can learn from the conflict situation in northern Nigeria and the social, political, and theological values of the dialogues of life and action toward better relationships and collaboration between American Muslims and Christians.

Considering “Prophecy in Romania: Ecumenical Attitudes in a Post-Communist European Context, Radu Bordeianu states that after the 1989 Revolution, Romania experienced an unprecedented religious revival, resulting in a momentous thirst for theological education. As an attempt to change the corrupted mentalities of the past, religion is now taught in public schools, many seminaries are opened, and theology converses with science. However, as post-communist society is gradually replaced by a capitalist, European culture, churches are increasingly concerned with materialism and secularization. There is both fear of loss of identity because of integration into the European Union and openness to a new global context. Taken to an extreme, these two possibilities would result in either an unhealthy, self-imposed isolation from the rest of the world, or the loss of one’s identity that results in the impossibility to contribute with one’s charism to the unity into which one enters. In this context, mission ad intra represents a common response to the needs and challenges of Romanian society, so churches should define their identity as dialogical, in relationship with the other. Such an ecumenical approach gives them a credibility that they cannot take for granted anymore in a secularized society, and strengthens them as they

respond jointly to social challenges, while creating a relationship with the state and society that is most conducive to the Church's prophetic role. Finally, prophecy and missions are by no means the exclusive attribute of the clergy or professional theologians, but belong to all the faithful.

Looking at the Indian context, Sebastian Madathummuriyil, explored the mission of the Church in India in the context of increasing tensions between Hindus and Muslims, as well as between Hindus and Christians. In his presentation titled "The Quest for Identity and the Call for Dialogue: Prophetic Imperatives of the Mission of the Church in India", he analyzes the demolition of the Babri Masjid on 6th December 1992 as a test case of growing Hindu nationalism (*Hindutva*), which disrupts communal harmony, and is responsible for fuelling violence in recent years. Although Muslims have been the key target of attacks by Hindu fundamentalists, since late 1990s there has been a remarkable increase in the number of Hindu fundamentalists' attacks on Christians. This is explained with special focus on the situation in the state of Orissa, which has seen an escalation of these attacks since 2008. Important to note is that the declared "war on terror" has adversely affected the relationship between Christians and Muslims in India, generating suspicion among average Muslims who understand such a "war" as a Christian/Western strategy against Muslims. Given the present situation, the Church in India must re-examine the Church's imperialistic objectives of mission that reflects exclusivist and totalitarian tendencies and has to re-discover its identity paying heed to the challenges posed by religious, cultural, ideological, and linguistic pluralism. Moreover, Madathummuriyil emphasized the role of the Church to peacefully resist nationalist ideologies based on homogeneity of religion, culture, and language. He points out that since the Church in India is a minority community, which remains estranged from Hindus, and to some extent from Muslims, it can be a prophetic and challenging voice that mediates between Hindus and Muslims in the dire need for establishing peace in the country. To be a prophetic Church in the Indian context, then, would imply, on the one hand, forfeiting traditional strategies of mission and, on the other hand, enhancing measures for regaining trust and confidence of both Hindus and Muslims through dialogue in an age of widespread anti-Christian sentiments.

GERALD M. BOODOO

*Duquesne University
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*