

The book cover features a central map of Asia, including the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia, and the Japanese archipelago. The map is rendered in a dark purple color with a small red cross in the center of the Indian subcontinent. The map is set against a background of radiating light beams that transition from yellow and orange on the left to blue on the right. The title is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font with a black outline, positioned at the top of the cover.

**Proclamation and Beyond:
Rethinking Evangelization in
21st-Century Asia**

Paul Rohan, J.C.

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Good Shepherd Centre
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Rethinking Evangelization in 21st-Century Asia**

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Preface

Christianity in Asia stands at a critical historical moment. As a minority tradition within a richly pluralistic religious landscape, it is called to discern renewed forms of witness that remain faithful to the Gospel while engaging constructively with the cultures, religions, and public realities of the continent. This work emerges from a long intellectual and pastoral journey shaped less by abstract speculation than by lived encounters with the peoples, cultures, and religious traditions of Asia. My engagement with the question of evangelization began with a growing unease – an intuition that inherited models of mission, though historically formative and theologically sincere, no longer fully correspond to the complex realities of twenty-first-century Asia. Gradually, this unease developed into a sustained scholarly inquiry: how can Christianity remain faithful to the Gospel while responding credibly to a continent marked by ancient spiritual wisdom, deep religious plurality, persistent structural poverty, and fragile social harmony? -v-

These questions opened the theological horizon that led to this book. The study revisits the meaning of evangelization in the Asian context by examining its historical development, theological foundations, and contemporary challenges. It argues that evangelization cannot be reduced to the expansion of ecclesial boundaries or the transmission of doctrinal formulations. Rather, it must be understood as a multidimensional process of witness

expressed through presence, dialogue, solidarity with the poor, and responsible participation in the public life of society. In this perspective, proclamation remains central to Christian mission, yet it finds its fuller meaning when the Gospel becomes incarnate in cultures, engages respectfully with other religious traditions, and contributes to the pursuit of justice, reconciliation, and the common good.

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My academic formation introduced me to the richness of Christian theology and its missionary heritage, while also making me aware of the historical asymmetries that shaped Christianity's presence in Asia. With the exception of the St. Thomas Christians of India, most Asian Christian communities emerged through early modern missionary movements closely linked to European ecclesial, cultural, and political frameworks. While these missions bore courageous witness and established enduring communities of faith, they often transmitted forms of Christianity that remained culturally foreign and institutionally dependent. Engagement with the history of mission and with contemporary Asian theological voices convinced me that evangelization in Asia must be reimagined from within the continent's own historical memory and spiritual soil.

The teaching of the Second Vatican Council has exercised a decisive influence on this work. Its affirmation of religious freedom, interreligious dialogue, and the presence of truth and holiness in other religions opened a theological vision that resonates deeply with Asian realities. At the same time, it raises crucial questions: how can Christ be proclaimed authentically where Christianity remains a minority faith? How can evangelization avoid triumphalism, proselytism, and cultural domination? And how can the Church speak credibly in the public sphere amid injustice, violence, and ecological crisis?

The insights of Asian theologians – including Aloysius Pieris, Michael Amaladoss, and Felix Wilfred – have further shaped my conviction that evangelization in Asia must be dialogical, contextual, and publicly accountable. Their insistence that theology listen to the cries of the poor, engage other religious traditions seriously, and address concrete social realities led me to understand evangelization not merely as proclamation but as a comprehensive ecclesial praxis. The phrase “*proclamation and beyond*” gradually emerged as a way of holding together two inseparable dimensions of Christian witness: the explicit confession of Christ and the embodied practice of justice, compassion, and solidarity.

This book therefore does not seek to relativize proclamation or dilute Christian identity. Rather, it clarifies the relationship between proclamation and evangelization, showing how proclamation gains credibility when embedded within presence, dialogue, and public witness. The chapters move from historical foundations to contemporary realities and culminate in a constructive proposal that situates public theology as a necessary horizon for evangelization in third-millennium Asia.

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At a deeper level, this work is sustained by the conviction that the Spirit of God has never been absent from Asia. Long before the arrival of Christian missionaries, the Spirit was already at work within the continent’s religions, philosophies, and ethical traditions, nurturing humanity’s search for truth, compassion, and liberation. Evangelization, in this light, becomes less an act of possession than a humble participation in God’s ongoing work in history.

I express my sincere gratitude to Prof. Gnana Patrick, a valued friend, mentor, and collaborator in several academic initiatives, for generously contributing the reflective *Foreword* to this volume. His scholarship, encouragement, and intellectual companionship have been a continuing source of inspiration. I also

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This book is lovingly dedicated to the memory of Revd. Fr. Adrian Joseph OMI, my revered teacher of the Old Testament in the seminary, whose wisdom, humility, and passion for Scripture left a lasting imprint on my theological journey.

Ultimately, this book is offered as an invitation to rethink evangelization in Asia not as a strategy of expansion, but as a humble participation in the Spirit's quiet yet transformative work already unfolding among the peoples, cultures, and religions of this vast and ancient continent.

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