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## **Fellowship of Indian Missiologists (FOIM) PIONEERS, TRENDS, MODELS, AND PROSPECTS OF MISSION TODAY**

**29 Oct – 1 Nov 2019, Tarumitra, Patna**

The “Fellowship of Indian Missiologists” (FOIM) is an inter-denominational fellowship of professional missiologists, who live together for 3-4 days to discuss issues connected with mission. As such, it is a unique ecumenical organization in India; it has had Roman Catholic and Protestant bishops arising from its ranks. FOIM holds meetings in different parts of the country. It receives no foreign funding and is totally dependent on the contributions of its members. It has, to date, covered a variety of topics, as the titles of some of its published volumes indicate: *Bible and Mission in India Today*; *Christ and Culture*; *Mission and Conversion: a Reappraisal*; *Christ among the Tribals*; *Mission in Civil Society*; *Digital Generation: Challenges and Missiological Responses*; *Emerging Indian Missiology*. FOIM has thus far published 17 volumes on various aspects of mission. These volumes are widely in use in a number of Protestant and Catholic libraries in India and abroad, thereby fulfilling one of the chief goals of FOIM.

Experience over the years has justified naming it a “fellowship.” The first meeting of the association was held in 1991; the 18<sup>th</sup> was held in Tarumitra, an ecological centre having accreditation with the United Nations and run by the Jesuits in Patna, from 29 Oct to 1 Nov 2019, followed by a visit to the ruins of the ancient Buddhist university of Nalanda on 2<sup>nd</sup> Nov. The theme of the meeting was “Pioneers, trends, models, and prospects” of mission today. Archbishop William D’Souza of Patna Archdiocese and Bishop Daniel Ponraj of Bihar Christian Church presided over the inaugural function. A total of thirteen papers were presented and discussed. Four other papers were sent in, but could not be discussed, since the authors were impeded for various reasons. The papers presented at this meeting offered varied fare to the participants. Keeping in mind the context of the meeting, the sessions began with two papers on the history of missions in Bihar, from

Catholic and Protestant perspectives. Other aspects of mission history came across in papers on William Carey, Abhishiktananda and R.P. Duchesne. There was a whole set of papers studying mission initiatives among specific groups, like Brahmins, caste Hindus in North Gujarat, youth. Other papers dealt with innovators in mission, the Khrist Bhakt movement and the role of women in the Presbyterian Church among the Khasis. There were also a few papers which dealt with various aspects of mission theology, including life-style and the impact of religious pluralism on mission today.

Valuable insights surfaced during the Group discussions on the last day. We must avoid the absolutist mindset, that others have no truth to share. Paul's speech in the Areopagus of Athens is an example of dialogue in a pluralistic society (Acts 17:18-31). A 'rainbow and prism theology' will enable us to understand the religions as reflecting a ray of the eternal Truth which enlightens all people. In accepting Christ, all elements which do not contradict this belief may be retained. This would refer to social customs, eating habits and the spiritual and moral goods found among them. Culture is to be transformed with sensitivity, not replaced by impositions from outside. An Asian theology will be inculturated, liberative and socially oriented.

We do acknowledge, that the present context of Hindutva checks some of the aggressive and abusive types of evangelism. On the other hand, it is a destructive force that impedes the spread of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Our lives should shine as service oriented. We could seek ways to dialogue with some of the votaries of Hindutva.

At the same time, we acknowledge, that Christians have experienced opposition and persecution from the very beginning of Christianity. Such persecution purifies a Christian's conviction and makes his/her fidelity to Jesus even stronger. So it is incumbent on Christians to stand firm and witness to Jesus.

As is the custom, all the papers will be published in book form at the next FOIM meeting, to be held in Aluva in October 2021 on the theme "Pluriform Mission in the Postmodern World." This theme will be open to such topics as: artificial intelligence, nationalism, Hindu nationalism, polarization, climate change, future trends, futurology, women, gender, migration, millennials, public theology, cosmological issues, wider ecumenism. It is clear that FOIM is very much alive to answering the needs and challenges of mission today.

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