



Acts of the
Study Days
on
**The Salesian Mission
and the Initial Proclamation
of Christ in the Three-fold
Context of East Asia**

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edited by
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Table of contents

INTRODUCTION	7
Listen!	9
The Study Days	11
What Do We “Say” about Jesus to the Peoples of East Asia?	13
<i>Sr. Alaide Deretti FMA, General Councillor for Mission ad/inter Gentes</i>	
Rediscover the Dynamics of Initial Proclamation in East Asia	21
<i>Fr. Václav Klement SDB, General Councillor for the Missions</i>	
An Overview of the Topic of Study Days from Prague to Sampran ..	25
<i>Fr. Alfred Maravilla SDB</i>	
PART I - ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION	39
<i>An Analysis of our Situation in East Asia</i>	41
<i>Sr. Alma Castagna FMA</i>	
Initial Proclamation in East Asia in FABC Documents and in Ecclesia in Asia	51
<i>Fr. Joseph Phouc SDB</i>	
PART II - STUDY & REFLECTION	63
Initial Proclamation of Christ in the multicultural Settings through Storytelling	65
<i>Fr. Cyril Niphot Thienvihan</i>	
A Response to Cyril Niphot Thienvihan	73
<i>Fr. Fidel Orendain SDB</i>	
Initial Proclamation and Outreach Programs for Poorer Sectors of Society	81
<i>Mr. Vivat Lauhabut</i>	
A Response to Vivat Lauhabut	87
<i>Fr. Lanfranco M. Fedrigotti SDB</i>	



Initial Proclamation in a Multireligious Context Through Dialogue of Life	91
<i>Fr. François Ponchaud MEP</i>	
A Response to François Ponchaud	107
<i>Sr. Teresa Furukawa Chieko FMA</i>	
PART III - FORMULATING CONCLUSIONS	111
Emerging Perspectives during these Study Days in view of a Renewed Missionary Praxis	113
<i>Fr. Joseph Phuoc SDB & Sr. Alma Castagna FMA</i>	
Practical Proposals	123
<i>Practical Proposals – FMA</i>	
<i>Practical Proposals – SDB</i>	
PART IV. STORYTELLING	125
Kolbe is an Example of Virtue	127
Different Routes to Baptism	129
The Poor are Evangelizing Us!	131
The Cost of her Christian Faith	133
Our Martyrs’ Heroism Attracts	135
Faith Lived through Charity	137
Stories of Hong Kong Neophytes	139
CLOSING REMARKS	141
Three Words to Remember this Meeting	143
<i>Sr. Alaïde Deretti FMA</i>	
A Renewed Commitment to Initial Proclamation	145
<i>Fr. Václav Klement SDB</i>	
THE STUDY DAYS IN THE LIGHT OF THE WORD OF GOD	147
<i>Sr. Maria Ko Ha Fong FMA</i>	
The Encounter of Jesus with Three Different Persons in Different Contexts (John 3-4)	149
“What Are You Looking For?” “Come and See” (Jn 1, 35-42a)	159
How Many Loaves Do You Have? Go and See! (Mk 6, 30-44)	169
“Go Up and Join that Chariot!” (Acts 8, 2)	175
Mary the “first Evangelised” and the “first Evangeliser” (1Cor 8,1-23).	185



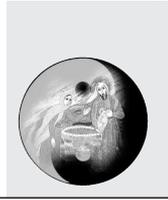
<i>Mary the Alpha and the Omega of Time. A Reflection on the Solemnity of the Assumption</i>	191
ACTIVITY SHEETS FOR COMMUNITY MEETINGS OF ONGOING FORMATION	195
1. Sharing the Word	197
2. Initial Proclamation	199
3. Initial Proclamation. What Is It?	205
4. Attracted by Jesus to Attract Others	209
5. Storytelling: Sharing my Faith Experience	213
6. Dialogue with Our Brothers and Sisters of East Asia	217
7. Examples of Initial Proclamation	221
8. Witnessing to Jesus Christ the Saviour, Who Took Flesh as an Asian!	225
9. Saint Francis de Sales: Heart Speaks to Heart	229
10. Sharing the Gift of Jesus	233
APPENDICES	237
1. East Asia and the Challenges of Mission ad Gentes	239
2. Uniqueness of Salvation in Jesus Christ and the Need of Primary Evangelization	241
3. Evangelization and Interreligious Dialogue	247
4. Christian Witness in a Multireligious World Recommendations for Conduct	251
<i>Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, World Council of Churches, World Evangelical Alliance</i>	
5. The Evangelizing Mission of the Church in Contemporary Asia ...	257
<i>Excerpts from the Final Statement of the FABC, Fifth Plenary Assembly (1990)</i>	
6. Initial Proclamation in Catholic Educational Institutions	263
<i>Secrétariat Général de l'Enseignement Catholique, France</i>	
7. Young People and Religion in Our Secular Age	277
LIST OF PARTICIPANTS	283





Introduction





Listen!

聽

The Chinese character of listening above is composed of five parts:

- **ears** (耳), the main gate of listening
- **you** (十), personal commitment to listen
- **eyes** (目), eye contact with the dialogue partner as well as attentive observance of non verbal communication
- **one** (一), give full attention to this “one on one” activity
- **heart** (心), the most important gate to effective listening: “Heart speaks to heart”!

These Study Days are a privileged occasion for the Salesian Family to listen together to the Spirit who speaks through the rich cultures, ancient traditions and poor multitudes of East Asia.

A constant prayerful listening to the Word of God develops in us the capacity to discover that the Gospel of Jesus is silently growing as a leaven (Lk 13, 21) in our East Asian societies.

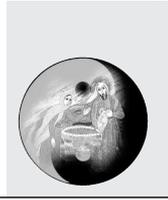


Attentive listening allows us to discern the embodiment and manifestation of the presence and action of God and His Spirit in the cultures, religions and the poor of this part of Asia.

Our capacity to attentively listen will make us intuitively sensitive to that unexpected moment when our life, activity, presence or image as consecrated persons and as Church may spark that interest to know the person of Jesus Christ and have faith in him.

As attentive listeners “we shall not be timid when God opens the door for us to proclaim explicitly the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior”! (FABC).





The Study Days

The Study Days are a development of the *Seminar for Missionary Animation and Formation* organized by the SDB and FMA Missions Departments for many years now. However, unlike the Seminar, the Study Days are not intended as occasion for the animation and formation of missionaries. These Study Days are meant, rather, to foster reflective discussions and a deeper contextualised reflection on the **initial proclamation of Christ in East Asia** in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of the challenges and discover new insights and perspectives in view of a rediscovering its relevance today. Hence, the Study Days are directed primarily to Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians as well as other members of the Salesian Family with a certain level of either theological, missiological, anthropological or academic formation.

For this six-year period *initial proclamation*, as the start of the rich, dynamic, and complex process of evangelisation, was chosen as the overriding theme of the SDB-FMA Study Days in all continents. These Study Days build on the *Missionary Animation Seminar on the East Asia and the Challenges of Mission Ad Gentes. Salesian Family Missionary Seminar* (2005) and the *Uniqueness of Salvation in Jesus Christ and Need of Primary Evangelization. Animation and Missionary Formation Seminar SDB-FMA East Asia Oceania* (1998).

The term initial proclamation refers to the start of the rich, dynamic, and complex process of integral evangelisation in Asia's three-fold context: rich cultures, ancient religions and oppressive poverty (FABC 1, *Evangelisation in Asia Today*). **It is the beginning of the pedagogy which introduce people step-by step to the mystery of Christ** (*Ecclesia in Asia* 20). It is in initial proclamation that the witness of life and words of the Christian community and / or of missionaries become relevant to certain persons who, through the action of the Holy Spirit, hear the Good News that Jesus Christ was incarnate, died on the cross, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven for our salvation. A person who opts for Christ is, then,

led to the next stage of this process which is the *catechumenate* and the consequent Rites of Christian Initiation, and continues through catechesis and sacramental life (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 21-24).

This booklet reflects the three moments of the Study Days: **I. Analysis of the Situation** **II. Study & Reflection** **III. Formulation of Conclusions**. It also contains the prayerful reading of the Word of God through the *biblical reflection* at the start of each day.

Most speakers were chosen purposely outside the Salesian Family circle in order to hear a ‘different voice’ regarding the topic and help the participants to ‘think out of the box’ and provoke a deeper reflection and analysis of the situation and help participants discover new insights and perspectives.

After the presentation of the speaker, one of the participants (who had read and studied the presentation well in advance) presented a prepared response in a form of a critical reaction to the talk outlining its possible challenges and opportunities from the Salesian perspective so as to stimulate further discussion and deeper reflection among the participants.

Besides Sr. Florita Dimayuga FMA and Fr. Alfred Maravilla SDB as moderators of the Study Days, Sr. Alma Castagna FMA and Fr. Joseph Phuoc SDB, as facilitators, had the crucial task 1) of collating the situation reports of participants and present their synthesis at the start of the Study Days, 2) of synthesizing the discussions each day and point out emerging insights and perspectives expressed by the different perspectives of the participants 3) and of formulating a final synthesis of the whole Study Days outlining the challenges as well as new missiological and theological insights and perspectives regarding initial proclamation in East Asia.

These Acts of the Study Days are published with various activity sheets which would enable the local communities (even those in other contexts) to use the materials for the on-going formation of their members and, hence, foster a deeper and wider reception among Salesians, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the Salesian Family of East Asia of the new perspectives and insights emerging from these Study Days.



What Do We “Say” about Jesus to the Peoples of East Asia?

Sr. Alaíde Deretti FMA
General Councillor for Mission ad/inter Gentes

Dearest brothers and sisters,

Let us look back to Jesus.

“When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples,

‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’...

And you, who do you say that I am?’” (Mt 16:13-20).

Two questions that reveal Jesus’ interest, desire and curiosity to know, from the disciples themselves, what people say about him and what his disciples think about him. Two related questions made one after the other, starting from a concrete context: Caesarea of Philippi.

Two questions that resound, albeit in different forms, during these Study Days. People’s interest in Jesus and our personal experience of Him - these are two aspects that dispose us to assume the attitude of listening, of intelligent analysis and of deep respect in order to discover:

1. What is happening in the religious and cultural realities of the peoples of East Asia (China, Hong Kong, Japan, Macau, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea); of South/east Asia (Brunei, Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Burma, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam); and what they “say” about Jesus of Nazareth.

Can the God of Jesus and his Kingdom play a significant role in the development of the peoples of East Asia, with their emerging economies like in China, with the ever-widening gap between the upper social classes and those who do not count at all, with the high rate of immigration within and outside of countries, and the strong impact of the era of technology, information and communication?



Is the quest for meaning, truth, and eternal life in the following of Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate face of God's Wisdom, a matter of concern for men and women, for the young and the poor? If it is, then under what conditions?

2. "And you, who do you say that I am?" What do we say about Jesus, about our personal experience with Him? What is the face that we give, as spiritual persons and communities, as the "little flock," to the service of education rendered to the poorest young people? How do we go about, always in his Name, discovering and offering the gift of faith in Him? What approach and language do we use?

In the East Asian scenario, we realize once more, after reflecting on it, that cultural and religious pluralism is the prevailing situation, and that Christians are a minority. If we rely on statistics¹, we Christians / Catholics are a minority among the minorities. But at the same time no Asian Church is so small or so poor that it has nothing to give, and in the same way, no Asian Church is so great and powerful that it does not have anything it can receive.

It remains true that, apart from sizes or numbers, every local Church in Asia is strongly called to the missions, to bear witness to and to proclaim Jesus with the strength of the spirit, among and with the people². The central role of the local Church in the missionary project today has been vigorously supported in the field of Asian ecclesiology, and promoted by the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC) right from the beginning

¹ One can find an abundance of statistical data on each nation in the region covered by the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC). Only two entries are included here (statistical data of 2007). Given for every country of the FABC is the *estimated population* in millions, followed by the *percentage of Catholics* in that nation: **Bangladesh** (158.6m / 0.27%); **Bhutan** (0.6m / 0.02%); **Burma/Myanmar** (48.8m / 1.3%); **Cambodia** (14.4m / 0.02%); **China** (1,322.5m / 0.5%); **East Timor** (1.1m / 97%); **Hong Kong** (7.2m / 4.7%); **India** (1,131m / 1.72%); **Indonesia** (231.6m / 2.58%); **Japan** (127.7m / 0.36%); **North Korea** (23.7m / ?); **South Korea** (48.5m / 6.7%); **Laos** (5.8m / 0.9%); **Macao** (0.48m / 5%); **Malaysia** (27.5m / 3%); **Mongolia** (2.6m / ?); **Nepal** (28m / 0.05%); **Pakistan** (162m / 0.6%); **Philippines** (88.7m / 81%); **Singapore** (4.4m / 6.5%); **Sri Lanka** (19.2m / 8%); **Taiwan** (22.9m / 1.4%); **Thailand** (62.8m / 0.4%); **Vietnam** (87.3m / 6.1%).

² FABC I, 12.

(Manila 1970). The local Churches of Asia are aware that they are a little flock, and that they are called to be missionary communities, communities of a faith with broad horizons, and with a strong evangelical commitment to be for and with “others.” The mission especially in Asia is lived in the context of reciprocity, of mutual exchange. And with *Ecclesia in Asia*, with the journey of the FABC, as our starting point, we would like to study and **propose the first proclamation of Jesus**. The approach, therefore, would be:

* in the perspective of the Incarnation: ***The heart of the proclamation is the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, the human face of the Wisdom of God, the most surprising sign of his love for all (cf. Eph 3:18-19)***. Jesus proclaimed and witnessed to the truth that God is constantly in relationship with humanity and with the cosmos. He made visible his Mission, which he has carried out from all eternity in various ways (*Missio Dei*).

* as ***local Church which is constantly reborn when it allows itself to be impelled by the Spirit towards “others.” A Church formed by small missionary Christian communities, its own way of being Church, communities that tend toward communion***, a people on a journey, open to dialogue and the service of the poor and the young people, ***becoming poor themselves (Cf LG, AG³; RM 1, 4, 7, 22, 23, 32; FABC of 2000)***⁴

* ***In, through and with the world***: these Churches reborn from Vatican II are growing in the awareness that ***they cannot carry out the Mission of God on their own***. By tradition⁵ and by faith we know that God, through His

³ *Ad Gentes* of Vatican II provides in the first place a strong, coherent and deeply theological reason for such nature: the Church is in mission because the mission has been graciously assumed in the *missio Dei*, the same mission of God in creation, in redemption and in continuing sanctification.

⁴ “The Church cannot of course abandon the basic experience of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, the Son of God who came into the world for the salvation of all. The Church, by virtue of its vocation, feels bound to proclaim Jesus Christ as Savior. At the same time, however, a Church that lives in a pluralistic world cannot neglect the work of the Spirit of God in all human persons, and in all cultures and religions” G. Karakunnel, in *Cristologia e missione oggi*, Urbaniana, Roma 2001

⁵ Irenaeus speaks of Jesus and of the Holy Spirit as the two hands of God. This means that God is in direct relationship with the world both in Christ and in the Spirit.

God is involved in the history of the world through the working of the Holy Spirit and the incarnation of the Son.

Spirit, continues his saving and liberating presence today in the world in ways that are surprising and unknown, “grace works invisibly in the heart of men and women of good will” (Cf. *Gaudium et Spes* n.22, *Redemptoris Missio* 6,10,28; 56).

From here we can draw two formative implications:

1. Increase the positive attitude of trust and hope in human existence, in the experience of individuals and communities, in the concrete situation of “other” young people, of those “far” from us (of different faiths, ethnic groups, cultures, sensitivity, with less possibilities in life), in the evolution of history, science, post-modern ethos, and so on.
2. This reality needs *new persons, with a more personal, adult faith* that allows them *to discern and confront themselves critically with others, with evangelical relevance*, in order to *perceive* the signs of God’s action and to *build the Kingdom, together with those who are different from us*.

In these days, the center, the priority of our sharing is *the initial proclamation of Jesus*. This priority will be considered in relationship to, and in interdependence with, other aspects of the mission. The proclamation cannot disregard the commitment to create inculturated Christian communities, the action, in Jesus’ name, for justice, peace, intercultural relations, the rights of peoples, the practice of interreligious dialogue and of reconciliation among persons and peoples. *The mission of the Church today is pluridimensional* because it is interwoven with different elements that are both similar and interdependent.

Furthermore, we know that *witnessing and the proclamation of Jesus are inseparable*. The first means of evangelization, Paul VI writes, is the witnessing of an authentically Christian life (cf. EN 41). Proclamation, as we read in the document *Dialogue and Proclamation*, is the foundation, center and vertex of Evangelization.

Here, too, we look to Jesus: his mission was characterized by words and works, which mutually explained each other. His parables and teachings were prophetic pronouncements that often went against the trends of wisdom and



religious practice that were commonly accepted. His healing miracles and exorcisms were parables in action, and his practice of including those who were at the fringes of society among his followers and welcoming them at table bear powerful witness to the validity of his teaching (cf. DP, 56-57).

The act of proclaiming, like that of witnessing, seriously takes into account *the geo-socio-political-cultural context*. The history of the mission shows the need to narrate and communicate faith in Jesus with new ways of understanding and new emphases asked for by the times and by the geographical and cultural area. When Arius put Jesus' divinity into question, the proclamation of the Gospel had to emphasize that He was truly God incarnate. In the turmoil of the Reformation, it was necessary to concentrate on a concept of salvation that did not depend on human works but on God's grace. During the times of colonization and exploitation, the Gospel had to include a clear stand on the dignity of every human being and every people. In the epoch of globalization, the Gospel has to recognize the anthropological value of cultures and religions, and of local contexts, and to decisively take the side **of victims**, of justice, **of the poor, as Jesus had done, and as the Church in Asia proposes.**

In a postmodern, pluralistic world, special attention must be reserved for the proclamation of Jesus as the only true Savior of the world, despite the real validity of other religious paths.

In a complex world that is attentive to human rights and conscious of the truths found in religions, we can be tempted to take the edge away from the prophetic tradition of the first proclamation of Jesus, contenting ourselves with a hidden, private witnessing. This, however, can end up, on the one hand, in espousing the postmodern causes of relativism, consumerist society and capitalistic ploy; and on the other, in the emptying of faith in Jesus of Nazareth. *When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?* (cf. Lk 18:8).

Furthermore, in a world marked by growing religious violence, and by new religious phenomena, some of which stem from sects, we can be tempted to choose a style of witnessing and proclaiming that is severe, invasive and presumptuous, and neglect the values of tolerance, the nature of the laity, freedom and dialogue which modernity, and our religious and cultural traditions, have left us as a precious heritage.



The mission of proclaiming and bearing witness to Jesus must be *dialogical* at all costs, because, in the final analysis, it is none other than a sharing in the dialogical nature of the One and Triune God, in his Mission for man and woman. God became a human person, and he was born in Asia!

It must also be *prophetic*, because, basically, there can be no real dialogue when the *truth, Jesus of Nazareth*, is not expressed, proposed and articulated clearly and without any compromise.

Proclaiming and bearing witness to Jesus, the Kingdom of the Father, in a prophetic dialogue that is *daring and humble*, and placed at the service of humanity, the Church in Asia today will be significant and faithful, *even if it is a minority. It will truly be “salt and light.”*

At the same time, we are convinced that to carry out in a new way the testimony and proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth in the educational practice or in the occasions of daily life, in our prophetic interaction with the life situations of young people and adults, is to contribute to translate the Preventive System in Asia, making it always rich in proposals and relevant in a globalized world that tends to always be more diverse and complex.

We stand before a mystery of grace, a gift, a responsibility. We shall work by continuing the Christian tradition; thus the urgency of knowing the journey of understanding once more the mission of the universal Church and that of the diocesan churches⁶, the experiences of individuals, families and/or institutions, the development of our action in the Salesian educational mission, in the wake of the SDB/FMA reflections on the paradigm of the missions⁷, *seeking to listen to “what the Spirit is telling the Churches”* (Rev 2,7. 11. 17. 29; 3,6.13. 22).

⁶ The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and its missionary decree *Ad Gentes* (1965), *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1965), *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), and *Ecclesia in Asia* (1999). ASIA/THAILAND – Asian Missionary Congress, Thailand, October 2006. Guided by the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC) and by the leadership of the local Churches, Christian communities of this vast continent seek to listen to “what the Spirit is telling the Churches”(Ap 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). They seek to follow Jesus, the first evangelizer and missionary of the Father, who became incarnate as an Asian: the Savior of the world was born in Asia (EA 1).

⁷ Cf. *Uniqueness of Salvation in Jesus Christ and need of primary evangelization, Missionari praxis and primary evangelization*, FMA-SDB. East Asia and Oceania, Hua Hin (Thailand), 10 -16 May, 1998; *Missionari praxis and primary Evangelization*, FMA-SDB,

In commemoration of Don Bosco's missionary dream at Barcelona 125 years ago, in April 1886, may Mary point out to us new paths, the "living pages" of the story of Jesus to write among the young people of Asia.

Thank you!



South Asia, Calcutta, 1-7 March 1999; *The challenges of the Mission ad gentes in East Asia*, FMA/SDB, Hua Hin, 2004. It was from this seminar that the Institute began using the term *ad/inter gentes* to show the paradigm shift on the missions that is in process.





Rediscover the Dynamics of the Initial Proclamation in East Asia

Fr. Václav Klement SDB
General Councillor for the Missions

Good morning and welcome to everyone!

I'm coming from France where I spent three days praying at Taizé with over 5000 young people from all around the world. Surely I also prayed for all of you. Then I was in Lyon (France) for 5 days of meeting with seventy Salesians from Western Europe discussing 'Project Europe' together with the Rector Major, Fr. Pascual Chávez. I also bring his warm greetings and blessing to all of you!

It is a **great gift of God to live as Catholic Christians in Asia**. Quite often I feel really home-sick of Korea. Among the many reasons is especially the family spirit of our young and small Asian Churches, where Jesus Christ was welcomed very recently, yet often these small Church communities are dynamically alive. However, especially here in East Asia we experience every day that even two thousand years after Jesus' resurrection his Church is still "a small flock."⁸ There is also a perjuring prejudice against the Church which sometimes gives ground to suspicion even to the point of being considered a threat to religious and cultural identity.⁹

After many months of preparation, we are gathered together here in Ban Than Phraphorn Sampran: Salesians of Don Bosco, Daughters of Mary

⁸ FABC, «Christian Disciples in Asia Today: Service to Life,» 14.3 in F. J. Eilers (ed.), *For All Peoples of Asia. Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1992-1996*, II (Claretian Publications: Quezon City, 1997) 9

⁹ FABC Office of Evangelization, «Conclusion of the Theological Consultation,» 13, in G. Rosales, C.G. Arévalo (ed.), *For all the Peoples of Asia. Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970-1991*, I (Claretian Publications: Quezon City, 1997) 279.



Help of Christians and some groups of the Salesian Family present in East Asia (SHIM, DQM, SQM, Caritas of Jesus, Salesian Cooperators). Actually this is already the **fifth Regional Missionary Formation meeting since 1989**. Indeed since then every 6 years the Salesians and Salesian Sisters shared together a formation opportunity on various themes: *The Far East – Cultures, religions and evangelisation* (1989, Hua Hin), *Evangelisation and Interreligious dialogue* (1994, Batulao), *Uniqueness of Salvation in Jesus Christ and Need of Primary Evangelisation* (1998, Hua Hin), “*The challenges of the Mission “Ad gentes” in East Asia*”(2004, Hua Hin). Starting 2004 the event was opened to all groups of the Salesian Family. After the GC26 of the SDBs (2008) this gathering was transformed to ‘**Study Days**’ regarding the Salesian mission. Now the focus is not so much on the formation of missionaries, but as an occasion to study and reflect deeply on some specific themes regarding our mission of evangelisation.

We have chosen ‘the initial proclamation of Jesus’ for both SDB and FMA as **THE TOPIC for the six year period 2008-2014 for all regions**. We started with the European Study Days in Prague (2010), this year (2011) we have the Study Days in South and East Asia as well as another in Oceania; next year 2012 will be for Africa and another on Salesian presence in Islamic contexts and, finally, in 2013 for the whole of America. Four of these Study Days are held on SDB facilities while three are on those of the FMA. I’m very grateful for the hospitality of the Thai FMA Sisters with their new Provincial Sr. Maria Tovichian and all who contributed to prepare and make these East Asia Study Days a reality.

During these days we are called to **re-discover the dynamics of the initial proclamation of the Gospel**. About four billion people, especially many youngsters, are still waiting to hear the Good News of God’s salvation, brought by Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. As a matter of fact, there are a lot of prejudices against the proclamation of Jesus and his Gospel. Even among the consecrated members of the Salesian Family many are not prepared to foster or to facilitate this important initial encounter between Jesus Christ and our friends or youths of other religions.

The choice of **initial proclamation of Jesus Christ** as the theme of our study and reflection these days implies that we, members of the Sale-



sian Family, are challenged to reflect on the missionary action of the Church as well as examine that of our Congregations. Initial proclamation poses a crucial question to us all because our mission of evangelisation and education hinges on it.

The whole Church is missionary by its nature¹⁰ and our contribution as Salesian Family to the Church's mission is mainly in the field of education. Our way of living and sharing the Gospel is through the Preventive System of Don Bosco. We are immersed in our busy daily life and mission, and we often lack time to reflect on our own activities and convictions. These Study Days give us the chance to reflect together more deeply on our evangelizing mission. We hope to offer the fruit of our reflection and our intuition to many brothers and sister of the Salesian Family in East Asia, one of the three most vibrant Salesian regions worldwide.

At the start of these Study Days I invite you to consider these important points:

1. All of us are in touch daily with thousands of youth who are followers of other religions especially in our schools, parishes, training or youth centres. Hence **we are challenged to discover the opportunities and dynamics** of initial proclamation of Jesus in our daily life and activities;
2. We are also **called to be more open through the dialogue of life** with followers of other religions or with Christians who have lapsed altogether from their faith and **to reach out to them as friends**;
3. We are **called to clarify some of our own doubts or prejudices** about the 'direct or indirect evangelisation' or about the relationship between our witness of life and proclamation;
4. The presence of one Salesian Cooperator during these Study Days is an invitation for all of us to **reaffirm the importance of the family and our family ministry** as a privileged place for the initial proclamation of the Gospel;

¹⁰ "The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father" (*Ad Gentes 2*)



5. Finally, we are **challenged to share our own experience of God with others**, and get into the dynamics of the 'First Asian Missionary Congress' (Chiang Mai, 2006). Blessed John Paul II invited us to '**tell the story of Jesus**' as the best way of proclaiming the Gospel in this continent.¹¹ For the Salesians it is also the theme for the 2012 Salesian Mission Day with the same content and title. During these Study Days we are also encouraged to rediscover the value of 'storytelling' as the best East Asian way of sharing own faith experiences and of engaging in initial proclamation.

I entrust these Study Days to Mary, Mother of the Church and Help of Christians who was present in the Cenacle with Jesus' disciples before the first Pentecost.

Let's pray together:

***Mary, Mother of the Church,**
we give you thanks for your 'Yes' to God and for your journey of faith
as first disciple and missionary of Jesus.*

***We want to live in communion** with all the disciples
of your Son Jesus,
together with the pilgrim Church
in order to bring the Gospel to all.*

***Mary, inspire us with the courage** to talk
about the world to Jesus and about Jesus to the world!*

***Help us, O Mother to follow Don Bosco, a tireless storyteller,**
in order to share with humility, patience and courage
the experience of our personal encounter with Jesus
in our communities, among the young and with every one we meet.*

Amen.

¹¹ *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 20.



An Overview on the Topic of the Study Days: from Prague to Sampran

Fr. Alfred Maravilla SDB *

Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* insists that initial proclamation "is the permanent priority of mission" and that it "has a central and irreplaceable role" in the Church's mission because "all forms of missionary activity are directed to this proclamation."¹² Thus, during this six year period the SDB Missions Department and the FMA Sector of Mission *inter/ad gentes* had chosen to foster a deeper reflection regarding initial proclamation through the Study Days in the different regions of our Congregations.

This choice turned out to be providential and extremely relevant: in April 2010, the Rector Major invited Salesians to reflect on "the need for an initial proclamation or a renewed proclamation of the Gospel" so that our youth ministry becomes more missionary.¹³

The first of the series of Study Days was on ***Salesian Mission in Frontier Situations and Initial Proclamation in Europe Today*** (Prague, November 4 -10, 2010). Ubaldo Montisci's presentation was decisive in helping us to understand that from the various terms used in ecclesial documents (*first evangelization, pre-evangelization, missionary preaching,*

* He was a missionary in Papua New Guinea (1985-2006) where he was involved in the school apostolate. He was also a visiting lecturer at the Don Bosco Center of Studies, Parañaque, Philippines and a lecturer at the Catholic Theological Institute, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. He has a certificate in Islamics, licentiates in both Missiology and Dogmatic Theology. He is preparing to defend his thesis in Fundamental Theology. At present he is responsible of the area of missionary animation and formation in the Missions Department at the SDB Generalate.

¹² *Redemptoris Missio*, 44.

¹³ "In fact, our apostolate is still not very missionary, that is to say, it pays little attention to the need for an initial proclamation or a renewed proclamation of the Gospel." Fr. Pascual Chávez, *Salesian Youth Ministry*, 2.3, Acts of the General Council, no. 407 (2010), 23.



kerygma, renewed proclamation, initial proclamation, new evangelization) initial proclamation is preferred especially when referring not only to contexts which was traditionally considered to be *ad gentes*, but also to contexts where there is an abandonment of the faith or where it is lived in a routine manner.

Montisci's presentation helped us to identify that initial proclamation, by its very nature, is directed primarily 1) to those who do not know Jesus Christ (those who are not Christians); 2) to those who search for Someone or something whom they sense but cannot name; 3) to those who go through daily life deprived of any sense, 4) as well as to those who, after having known him, have abandoned him; 5) and to those who believing that they have already known him enough, live their faith in a routine manner.¹⁴ Since then these recipients of initial proclamation have been kept in mind in the subsequent Study Days.

A few days ago during the Study Days on *The Salesian Mission and the Initial Proclamation of Christ in the Three-fold Context of South Asia* (Kolkata, August 7 – 11, 2011) our discussions brought to light that in a multireligious context there is a need to foster initial proclamation through the dialogue of life, education, human promotion and empowerment. Similarly, it was underlined that every proclaimer of the Good News must be in constant touch with God, have a deep experience of Christ, enriched by moments of personal prayer and reflection on the Word of God so that he/she may bear witness to Jesus through his/her way of thinking and living, through Christ-like deeds and by adopting a simple lifestyle. Hence, it was felt that it is necessary to create a conducive environment and make use of every opportunity for initial proclamation in the various settings of our apostolate. Similarly it was an urgently felt need to equip those in the initial stages of the formation with knowledge and skills in initial proclamation thereby instilling in them a strong missionary sense. Similarly every opportunity for direct mission experience needs to be guided and accompanied.

Today we are gathered here in Sampran to reflect, study and discuss

¹⁴ Joseph Gevaert, *La Proposta del Vangelo a chi non Conosce il Vangelo* (Leumann, Turin: LDC, 2001), 63-75; Xavier Morlans, *El Primer Anuncio. El Eslabon Perdido* (Madrid: PPC, 2009), 131-153.

on *The Salesian Mission and the Initial Proclamation of Christ in the Three-fold Context of East Asia*. Our gathering here ought to be seen as a continuation and deepening of the themes discussed at the Missionary Animation Seminar on *Evangelization and Interreligious Dialogue* at Batulao (1994), at the Animation and Missionary Formation Seminar on the *Uniqueness of Salvation in Jesus Christ and Need of Primary Evangelization* at Hua Hin (1998), and the Salesian Family Missionary Seminar on *East Asia and the Challenges of Mission Ad Gentes* at Hua Hin (2005).

Our discussions here are under the light of Ecclesia in Asia and the reflections and pastoral orientations of the Church in East Asia. The pastoral approach of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC) is founded on its attitude of respect and appreciation of the human and religious values among its peoples who are followers of other religions. For the FABC the proclamation of the Gospel in Asia could only take place through the building up of the local Church¹⁵ which, though small in number and meager in resources, has a renewed sense of mission¹⁶ as it journeys together with all the peoples of Asia in compassion and humility,¹⁷ in making every effort to keep the story of Jesus alive¹⁸ and in sharing the treasure of its Christian faith.¹⁸ Concretely, this implies the fostering of dialogue with Asia's triple reality of cultures, religions and poor multitudes which the FABC coined as *active integral evangelization*.²⁰

The pastoral methodology and theological reflection proposed by the FABC insist on starting with a contextual analysis to better comprehend how Christians understand themselves in their present situation. This also sheds light into the ambiguities of East Asia's history, the deep-seated mistrust and anti-foreign attitudes, the perduring perception that the Christian faith is something foreign and even inimical to local cultures and traditions

¹⁵ FABC I, 9 in *FAPA*, vol. I, 131.

¹⁶ "International Congress on Mission," 19, 23 in *FAPA*, vol. I, 131; FABC VII, Introduction in *FAPA*, vol. III, 2-3.

¹⁷ FABC VI, 3 in *FAPA*, vol. II, 2.

¹⁸ "Message of the First Asian Mission Congress," *First Asian Mission Congress* (Goa: FABC, 2008), 339.

¹⁹ OESC, "Dialogue Between Faith and Cultures in Asia: Towards Integral Human and Social Environment," 31 in *FAPA*, vol. II, 25.

²⁰ FABC II, 14.1 in *FAPA*, vol. I, 34; FABC VI, 14.1 in *FAPA*, vol. II, 7-8; FABC VIII, III, III.B in *FAPA*, vol. III, 8-9, 12.

and the aversion for any direct proclamation due to the fear that Christianity would undermine the local culture and society and upset the delicate religious balance of a multi-religious context.

It needs to be pointed out that although the FABC documents have frequently spoken of the urgency and necessity of proclamation it has not specifically used the term “initial proclamation.” Yet, a deeper understanding of the term and a closer analysis of FABC documents reveal that initial proclamation lies at the heart of FABC’s approach to the proclamation of the Gospel. The threefold dialogue, witness of life, active integral evangelization and story-telling find their rightful importance and place in the evangelizing mission of the Church in Asia as outlined by the FABC when seen as initial proclamation.

In *Ecclesia in Asia* John Paul II insisted on his overriding concern that evangelization should be centered on the “explicit proclamation of Jesus as Lord,”²¹ the presentation of the “the complete truth”²² about Jesus as “true God and true man, the one and only Saviour for all peoples,”²³ which includes “ontological notions”²⁴ even if he recognized that this could present difficulties in Asian countries. The main concern of Asian bishops, instead, is *how* to lead the followers of other religions to discover and be fascinated with the person of Jesus Christ who alone leads them to faith.

I submit that the key that would reconcile *missio ad gentes* and *missio inter gentes*, “the complete truth” of Jesus Christ and “how” to lead others to that truth, which are, apparently, two opposite and mutually exclusive orientations, is the deeper understanding of initial proclamation which would unveil it as being the missing link between proclamation and witness of life which the FABC continues to insist as essential elements of its mission of active integral evangelization in Asia. Surely, presenting Jesus Christ as “the truth” himself (Jn 14,6) is not a matter of arrogance. But here the vital question in response to Christian proclamation is a personal relationship and total commitment to Jesus Christ not whether and how Jesus is the unique and universal Saviour nor about the rejection or acceptance of

²¹ *Ecclesia in Asia*, 19.

²² *Ibid.*, 23.

²³ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.



possible ways in which God can save other people. But it is only in Christian initiation and catechesis that the “ontological notions”²⁵ of Jesus Christ insisted upon by *Ecclesia in Asia* comes to the fore.

The FABC and Initial Proclamation

Certainly, a clear understanding of Christology is presupposed in initial proclamation. But neither a doctrinal discourse nor an argumentative presentation of the faith is able to stir up the desire to have a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. An argumentative presentation proceeds through progressive deduction. It is filled with logical reasoning which could make it alien to listeners who are not familiar with such language. Certainly this will have its opportune moment in the process of Christian initiation, but not in initial proclamation. Indeed, “being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”²⁶

The animation and missionary formation seminar in Hua Hin in 1998 focused on primary evangelization. Although no definition was made, the text presents initial proclamation more as *kerygma*. *Kerygma* focuses on the content of the Christian faith.²⁷ Yet, a renewed awareness and appreciation of initial proclamation has led to a deeper understanding that initial proclamation is primarily the fostering of an environment, on creating quality relationships that could stir up an interest in Jesus Christ.

In the light of the FABC documents and the reflections during the Study Days in Europe and South Asia, initial proclamation could be defined as the **witness of life** of every Christian and of the whole Christian community and the **set of activities** in specific contexts that, while safeguarding the **freedom of conscience** with loving **respect** and **esteem**, aim at **eliciting or stirring up an interest for Jesus** making it possible to initiate the gradual and dialogical process of **proposing the person and mes-**

²⁵ *Ecclesia in Asia*, 20.

²⁶ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 1.

²⁷ “Need of Primary Evangelization. Contents and Methods” in *Animation and Missionary Formation Seminar. Uniqueness of Salvation in Jesus Christ and Need of Primary Evangelization* (Rome: SDB, 1998), 79, 83, 88-93.



sage of Jesus Christ. It is directed not only to those who do not know Christ, but also to those who, having known him, have walked away from him; to those who, believing that they already sufficiently know him, live the Christian faith routinely; to those who search for God and to those who live a life deprived of any meaning so as to **lead them to an initial adhesion to Jesus Christ or to a revitalization of the Christian faith.**²⁸

It must be stressed that for the FABC initial proclamation is neither a method nor an activity nor a celebration. It is neither planned nor organized. It happens on the spot in the midst of ordinary daily life. It is that moment, that spark that could ignite the flame of faith in Jesus Christ There are as many ways of fostering initial proclamation as there are forms of making an invitation. Conversely, the one who receives initial proclamation could freely listen and accept it, reject it or allow oneself to be questioned as exemplified by the encounter of Jesus in John's Gospel with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (Jn 4,3-42), or the encounter of Phillip with the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts, 43-54). As explained above initial proclamation, then, is a proclamation of Jesus Christ that is respectful of their freedom of conscience. It could never do violence to the person's conscience nor could it be mistaken for proselytism. However, "**we shall not be timid when God opens the door for us to proclaim explicitly the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior and the answer to the fundamental questions of human existence.**"²⁹

Missio inter Gentes

William R. Burrows first proposed the term *missio inter gentes* in 2001 because, he stressed, the proclamation of Jesus Christ in Asia is now done by Asians themselves *among* followers of other religions who are friends, neighbours and fellow citizens. This neologism implies a shift in approach which considers the cultural, religious and social context of the gentes of

²⁸ André Fossion, "Proposta della Fede e Primo Annuncio," *Catechesi* 78, no. 4 (2008-2009): 30-34; Joseph Gevaert, *Prima Evangelizzazione* (Turin: LDC, 1990), 68-71, 80-84.

²⁹ FABC V, 4.3 in *FAPA*, vol. I, 282.

Asia as *loci theologici*.³⁰ East Asian theologians soon considered this neologism as the best expression of the Church's mission in Asia as fostered by the FABC. Some East Asian theologians have interpreted this as a clear indication that the FABC's pastoral approach and the Universal Church's mission *ad gentes* is incompatible. For example Jonathan Yun-ka Tan asserted that the FABC documents teach that *missio ad gentes* could be seen as being definitively replaced by *missio inter gentes* as a new mission paradigm in Asia.³¹ This has been picked up by not a few, hence, some use expressions like, "there is no mission *ad gentes* in Asia," "*missio inter gentes Asiae*," or "*missio ad gentes/missio inter gentes*."

The fact is dialogue with Asia's "great religions,"³² "rich cultures"³³ and "massive poverty"³⁴ has led the FABC to draw out from its faith expressions a new thinking even if it is initially hidden in some vague formulation. This process is underpinned by a dynamic fidelity and adherence to the one deposit of faith and a conscious concern to present this same faith in Asian context. As this dialogue deepened, in time, new terms were developed by the Asian Church, the one and the same subject of the journeying people of God, to express the one and the same faith in Asia. I submit, therefore, that *missio ad gentes* and *missio inter gentes* are neither mutually exclusive nor diametrically opposed. These are, rather, complimentary approaches of the one mission of the Church of Christ which both sustain and preserve each other because both are intimately inter connected and oriented towards each other. *Missio inter gentes*, then, is the Asian application of *missio ad gentes* which is attentive to the Asian milieu by sharing the faith in Christ *among* peoples using a step by step pedagogy. In Asia, in our case on East Asia, mission *ad gentes* cannot be but *among* peoples. The dialogues of life and of action fostered by the FABC take place by living *among* the people. *Missio inter gentes* considers intercultural dialogue,

³⁰ William R. BURROWS, "A Response to Michael Amaladoss," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 56 (2001): 15.

³¹ Jonathan Tan Yun-ka, "From *Ecclesia in Asia* to *A Mission of Love and Service: A Comparative Analysis of Two Contrasting Approaches to Doing Christian Theology in Asia*," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 41 (2004): 87.

³² Asian Bishops Meeting, *Resolutions of the Meeting*, 12 *FAPA*, I, 9; FABC II, 5 in *FAPA*, vol. I, 30.

³³ FABC VII, III in *FAPA*, vol. III, 8

³⁴ FABC V, 2.2.1-2.2.3 in *FAPA*, vol. I, 276-277; FABC VIII, 12 in *FAPA*, vol. IV, 5.

interreligious dialogue, human promotion and liberation, witness, dialogue and evangelization of culture as integral characteristics of the Church's approach to mission in Asia. In fact, *missio inter gentes* primarily aims at stirring up interest in the person of Jesus Christ in order to initiate the gradual and dialogical process of proposing the person and message of Jesus Christ.

This step by step pedagogy use symbols or images of Jesus drawn from East Asians' daily living experiences so as to make Jesus Christ relevant to their existential realities and concerns like the crucified and risen sage,³⁵ the poor Monk, the perfect realization of change, the marginal Person par excellence, the crucified people,³⁶ the Tao³⁷ or even those which are close to East Asian sensitivities like the Teacher of Wisdom, the Healer, the Liberator, the Spiritual Guide, the Enlightened One, the compassionate Friend of the poor, the Good Samaritan, the Good Shepherd, the Obedient One.³⁸ Through the *diakonia of Truth*³⁹ whatever image, symbol or formulation expressed in myths, folklores, and other narratives⁴⁰ are analyzed if they are consistent with the Christian faith by "examining how they incorporate the biblical witness of Jesus and how they make use of the historical Christological traditions."⁴¹ But this gradual pedagogy neither denies nor hides nor waters down the complete truth of Jesus Christ, rather, it prepares its personal reception.

For the FABC "the promotion of justice is part and parcel of evangelization,"⁴² hence social involvement is "a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, that is, of the mission of the Church for the redemption of

³⁵ Jonathan Tan Yun-ka, "Jesus the Crucified and Risen Sage. Constructing a Contemporary Confucian Christology," ed., Roman Malek, *The Chinese Face of Jesus Christ*, Monumenta Serica Monograph Series, L/3b (Sankt Augustin, Germany: Institute Monumenta Serica and China-Zentrum, 2007), 1487, 1496-1513.

³⁶ Peter C. Phan, "Jesus the Christ with an Asian Face," *Theological Studies* 57 (1996): 405-430.

³⁷ Joseph H. Wong, "Logos and Tao: Johanne Christology and a Taoist Perspective," *PATH 2* (2002): 341-374.

³⁸ These images from Ecclesia in Asia were proposed by the Synod Fathers. *Ecclesia in Asia* 20, footnote 80.

³⁹ *Fides et Ratio* 49 explains the *diakonia of truth* as an act of the Magisterium... here I use the term referring to the service of confronting truth in a general way.

⁴⁰ *Ecclesia in Asia*, 20.

⁴¹ Peter C. Phan, "Jesus the Christ with an Asian Face," *Theological Studies* 57 (1996): 428.

⁴² BISA IV, 8 in *FAPA*, vol. I, 212; FABC I, 15, 19 in *FAPA*, vol. I, 5.

the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.”⁴³ It is crucial to ask ourselves often: In what way do our initiatives for human promotion and development stir up an interest in the person of Jesus Christ?

As you might have noticed initial proclamation in the threefold context of East Asia is not easy. Thus, in East Asia initial proclamation, or *missio inter gentes*, presupposes a deep **spirituality of dialogue** which enables the proclaimer to overcome impeding obstacles like false ideologies in helping the poor, suspicion and prejudices against followers of other religions which are often rooted on a superficial or false knowledge of their beliefs as well as of their religious and cultural practices.

Initial Proclamation among East Asian Christians

Is initial proclamation relevant in countries or areas in East Asia which are predominantly Christian? Should we not reflect on new evangelization instead? Indeed, it is not surprising if one would think that in areas or countries where there is an abandonment of the faith or where it is lived in a routine manner what is really needed is new evangelization and not initial proclamation. Certainly there are complex reasons why many Catholics abandon the practice of the faith after school or after faithfully attending parish catechesis. Sweeping and simplistic statements do not do justice to the complexity of issues involved. Yet, we are aware that in Christian countries of East Asia many of the young people who frequent our Religion classes and parishes have neither consciously opted to be Christians nor do they all live committed Christian lives.

The necessity of initial proclamation among baptized Christians has become more urgent today in our globalized world. Globalization and the facility of global communication and travel multiply the possibility for relationship and exchange between cultures, peoples, and individuals is radically changing the world. A new culture, in consequence, is emerging with definite structures and a broad social context. It is not yet clear if this global movement will lead to the extinction of or reassertion of local cultures. It is clear, however, that the emerging global culture is not a mere collec-

⁴³ FABC I, 22, in *FAPA*, vol. I, 15-16.

tion of juxtaposed local cultures. It is, rather, profoundly imbued by the principles of materialism and secularism, where the measure of all things is productivity, economy and technology, leaving no space for religious principles and ethical values.⁴⁴

Hence, one important effect of globalization in East Asia is secularism. The term “secularisation” itself, in the context of European history, connotes an original unity between the Church and the State and the subsequent separation of the Christian Church and the civil state which led to the emergence of a civil society where there is plurality of perspectives and worldviews. This western understanding of secularisation is, to a certain degree, foreign to Asian mindset. For an East Asian religion and culture are intimately inseparable. In fact, a certain form of state support for properties of religious institutions has been the key element of religious politics in Asia throughout its millennial history.⁴⁵

Secularization, however, may also be understood as relegation of religion to the private sphere as well religion’s declining relevance in society and, consequently, of the binding power of norms and values which are rooted in religion and expressed in daily life, political orientation and public order. This is correctly referred to as “secularism”. Secularism is certainly present in East Asia particularly in urban centres and metropolises. In fact, there are East Asians who claim to be without any religious affiliation.⁴⁶ Secularism has caused among believers of all religions the loss of the sense of God, of the sense of God’s presence in the world and of God’s providence over their lives.⁴⁷

Perhaps the most aggressive adversary of religions in East Asia is the type of secularism, so pervasive especially among the urban middle class’ education and cosmopolitan life-style. The middle class, in turn, controls economic activities, the apparatus of the state as well as the local means of social communication which have managed to subtly and insidiously to

⁴⁴ Mariam Ait Ahmed Quaali, “Globalization and the Future of Inter-Faith Dialogue,” *Islam Today* 26 (2009):119-123.

⁴⁵ Joachim Gentz, “The Religious Situation in East Asia,” in *Secularization and the World Religions*, ed., Hans Joas, Klaus Wiegandt (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 241-242.

⁴⁶ Gudrun Krämer, “Islam and Secularization,” in *Secularization and the World Religions*, 111-112.

⁴⁷ ABM, “Message of the Conference,” I, 8-10 in *FAPA*, vol. I, 30-31.

capture the souls of many East Asians. There are also groups who either assert that belief in the supernatural inhibits development or exploit or politicize the people's deep religious sense.⁴⁸ In cultures or contexts in the process of secularisation where the religiously implicit is barely heard or understood, initial proclamation would need to be followed up, where it is possible, by explicit proclamation.⁴⁹

In contexts where the process of secularisation has taken place, there is an observable faith fatigue among Christians – which, unfortunately, is also reflected in religious life – and which could be noticed in the joylessness, weariness of spirit and an inner sadness in living their faith, which ultimately lead to its abandonment. In such a context, the initial proclamation that one receives in the family is often not adequate enough to become the foundation of a robust faith. It is in this light that the *General Directory for Catechesis* insists that Christians who either live their faith out of habit, or as something merely 'cultural' or have abandoned altogether the practice of their faith all need initial proclamation of the Gospel in view of fostering their personal option and adhesion to Christ.⁵⁰ Without this initial personal option for Christ and initial conversion catechesis becomes sterile. How much time, effort and resources we invest in catechesis in our schools, training centers and parishes, yet how little we bother to ensure that those who are catechized have actually previously made a personal faith option to know and follow Christ as a result of an initial proclamation.⁵¹ Thus, **initial proclamation is the first and necessary step towards a new evangelization of East Asian Christians!**

Christian Way of Life as Initial Proclamation

Seeing Christianity as "style" which is an initial proclamation overcomes the danger of reducing it to doctrines while focusing on the whole Christian life either in all its expressions or singular of expressions, as well

⁴⁸ FABC VIII, I, 23 in *FAPA*, vol. IV, 8-9.

⁴⁹ Pierre Robitaille, "La Première Annonce en Etablissement Catholique D'Enseignement". Dossier. Enseignement Catholique Secretariat Générale, France (March 24, 2009), 4-5.

⁵⁰ *General Directory for Catechesis*, 61.

⁵¹ Joseph Gevaert, *Prima Evangelizzazione* (Leumann, Turin: LDC, 1990), 68-71, 80-84.

as in its relational or socio-political expressions.⁵² Thus, living *among* the people implies, in turn, fostering a *dialogue of heart, life and action* and looking at the context *with* the people under the light of the Gospel in order to discover the signs of the times and unmask what is inhuman and provide bridges which people can cross to new life.⁵³

Understood as initial proclamation, *missio inter gentes* proclaims Jesus Christ not by abstract metaphysical, speculative or doctrinal presentations but by dialogue through a relational way of life *among* peoples of diverse cultures, various religions and social status that is open and welcoming, and accepts pluralism as an opportunity for mutual enrichment and collaboration. Relationship, which is a core East Asian value, is also the core value in this dialogue of life and. This core value undergirds the web of relationship and of friendship which plays an important part as shown by Matteo Ricci's Chinese experience.⁵⁴ Hence, ordinary daily life *among* peoples is the arena of dialogue of life and action and the foundation on which to build theological and spiritual dialogues. In this light, daily life is "a truly propaedeutic path to faith."⁵⁵ Hence for us, it does not matter whether we are in school or in a parish, whether we are involved in education apostolate, in pastoral activity or in human promotion. All our life and activity, no matter where, is, in fact, and ought to be, initial proclamation. No matter where we are assigned we are, therefore, missionaries. Let whatever we do, then, be filled with missionary zeal and ardor which were so characteristic of Don Bosco, the founder and center of our Salesian Family!

Storytelling as Initial Proclamation

As pointed out, whether we live in multireligious context or in areas where the majority are Christians, initial proclamation is necessary. In a

⁵² Christoph Theobald, "Il Cristianesimo come Stile. Fare Teologia nella Postmodernità," *Teologia* 32 (2007): 281.

⁵³ Roger P. Schroeder, "Proclamation and Interreligious Dialogue as Prophetic Dialogue," *Missiology: An International Review* 14, 1 (2013): 52-53.

⁵⁴ Savio Hon Tai Fai, "La Via Dell'Amicizia e la Lex Orandi. Una Lettura Interculturale del Jiaoyou Lun di Matteo Ricci," *Rivista Liturgica* 97, no.2 (2010): 231-258; Matteo Ricci, *Dell'Amicizia* (Quodlibet: Macerata, 2005).

⁵⁵ *Fides at Ratio*, 67; Christoph Theobald, *Le Christianisme Comme Style*, vol. 1 (Cerf: Paris, 2007), 125-131, 188-189, 385-387.

“fully participatory Christian communities where people experience that they “belong” and that together they are the Church,”⁵⁶ we Asian Christians are challenged to proclaim by sharing the story of our personal encounter with Jesus the Savior. Unlike direct proclamation which could appear to East Asians as a culturally insensitive and religiously disrespectful monologue, the telling and retelling of the personal experience of Jesus on the part of the storyteller, takes place in the context of a web of relationships among our fellow East Asians from diverse cultures and various religions, many of whom are poor. Our love for Christ and for our Asian brothers and sisters impels us to narrate the story of Jesus and our personal encounter with him. Such a storytelling becomes initial proclamation when through the story, the storyteller inspires hope and strength among the listeners to face their struggles in daily life. Thus, the story becomes a compelling invitation to follow Jesus Christ. Yet, we tell and retell these without any thought of forcing them on the listeners.

To be effective the Christian storyteller also needs to be formed by and constantly drinks from the living water of God’s Word and ponder it in his/her heart. Yet, the main actor in *missio inter gentes*, hence in initial proclamation, is not the person of proclaimer but the Holy Spirit, the Great Storyteller. This “entails perceiving and honoring the divine Spirit at work in all peoples, cultures and religions.”⁵⁷ Indeed, it is the Spirit who sets ablaze the hearts of the storyteller and the listeners⁵⁸ and stirs up interest in the person of Jesus Christ!

A Fervent Wish!

Today Christianity remains “a little flock,”⁵⁹ in proportion to a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious population. To a great extent, Christianity was transported without being transplanted, hence it has remained a *bonsai*, a potted plant. Thus, East Asian Catholics, need to work

⁵⁶ FABC V, 3.3.3 in *FAPA*, vol. I, 281.

⁵⁷ FIRA I, 2.4 in *FAPA*, vol. III, 120.

⁵⁸ “Message of the First Asian Mission Congress,” in *Telling the Story of Jesus in Asia*, 338-339.

⁵⁹ FABC VI, 14.3 in *FAPA*, vol. II, 9.

together with other Christians, steadfastly convinced that “the Lord has sent us” to be his missionaries in this continent.⁶⁰

I dare dream that our discussions during these Study Days will open up “a new and promising horizon”⁶¹ and our Salesian missionary zeal would “be re-kindled now” (cf. Lk 12:49).⁶² I dare hope that after this gathering we may all be “on fire with the love of Christ and burning with zeal to make him known more widely, loved more deeply and followed more closely.”⁶³ Indeed, “a fire can only be lit by something that is itself on fire,”⁶⁴ less we give in to **faith fatigue** and slide back comfortably to the **joyless and ardourless “maintenance mode” of Salesian presence in East Asia**. Indeed, enthusiastic Salesian sisters, brothers and priests attract young people to the Salesian life!



⁶⁰ “Asian Congress on Evangelization, Manila 1992,” in *FAPA*, vol. IV, 278.

⁶¹ *Ecclesia in Asia*, 9.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 23.

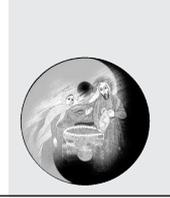
⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.



Part I
Analysis of the Situation







Analysis of our Situation in East Asia

Sr. Alma Castagna FMA *

Cambodia

In the multicultural, multireligious and poor contexts of East Asia, the religious awareness and sensitivity can contribute to a more mutual understanding and respect to the beliefs of each religion and that more dialogue with each other leads to the paths of life and love and hope for a better society as well as the sharing of the faith.

The most marginalized people are the most open and sensitive to the Christian message but at the same time, because of their spiritual and material poverty, there is a risk that they become Christians more out of economic interest than faith conviction. Even today, for many poor people to become a Christian is to have money, success and a future.

The Church's mission here is to proclaim the Kingdom of God and build that Kingdom in a world of today. The root of this proclamation is our deep faith in Jesus, the Lord of History. It is the same Jesus who was born, lived, died and rose from the dead to witness that God is life and love. Our mission, then, is to continue the building of that Kingdom of God. In this light it is extremely important to prepare a highly motivated Catholic laity (priority) because the church, "little flock" will grow when there are lay people who dare to live and share their faith in the places of their daily life.

China

In multi-cultural and multi-religious society of Hong Kong life is lived in a hurried pace which makes people, especially young people, easily lose

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their identity or direction in life. Religious awareness is a drop of water in the thirsty heart of people today, provided we can convey it in an appropriate way. Living with so many questions confronting them, people desire a mentor, a coach, to share with, to talk to and be listened to. They need someone to indicate the way, so that they can find the truth and finally the “real meaning of life”.

Religious awareness can deliver people from the fear of death and from the shackles of superstitions and trigger in them the desire to search for friendship in an implacably competitive world. The attitudes we encounter among the marginalized are:

1. Search for solutions to their needs in a spirit of justice and fairness.
2. Search for answers to the existential questions prompted by their needs.
3. Search for friendship in an implacably competitive world.

Initial proclamation of Jesus is making Jesus known. Being known through his paschal story, how he lived, what he has done. Knowing how Jesus proclaimed maybe a good way to imitate how to foster initial proclamation. What Jesus did was to offer one more choice to the traditional and normal choice we do. In our globalized world today, we offer one more choice, but a choice of “BEING DIFFERENT”. This “DIFFERENCE” makes one discover the “MEANING OF LIFE”.

Indonesia – Timor Leste

In Indonesia it is very sensitive to say the name of Jesus but everyone is open and appreciative of those who live His virtues (charity, forgiveness, happiness according to the sermon of the mountain etc) . Many Muslim youth often tell the Salesians: “do not make us as one of you, just make us good Muslims.” The people’s openness to our witness of solidarity with the poor, to our option to work for the service of the poor and marginalized people without making distinction regarding religion or culture foster dialogue of life and action which enables us to do good to many people.

Jesus or *Nabi Isa Almasih* is our Lord, He is our Savior. How can we share this with the youth in the pluralistic country like Indonesia and Timor Oeste? Again, we say the teaching of Jesus like love, forgiveness which



is universal. We have to bear witness as a community founded on the evangelical counsels, that we really have the DNA of Jesus. Yes we are minority but we can do great things among the young to show that we are Jesus' disciples, that Jesus is in us and that we love all the young people like Jesus. Another experience is the spirit of sacrifice of every Salesian. This witnessing is initial proclamation. It can stir up in the young an interest to know Jesus better.

Japan

The first missionary in Japan was considered a failure of missions. The Christians in that period were seen as a divisive force. Full of zeal they destroyed Buddhists and Shinto temples. This led to the seclusion of Japan for 230 years. In the post war period of religious vacuum and confusion, various Christian missions, societies and educators arrived in Japan, hoping to take advantage of the situation. In order to conduct their missionary work more effectively, they soon engaged in research on Japanese religions and the Japanese sense of spirituality and religiosity. Centers for research and studies were opened and Institute for Christian Culture was established. These became centers where people meet for some days and relate to each other in an atmosphere of delicate charity. What united them together was their religious experience. Thanks to these centers Christians began to see non-Christians as equal partners and stopped treating them as objects of proselytism.

We recognize many moral and spiritual values in other religions and other cultures like respect for people and nature, respect the dead, contemplation, prayer of the heart, kindness, etc. We honor and treasure these values. We respect their religious ceremonies. The Japanese prefer the practices of faith than theories. Thus, the witness of a joyfully living our faith and living authentically our consecration and witness Jesus' words and with our lives are of greatest importance.

Religious awareness and sensitivity can be a strong meeting point of living faith and hope among the peoples of East Asia. If only religious leaders would be united and not compete in preaching the nature and culture of their belief and shows respect to one another tradition then all can



walk hand in hand towards one goal to the salvation of souls' their own soul and the souls of people they are living it.

The more marginalized people are, the more hesitant they are to work with others because their poverty gives them less and less confidence to develop equally with those who are better off. This is true even in their Christian life. Inversely, those who are rich do not extend a hand to welcome the marginalized people to grow in faith with them. Consequently, poor people are totally separated from the rich even in church. In reality these marginalized people are the easiest people to convince about faith because they cling to Divine Providence because they know well that they can't and won't make it all on their own strength.

Since Christians are a very small minority in Japan, some Christians think that it's a disadvantage to be known as a Christian, especially in marriage. They personally believe in Christ, but keep their faith in secret even in the family. Many of them have difficulties to let their children receive baptism and to bring them up in the Christian faith. This is a real challenge to initial proclamation.

Bishop Mori Kazuhiro wrote in 2008 that that in 1987 the bishops of Japan convened a national conference to search for new ways to evangelize. They realized that our problems lay in the "gap between faith and daily life" along with the gap between Church and the Japanese society. They felt that we will progress in evangelization only when the Church will have a meaningful presence in Japanese society and be seen for its simplicity of life like Mother Teresa. These reflections of the National Conference give us clear hints regarding the initial proclamation in Japan today.

Korea

Korea is a multicultural and multireligious country with a culture of meditation and reflection that is more developed than in the Western world. Hence, Koreans are also more open to accept a culture of prayer and efforts to find the truth. Thus, many become Christian by realizing that the mystery they experience in this life is the mystery of God.

On the other hand, a moral relativism that is easily affected by economic hardship and mass media sets obstacles in integrating Christian values and the truth of God. Direct proclamation is not possible. It is necessary



to help them in their human, social, and cultural development through various activities, movements.

The holy and sincere life of the late John Lee Taeseok, missionary in Tonj, Sudan is truly becoming a means of initial proclamation of Jesus in Korean society today.

Myanmar

The influence and belief of spirit world could sometimes be helpful, yet sometimes it could also be oppressive and fearful. Similarly, the struggle for survival is the priority for most of the poor, so hope for economical, physical development is very appealing and attractive.

Most marginalized people have a sense of inferiority. Often they can't make decisions. They do not have the courage to stand up for their rights. Their daily survival is their priority. They are always after the money. They look at life as a struggle and something to suffer as the result of their past life. Some keep their suffering interiorly and they do not want to share with others about their difficulties. This causes them to get the depressed or even develop heart diseases.

In the multicultural and religious context of Myanmar, Christianity could make a great contribution towards reconciliation and harmony, a life together and collaboration among the people for the sake of humanity. Christianity can be a unifying factor among other religions.

Liturgical celebrations, adoration or prayers have great importance in the life of Burmese Catholics. There will be always almost someone or a family praying in Church, but without right motivations. Some come to Church because others are doing it or since this family does it, so I have to do also. Therefore, prayers are often limited to rituals but never manifested in deeds and service filled with love. This could be a counter sign to initial proclamation of the Gospel in Myanmar.

The Phillipines

Although the majority of the population of in the Phillipines is Catholics, there are also Protestants and as small percentage of the popula-



tion are Muslims, Buddhist and followers of other religions. Peoples of East Asia generally have an innate religious awareness and sensitivity. The traditional forms of religious experience can help in the discovery of the content and wisdom behind these traditional forms. The area of popular religiosity or popular expressions of relating with the “sacred” is very rich in human and spiritual expressions – touching the areas of intuition, perception, sentiments and feelings.

New forms of religious experiences could be creatively explored in order to discover new methods and expressions attractive to people today. The vast field of social means of communication is a great challenge for exploration. The people’s religious awareness and sensitivity could motivate them to liberate themselves for the shackles of oppressive poverty.

The positive attitudes of marginalised people favorable to evangelization or initial proclamation are: openness to God, appreciation of the beauty of nature, valuing family life, valuing smooth interpersonal relationships, simple and frugal living, hard work, generosity, respect for life, awe before the divine mystery, gratitude for God’s gifts, optimism and joy, patient-endurance, flexibility & resilience, inventiveness & creativity, friendship, sense of belonging in a community.

Among marginalized people there is an attitude of dependence on the divine intervention. There is the attitude of trust in the God whom they know as Father, Provider, Loving, and Redeemer. There is an attitude of hope in the redeeming power of a God who will save them from their poverty and misery. This dependence on divine intervention could also lead to a tendency to become lazy and remain passive, believing that God will not abandon those who trust in Him. This is manifested in the fact that in the Philippines the poor remains poor and the rich becomes richer. The school apostolate and other social services are some of the concrete ways of proclaiming Christ. The alleviation of human conditions of poverty is the way of bear credible witness to Christ. The interventions of Catholic institutions in moments of natural calamities and disasters are highly valued.

The negative attitudes of marginalised people that have adverse influence on evangelization or initial proclamation are: superstitious view of life, fear of the evil spirits, fear of punishment by an angry God, resignation to fate or fatalism, complacency in one’s comfort zone or ignorance,



pride, greed & selfishness, worldly desire for pleasures, lust for money, vices and immorality, corruption of morals, lack of concern for the environment, self-centered opportunism, dishonesty, lack of self-discipline, lack of concern for the common good, indifference, superficiality, dependence, and “dole-out” mentality.

The Christian faith or religious awareness becomes the guiding moral principle and establishes the norms on which behavior and practices are based. It dictates the mode of behavior of a Christian in his or her day to day interaction with others in society.

Today the challenge to the “little flock” or the communities of Christians spread in East Asia is to experience a “new Pentecost” for the launching of a new evangelization. Even in the Philippines the challenge is twofold:

- to discover the Spirit of God already waiting for us in the ancient religions of Asia – waiting for the complete and definitive revelation of Jesus Christ.
- to reach out to peoples who are waiting for the Good News of salvation of Jesus Christ – to liberate them from oppressive poverty and show them the Way, the Truth and Life in its fullness (Jn 14:6).



In the Philippines we need to rediscover

- a) the *Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC)* as the new way of becoming church today because it has the capacity to empower the people in order to address the challenges of modern times.
- b) the traditional *Baptismal Catechumenate* as a process of growth in the faith that can be updated and adapted to our modern contexts.
- c) the importance of education of young people in our schools and training centers as a way of developing a healthy Christian conscience of Catholics in the midst of society where corruption and materialism are on the agenda.
- d) the opportunities for initial proclamation and deepening of the faith through groups and new forms new movements in the Church.



Thailand

The Thai people's religious awareness and sensitivity foster an environment in which relationships, messages, educational initiatives of various kinds reflect, testify and present lifestyle and mission of Jesus'. It helps us accompany people entrusted by appealing to their inner goodness. Their religious sensitivity offers them opportunities' for reflection. Generally they are open to dialogue, even if sometimes they are not as available to welcome concrete persons. They acknowledge the good Christians accomplished, as well as show their solidarity with Christians especially in the defense of moral values.

Their religious awareness and sensitivity help the young people and adults find their source of true life, the right way and the truth, which we can find all of these only in Jesus Christ. Help the human being touch this truth in the natural events that emerges in our society and in the world around us. Take care and love the poor and be one of them. Respect the Human Dignity of the people and respect for human life and to search for the truth.

The great majority of the people of Thailand are Buddhist and, naturally, Buddhism's influence and dominance is felt in daily life. They strongly believe that children are born with disabilities due to the sin their parents had committed in the past life. Therefore, they have to accept it and live this life as the consequence of their sin. The family of persons with disabilities often face the economic hardship. Thus often the person with disability is ignored or unattended. Because of their limited educational background, they are not easily convinced that their children with disability could be rehabilitated to live inclusively with other people. They would rather leave them in the home, often alone, until their death.

Among poor Catholics there are those who have not had the opportunity to deepen their Christian identity, some are open and willing to continue this journey, instead others are more concerned with asking, sometimes even demanding, for financial help. It is almost as if it is their right to charity but we have hope that they will be more open to the grace of God.

The evangelization in Thailand was initiated more that 400 hundred years ago, yet the Catholic population is only 0.8% compare to the 65 million population. Why is it that very few Thais are converted to Christi-



anity or to Catholicism? The Thai people want to see more love in action to empower them to live a better quality of life. We have to be more proactive to preach the Love of God to the poor and young people through our good way of life. We have to be friend with the young in our schools to understand them, regain their trust of friendship in order to win their hearts and share them our faith in Christ. As a “a little flock” we bear witness to Christ through our joy and hope even if we face difficulties and sufferings. Initial proclamation could only take place through witness of life and service!

Vietnam

In Vietnam the people’s religious awareness and sensitivity can make a great contribution to bring about reconciliation the harmony, a life of collaboration among the people our common good. It can be a unifying factor among other religions.

Our effort among the marginalized to defend human rights and dignity, promote life through engagement in health care, in social development and education become a means to make an initial proclamation of Christ. Yet, initiatives to foster initial proclamation are very few mainly because of the strict control of the government over religions. Many Catholics too lack of a comprehensive vision of reality of the Church.







Initial Proclamation in East Asia in FABC Documents and in *Ecclesia in Asia*

Fr. Joseph Phuoc SDB*

Introduction: the Story of a Cab Driver

In one decade (1994-2004) the Protestants in Vietnam grew from 400.000 to 1,200,000 members, almost 300%. Meanwhile, the Catholic Church in Vietnam has grown just 1.01 %. The same may be said about mainland China where our Protestant brothers and sisters are boasting of their fast growth in spite of adversities, political oppression and under different forms of persecution. Is there something missing in us, missionaries and proclaimers of the Good News to all our brothers and sisters in this large Continent of Asia? Are we going towards the wrong direction so much so that for centuries, the Catholic Church in Asia is still a minority, except in the Philippines? I believe that these Study Days will explore new venues for initial proclamation.

First of all, in this presentation I would like to break down some key concepts as an introduction to our theme of these days, and after that, I would like to highlight some reflection on the Church teaching on this issue of the initial proclamation. For the first part of this presentation I am heavily dependent on the presentation of professor Ubaldo Montisci at the *Study Days on Initial Proclamation in Europe* (2010).

The great Commission of Jesus at the time He went back to His Father has been always treasured by the disciples:

1. And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.” (Mk 16,15)

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going, proclamation of the good news —> universality

2. *“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, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember I am with you always to the end of the age.”* (Mt 28,19-20)

Going, Making disciples, Baptizing, Teaching to obey, Remembering the Lord’s Presence.

“You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24,48-49)

Being sent, Being Witness, Being clothed with power from on high.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1,8)

Receiving the power of the Holy Spirit, Being witness to the ends of the earth.

For two thousand years, thousands of Jesus’ disciples have obeyed this command and traveled to the farthest end of the world to share the Good News of Jesus and about Jesus. Vatican II in the last century has launched the whole universal church to its missionary thrust in facing various obstacles of the modernity.

In fact, for Vatican II, the entire Church is missionary. Its missionary thrust comes directly from the Mystery of Trinity. In the words of Stephen Bevens, “the Church’s foundation and continued existence are not to provide refuge from a sinful world or to provide a warm and supportive community for lonely souls, or even less to be a plank of salvation on a tempestuous sea that threatens damnation.” But “the church is to point beyond itself, to be community that preaches, serves and witnesses to the reign of God. In doing this, the church shares in and continues

through the power of God's Spirit, the work of its Lord, Jesus Christ."

That's why Vatican II states that the "pilgrim church" is missionary by its very nature (*Ad Gentes* 2); Paul VI affirms that evangelization is the church's identity (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 14), and John Paul II declares that missionary activity belongs to the nature of the Christian life (*Redemptoris Missio* 1). Then, the FABC Theological Advisory Commission proposes that "the church is a community of disciples bearing witness to the Risen Lord and his Gospel. Therefore it is the process of evangelization that is the *raison d'être* of the church." Bevans stressed that the church does not have a mission-as if the church exists prior to its task, rather it is mission as such.

Let us explore, therefore, the content of our term *initial proclamation* in the light of the wider context of "evangelization", which had diverse interpretations from Vatican II until today. Then, we will draw some reflections on the nuances of its meanings which could be relevant to our discussions these days.

It is in fact possible to identify two different ways of understanding evangelization from two important documents of the Magisterium: *Ad Gentes* (1965) and *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), which found further development in contemporary thought. In the Council Decree *Ad Gentes*, the Church's missionary work is presented as composed of four successive stages:

- witness of life, dialogue, presence of charity
- evangelization and conversion
- the catechumenate and initiation Christian
- formation of the Christian community

In this perspective, evangelization appears as a specific "moment" in the mission of the Church, precisely, the action directed to trigger the process that could lead to conversion and the first act of faith, which precedes the entry into the catechumenate (*Ad Gentes* n. 7).

Meanwhile, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* marks a major turning point. The document offers a broader concept of evangelization and defines it as a complex and varied elements which aims at the renewal of humanity through witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entry into the community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiative

The vision of evangelization that emerges is global: every ecclesial activity may, indeed, it must fall within its scope. The text, conscious of the breath of the meaning introduced, expresses it this way:

“These elements may appear to be contradictory, indeed mutually exclusive. In fact they are complementary and mutually enriching. Each one must always be seen in relationship with the others. The value of the last Synod was to have constantly invited us to relate these elements rather than to place them in opposition one to the other, in order to reach a full understanding of the Church’s evangelizing activity” (Evangelii Nuntiandi n. 24).

In hindsight, the term mission has been employed with different meanings and has brought with it some secular understanding (mission impossible) and it has been gradually replaced with a more catholic term evangelization (Protestants prefer to use the term “evangelism”). However, they are somehow exchangeable since both of these terms have the more general meaning of the church’s ministry *ad intra* (to be a sign and credible of what it stands for), and *ad extra* (for the work outside, persuading people to membership or promoting values of God’s reign in the world). It seems rather clear that church’s documents use both terms “mission” and “evangelization” as interchangeable in some contexts.

Here we have to state categorically in the beginning that “to evangelize” does not mean simply “to teach a doctrine,” but “to proclaim Jesus Christ” by one’s words and actions, that is, to make oneself an instrument of his presence and action in the world.

Evangelii Nuntiandi contributes more than any other document to the deep understanding of evangelization, but, paradoxically, it is one of the cause of the difficulties of interpretation of this term, especially since its use in the narrower sense is never entirely abandoned which, in any case, requires being re-named, especially at this historical moment in which the action takes on new importance that the Church will help to inspire faith in the non-believers.

Various terms are used like “first evangelization,” “pre-evangelization,” “new evangelization,” and “re-evangelization.”

1. Compared to initial proclamation the term *first evangelization* has the advantage of better reflecting the complexity of pastoral action aimed at arousing the faith (which surely means a verbal proclamation, but it

also has a component not entirely attributable to the word). It could include all moments ranging from initial dialogical witness, to the explicit proclamation of Christ, arousing in the interlocutor an initial adhesion of faith.

However, it can be understood either as an ecclesial action aimed at stirring up the faith (*Catechesi Traedendi* n. 19), as *missio ad gentes* to distinguish it from “new evangelization” (*Redemptoris Missio* n. 37); or as the first phase of the process of Christian initiation (RCIA n. 68).

2. Another term is **missionary preaching**. However it is rarely used and associated with “evangelization” in the restricted sense used in *General Directory for Catechesis* n. 17 or “initial proclamation” after *Catechesi Traedendi* n. 18 and *General Directory for Catechesis* n. 52.

3. **Kerygma** is another term used. Its principal meaning is the content of the message proclaimed, the extension of meaning to the action of proclaiming – analogically possible - is very rare.

4. A term which is widely used today, even at the risk of becoming a repository, more or less relevant, of any innovative attempt in the field of pastoral ministry is **new evangelization**. The reference point is *Redemptoris Missio* n. 33 which clearly distinguishes between *missio ad gentes*, pastoral activity and new evangelization

- “*missio ad gentes*” is directed to peoples, groups, and socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not known, or which lack Christian communities sufficiently mature to be able to incarnate the faith in their own environment and proclaim it to other groups. *Redemptoris Missio* attests to the importance of the mission *ad gentes* in old and new contexts: the traditional territorial areas, which have similar situations but not homologous to ours, the big cities, especially in the southern hemisphere, the cultural areas, the “new areopagi” (n. 37).
- “pastoral activity” of the Church is directed to Christian communities with adequate and solid ecclesial structures, fervent in their faith and in Christian living, bearing witness to the Gospel in their surroundings and having a sense of commitment to the universal mission.
- “new evangelization” is directed instead to an intermediate situation, in which groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the

faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel. The text of *Redemptoris Missio* is widely cited in *General Directory for Catechesis* n. 58.

5. Among these various terms **initial proclamation** is probably to be preferred for its continued presence through time in a large number of documents; for being the term which preferred among the more or less equivalent formulations; for the “univocal” meaning that is attributed to it. In any case it is the terminology preferred by the *General Directory for Catechesis* n. 51.

Redemptoris Missio reaffirms the permanent priority of initial proclamation in the life of the Church, its “central and indispensable” role (n. 44) in building up the Church and because all peoples have the right to know the Good News of “new life” offered by God in Jesus Christ. This proclamation is to be done in the context of the lives of those who receive it, in an attitude of love and esteem for the listener, with a language that is concrete and adapted to circumstances in the certainty that the Spirit is at work and establishes a communion between the missionary and listeners.

Finally, although initial proclamation is especially used in contexts considered to be *missio ad gentes*, it is also increasingly considered a necessity even among the Christian Churches of ancient tradition (cf. *General Directory for Catechesis* nos. 25 e 58). The concept, despite of its emphasis on proclamation, is used by the documents to mean more than mere witnessing or mere proclamation of the contents of the *kerygma*; therefore, it cannot be reduced to some limited and occasional intervention.

Meanwhile *Ecclesia in Europa* introduced a novel distinction between “initial proclamation” and “renewed proclamation.” The initial proclamation of the Gospel is directed to the non-baptized (n. 46) while renewed proclamation is directed to the baptized but illiterate or inconsistent in the practice of the faith (n. 46) and, therefore, they do not live consciously the faith. Here, the challenge is not to baptize the converts but to bring Christ to the baptized (n. 47).

More clearly, the *General Directory for Catechesis* distinguishes three moments in the one evangelizing process:

- *missionary activity* which is aimed at non-believers and religiously indifferent;



- catechetical activity-initiation which is directed to those who choose the Gospel or in need to complete or restructure initiation;
- pastoral activity is directed to believers in the community (n. 49).

The document itself acknowledges that the boundaries between church activities are not clear.

Later on, in *Dialogue and Proclamation*, the magisterium dealt with the relationship between interreligious dialogue and proclamation. Here, proclamation is examined in the context of the unbalanced treatment which seems to take place in some regions where the explicit mention of the Lordship of Jesus Christ is “bracketed” in favor of dialogue under different forms. In this document, the stress is placed again on the primacy of proclamation without any rejection of dialogue:

Recently John Paul II expanded the content of evangelization in *Ecclesia in Asia* n. 43:

The proclamation of Jesus Christ in Asia presents many complex aspects, both in content and in method. The Synod Fathers were keenly aware of the legitimate variety of approaches to the proclamation of Jesus, provided that the faith itself is respected in all its integrity in the process of appropriating and sharing it. The Synod noted that “evangelization today is a reality that is both rich and dynamic. It has various aspects and elements: witness, dialogue, proclamation, catechesis, conversion, baptism, insertion into the ecclesial community, the implantation of the Church, inculturation and integral human promotion. Some of these elements proceed together, while some others are successive steps or phases of the entire process of evangelization”. In all evangelizing work, however, it is the complete truth of Jesus Christ which must be proclaimed. Emphasizing certain aspects of the inexhaustible mystery of Jesus is both legitimate and necessary in gradually introducing Christ to a person, but this cannot be allowed to compromise the integrity of the faith. In the end, a person’s acceptance of the faith must be grounded on a sure understanding of the person of Jesus Christ, as presented by the Church in every time and place, the Lord of all who is “the same yesterday, today and forever.



II. REFLECTIONS:

After trying to understand some concepts related to initial proclamation in the relation with the process of evangelization, let us now focus on some key points that I believe need to be stressed in order to draw out some implications for our discussion. In the words of *Dialogue and Proclamation* n. 10:

“Proclamation is the communication of the Gospel message, the mystery of salvation realized by God for all in Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit. It is an invitation to a commitment of faith in Jesus Christ and to entry through baptism into the community of believers which is the Church. This proclamation can be solemn and public, as for instance, on the day of Pentecost, or a simple private conversation... It leads naturally to catechesis which aims at deepening this faith.”

Professor Monstisci had pointed out that it is possible to distinguish two main ways of understanding initial proclamation: as an ecclesial “style” and as a concrete evangelizing practice of the Church.

1. Initial Proclamation as “Style” of Proposing on the Part of the Church

First of all, initial proclamation can be understood as institutional and collective attitude of the Church in all its public events that, while not wishing it to be so, are in fact its image and the “initial proclamation” that the world receives, and which must be given careful attention specially in frontier situations and in the encounter with reality, people and situations outside the usual spheres.

Hence, for Italian Luca Bressan, initial proclamation indicates a mentality and the Church’s style of presenting herself and the interventions that “more than a practice in itself, more than a further additional element, with “initial proclamation” [...] I intend to indicate *an organizing principle*.

Proclamation in the development of the argument, suggests a number of guiding principles that may be useful in our discussion:

- the interlocutors are “outsiders”, i.e. non-believers or baptized who do not participate regularly in church activities. This implies a distancing from the ordinary, habitual answers, to the demands of Christian community life to which we have been accustomed until now.



- from the anthropological point of view, this style requires paying attention to the places where identity and the meaning of life are expressed, at the same time, one should be reminded that the dynamism makes Christianity capable of “living the fundamental anthropological experience while opening them up to new meanings” through the activation of symbolic dynamics that these experiences contain but which often remain inactive. This is called *inculturation*.

In other words, Christianity will pay attention to places and practices that every culture develops to express the fundamental dimensions of human life; it must then examine these practices, discover the ability to be open to the meaning, the openness to listen to the Christian message; it must know how to present itself in public spaces. From the institutional point of view, through humanizing relationship, initial proclamation as a style is an invitation of people to listen, to question and to accept. In many cases relationships become the starting point (or re-starting point) of a journey of faith.

Initial proclamation as a style has these elements: it chooses the contexts of proximity as the anthropological space in which it establishes itself; it makes the ordinary daily life the characteristic that describe the way it functions; it accepts the challenge of diversity and ambiguity as points of departure and possible place for the recognition of the different partners of the relationship; at the same time, it jealously keeps guardian of its memory, of Christian diversity which pushes it as a stimulus to inhabit these territories, in order to weave these relations. It is precisely due to these elements that Christianity can make its frontiers, its borders, a truly significant space for initial proclamation.

2. Initial Proclamation as a Concrete Practice of Evangelization

A second way of understanding initial proclamation is to consider it as a concrete pastoral action in everyday practice with individuals and groups. From this point of view, one of the definitions that had favorable reception among experts in this area is the one provided by the Belgian André Fossion: “esignates the statements of the Christian faith in various forms, which, in determined contexts, encourage and make possible the first steps in the faith by those who are far from”.



In the reflection of Xavier Morlans initial proclamation is that activity or set of activities that aim to bring the core message of the Gospel to those who do not know Jesus Christ, to those who, having known him, have abandoned him; to those who believe that they already know him sufficiently and live the Christian faith out of habit, with the intention of stirring up an interest in all of them for Jesus Christ that could lead to an initial adhesion or a revitalization of faith in him.

In summary, initial proclamation is relative to the *first steps of the faith*:

- it is “first” for the interlocutor, who feels moved to undertake a path of growth in faith;
- there is no single form of initial proclamation;
- by affirming that steps in the faith “are possible” it is clear that it deals with a proposal that takes into account freedom and it does not refer to a relationship of force or conquest;
- The recipients are those who, for various reasons, are estranged from the faith, are “far” from it or have moved away from it;
- It highlights the complexity and diversity of socio-historical situations.
- It could be added that while catechesis is an organic and systematic reality, initial proclamation is a *naturally partial experience*. It is an emblematic operation of what the Church is and what it should do; it is a communication device, an interface between the Church and the contemporary human person.
- The acceptance of initial proclamation has no formal visibility (for example a liturgical rite) but it is basically something that occurs in the conscience or inside the recipient, thus it is sometimes difficult to verify it. In fact, it is part of the attitude of the one who proclaims not to seek the immediate certainty of the results.

Turning to our Asian context, the great question now facing the Church in Asia is how to share with our Asian brothers and sisters what we treasure as the gift containing all gifts, namely, the Good News of Jesus Christ (*Ecclesia in Asia* 19). In fact, *Ecclesia in Asia* re-affirms that there can be no true evangelization without the explicit proclamation of Jesus as Lord.

Ecclesia in Asia 19 re-states what the Second Vatican Council and the Magisterium have repeatedly stressed, that is, the primacy of the proclamation of Jesus Christ in all evangelizing work. Deeply aware of the complexity of so many different situations in Asia, and “speaking the truth in love” (*Eph* 4:15), *Ecclesia in Asia* invites us to proclaim the Good News with loving respect and esteem for her listeners, a kind of proclamation which respects the rights of consciences. Yet, respect does not eliminate the need for the explicit proclamation of the Gospel in its fullness.

Concurring what the Asian church leaders and theologians have stated for decades, *Ecclesia in Asia* insists that the proclamation of Jesus Christ can most effectively be made by narrating his story, as the Gospels do. For *Ecclesia in Asia*, the ontological notions can be complemented by more relational, historical and even cosmic perspectives. The Church in Asia must be open to the new and surprising ways in which the face of Jesus might be presented in Asia.

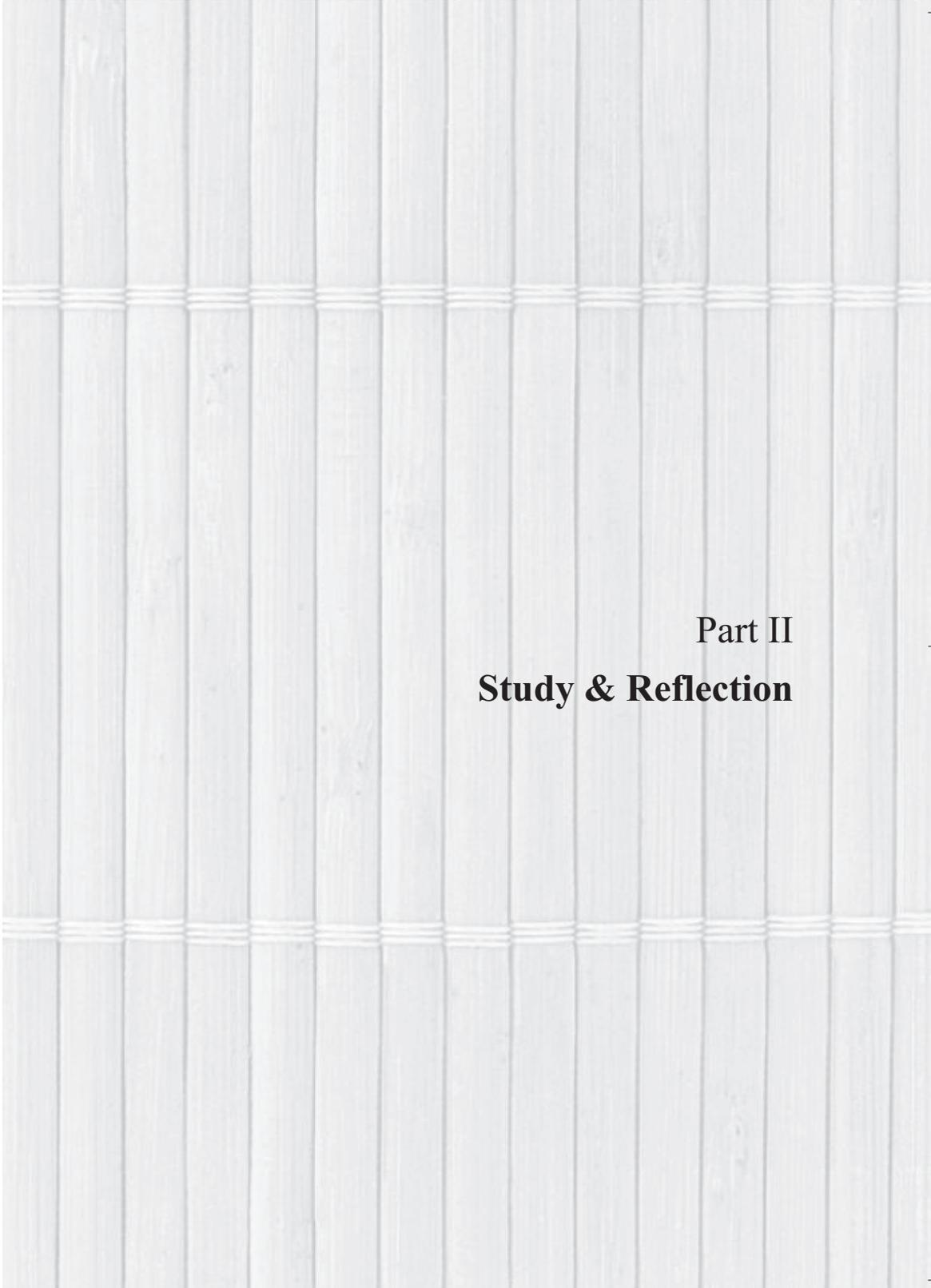
The second stress is the much-quoted statement: *A fire can only be lit by something that is itself on fire*. It means that “*the Good News of Jesus Christ can only be proclaimed by those who are taken up and inspired by the love of the Father for his children, manifested in the person of Jesus Christ...Christians who speak of Christ must embody in their lives the message that they proclaim*. (*Ecclesia in Asia*, n. 23).

Asia prides itself on the plurality of primal and traditional religions, cultures and traditions. At the same time, the scandalous poverty suffered by the marginalized and oppressed in Asia is an affront to God. In this context, the Asian Bishops explain mission as a triple dialogue: with the poor, the different cultures, and religions (Synod 1999: No. 5).

The FABC has consistently pointed out that, a holistic, contextual evangelization calls for a three-fold dialogue with the cultures, religions and the poor of Asia. It prefers the term “progressive evangelization” referring to that which grows, develops and matures through:

- *formation* (initial proclamation, catechesis, theology as the action-reflection of adult members as agent-subjects of ecclesial praxis and
- *spiritual guidance*.





Part II
Study & Reflection





Initial Proclamation of Christ in a Multicultural Educative Settings through Storytelling



Fr. Cyril Niphot Thienvihan *

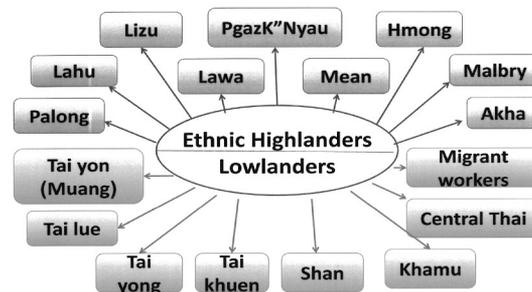
Introduction

The following presentation is based on my theological and anthropological studies.

Outline of Slide Presentation

- Brief background of Indigenous People in Thailand and the work of Missionaries with
- Indigenous Peoples.
- Pope's Address on indigenous faith & cultures.
- Linking Asians, linking peoples, linking faith and cultures
- What is the missionary activity of the Local Church (RTRC) in a multicultural and multireligious context of Chiang Mai Diocese? and
- Others.....

The Church in the midst of multifait & Cultures



* Cyril Niphot Thienvihan is a priest of the Diocese of Chiang Mai. He is the Director of the *Research & Training Center for Religio-Cultural Community*, Chiang Mai, Thailand.



Population figures of ethnic peoples in Thailand (2002)

Presently around 1,500,000 Million (2011)

Ethnic Groups	population
1. Karen	438,131
2. Hmong	153,955
3. Lahu	102,876
4. Akha	68,653
5. Mean	45,571
6. Lizu	38,299
7. H'tin	42,657
8. Lua	22,260
9. Khmu	10,537
10. Mlabri	282
11. Da-ang (Palaung	1,626
12. Tongsu	257
13. Chinese Yunanese	21,158
14. Shan (Tai)	12,020
15. Lue (Tai)	5,907

The discovery of local faith-culture values by the Missionaries

Fr. Oxibar (1935) wrote that he rejoiced in such indigenous traditions as being those of a people who, like his own Basques, could become Christians but still express their joy of life through the ways of their ancestors.

“These ancestral traditions would flower still more gracefully” under the protection of new religion and “through his presence and his prayers”

Pope Benedict’s Address in 2008

- by participating in interreligious dialogue, the faithful “are not renouncing” their commitment to spread the Gospel, which is an intrinsic aspect of the Christian identity.



- Interreligious dialogue hopes to build up “relations of mutual knowledge and respect” which can overcome animosity!
- Carry forward this important work (interreligious dialogue), exploring every avenue open to you....We need to initiate dialogue not for more peace alone, but above all to honor the human face of God, that is, our human dignity.

Pope Benedict XVI reiterated the profound respect of the Church towards other religions (Sept 2010)

- “Here too I wish to voice the Church’s respect for the ancient religions and spiritual traditions of the various continents.”
- We are also gratified to find in other religious experiences a genuine concern for the transcendence of God, acknowledged as Creator, as well as respect for life, marriage and the family, and a strong sense of solidarity.

Message of Pope John Paul II

- Your culture, which shows the lasting genius and dignity of your race, must not be allowed to disappear.
- Do not think that your gifts are worth so little that you should no longer bother to maintain them.
- Share them with each other and teacher them to your children.
- Your song, your stories, you paintings, your dances, your language must never be lost.

To realize the above message of the Pope:

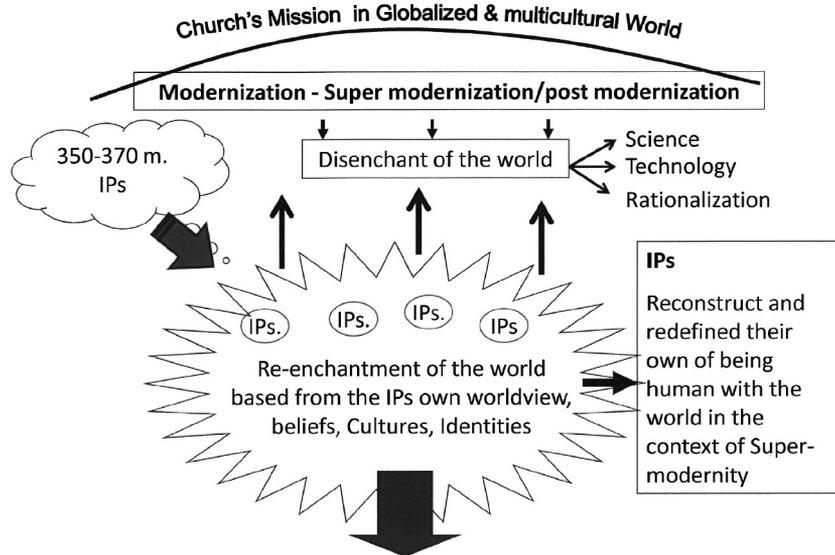
- The local church needs to shift paradigm
- as Fr. Jojo Fung mentioned: the envisioned “double shifts” in the mission of the church of Asia is related to the changes in the way of being Church in Asia in the midst of indigenous peoples.
- The mission of the Church in Asia involves:
 - Everyday interaction
 - Accompaniment

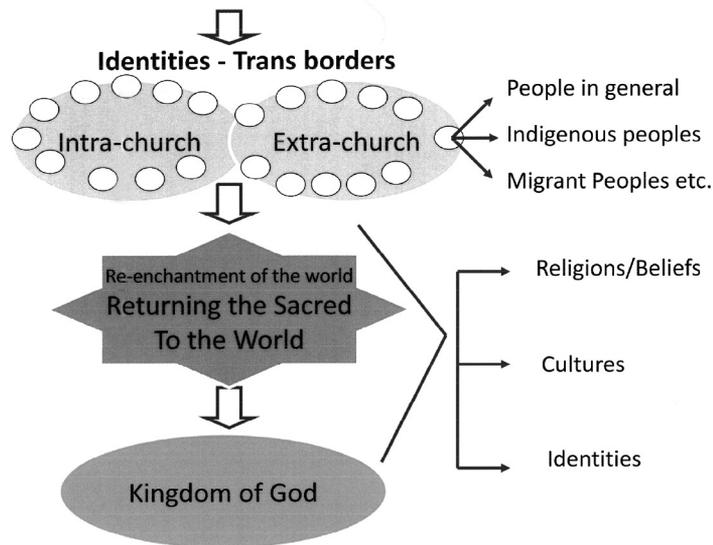
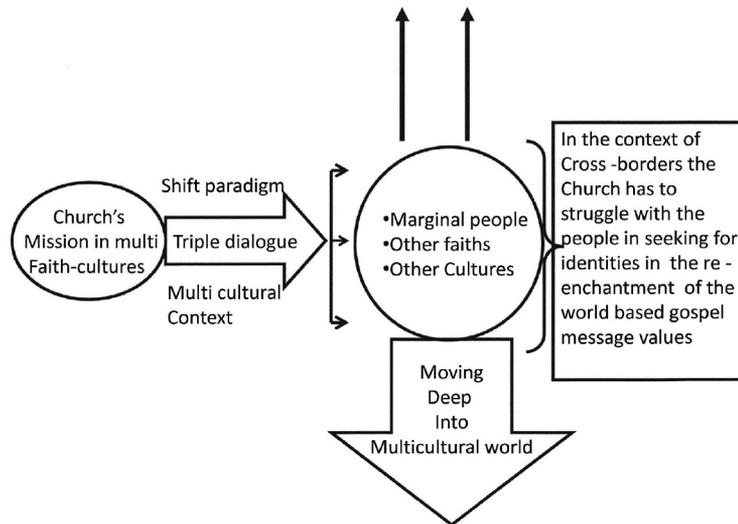


- Religious experience
- Liberative struggling to learn the shamanic way that the sacred power of the creative spirit must transform the way of doing mission of the Church that is shamanic and congenial to the aspirations of the marginal communities of indigenous peoples of Asia.

The mission of promoting sacred sustainability

- The Church of Asia is in need of forerunners who are led by God's creative spirit to live evangelically poor lives grounded in Jesus, the relational God-center in the web of "multiple relationality" that enable the Asia forerunners to relate to the different worlds and the different cultures and religions. In this way, the Church becomes a counterculture to the global capitalistic culture.





Experiences of Mission Work of Chiang Mai Diocese - Research and Training Center for Religio-Cultural Community (RTRC)

A research centre has been set up to empower people's movement based on religio-cultural values of local communities. It is working on its experience drawn from the work of the Diocesan Social Action Centre of Chiang Mai and missionaries in the North with an emphasis on a holistic approach of community work.

It has been working with several ethnic groups spread out throughout Northern Thailand, indigenous lowland people and highland tribal people. In addition, the research centre also co-operates and gets involved in building an interreligious network for social action, which includes Buddhists, Muslims and Protestants, who share common direction of work.

RTRC is composed of people from different faith-cultures. The founders are individuals who have the concept and experience in supporting people's movement, such as representative of grassroots organisations, lay people working in development organisation, catechetical centre personnel, youth, priests, religious women and men and university scholars.

Empowering People's Movements

- 1) Northern Social Forum (NSF)
- 2) Spiritual leaders Forum
- 3) Strengthening People's Organization and Movements

RTRC collaborates with people's organizations and indigenous groups in building a network among themselves and with other networks at large in order to revive and return the values of sacredness to the world based on the beliefs and cosmovision of the indigenous people.



Formation and Training For Future Successors

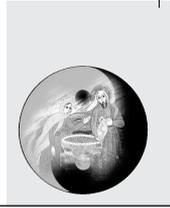
The Organic Intellectual (OI) Training lasts 2 years

Goals:

- To provide alternative education for grassroots leaders and young people from communities in response to intention and need of local communities in maintaining their religio-cultural values.
- To motivate leaders to be aware of and confident in local wisdom inherited from cultures of their communities.







A Response to Cyril Niphot Thienvihan

Fr. Fidel Orendain SDB

I approached my process of understanding this article with the reverence of a new comer, entering the revered circle of missionary front liners. I am a Salesian and can only speak from that perspective. I also must mention my background in Communication and Cultural Analysis and my role as a trend watcher of ideologies and technologies that affect the life of faith of the young. That makes me more of a sociologist which I hope is not too beneath nor incompatible with missiological theology.

My task is to offer feedback and digested reflections on the paper sent to us by Fr. Niphot before the Study Days, which was a part of a work of Fr. Jojo Fung, SJ. My reaction is mainly based on this work and not on Fr. Niphot's presentation today. It has to be pointed out, however, that Fung's work serves as a foundation to understand Fr. Niphot's presentation today.

The excerpt from Fung's work is extensive in several dimensions – theology, anthropology and pastorally. I aim to mention only some salient features in his work which I believe are crucial for effective Salesian mission, particularly "initial proclamation" in the 21st century and indicate places for possible Salesian application or suggest more deliberations where needed.

Reading the paper and some other documents related to the topic gave me an awakening, perhaps rousing is a better term. I am amazed how new theological terms have come about in the area of Missiology and Ecclesiology in the past 20 years. I realize that the paper adds to the long list of theologies of liberation that have been indigenized to the point that we now have various contextual theologies of liberation in Asia – e.g. Min-

jung theology, Dalit theology, Indigenous people's theology, theology of struggle, Asian feminist theology, homeland theology or theology of self-determination.⁶⁵ Just a few years back Robert Schreiter commented that the existing list of theologies of liberation is not enough to meet the numerous post-conflict realities of Asia. He proposed another paradigm of mission that must go hand in hand with other liberation theologies—reconciliation theology.⁶⁶ But this is not the focus of this reaction.

Since the article is a chapter of a bigger work of Jojo Fung, SJ, there is the possibility that some of my comments and questions are addressed in the pages that do not appear in our speaker's presentation. Having no access to Fr. Fung's complete work, I could only presuppose that the new patterns and proposals presented in this gathering (and in Fung's book) spring from an evaluation of other liberation theologies and their frameworks of doing mission. With that concern, I put forward my thoughts.

1) The overall paper seems to miss the nail on the head since the topic for consideration is "**Initial Proclamation in a Multi-Cultural Educative Setting through Storytelling**". But some general principles can be deduced and applied in educational settings we Salesians run or help manage. Fung's schema of dialogue appeals to our Salesian charism:

- Dialogue of everyday interaction
- Dialogue of religious experience
- Dialogue of accompaniment
- Dialogue of liberative struggle

2) The paper focuses on indigenous peoples living cultural symbols of their ancient civilizations in a contemporary world who still adhere to the primal religions. Its main thesis is the necessary engagement with or "preferential inclusion" of **Shamans** as dialogue partners of theology in a way that is not simply academic but a lived-experience. Even if this idea is not new, we commend the document for its insistence on dialogue and intense exposure.

⁶⁵ Hope S. Anton "New Paradigm Concepts of Mission." Lecture October 2008, Asian Mission Conference, Taiwan.

⁶⁶ Robert Schreiter, "Liberation and Reconciliation as Paradigms of Mission (Sundbyberg: Swedish Mission Council, 2003)

- 3) The paper's main concept mingles cultural anthropology and theology. But a simplistic reduction of practical application of secular anthropology and sacred theology is not without difficulty. The effort is bound to stir up a storm because they are perceived to be oceans apart. And for them to meet, the dichotomy must somehow be resolved – a missiologist must become a Christian anthropologist and a culturally sensitive theologian as well.
- 4) This we know is not something new. Since Vatican II “inculturation” has been a byword subjected to every imaginable interpretation and misinterpretation not only because each culture is different but each missionary carries his own personality and his own theological paradigm. We do not even dare venture to explore the changing definition of the word “culture” itself as brought about by theologians who came up with distinctions of culture with “c” (anthropological) and the Culture with “C” (Theological) much like “Traditions” and “traditions”.⁶⁷ Hence the importance also of establishing common theological definitions and foundations.
- 5) The proposal for **A Shamanic Theology of Sacred Sustainability** like most of the liberation theologies mentioned, seems to come about because of circumstances that have isolated theology today to mere academic exercises, often unrelated to the life and mission of the church. The paper's proposals spring forth from a specific area in a specific culture – from a very intense experience of shamanic initiation of Fung. Because of its local character, generalizations will not always be welcomed especially when they are elevated to templates/ formulae for universal application for other missionaries to consider in their respective fields.
- 6) The emphasis of the Church's responsibility of defending the cultural heritage and identity of indigenous peoples in Asia and the world is recommendable. Time and again, overzealous missionaries must be reminded and sometimes reprimanded in their activities that decimate local traditions. However, I believe that Shamanic theology, like other proposals, must be subjected to a

⁶⁷ Likewise, “globalization” via the rapid development of communication technology has added more shades of meaning to culture's definitions.

criterion that is approved and accepted by the Church, her Missionaries and the faithful.

- 7) In his book *“Deliver Us From Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission,”* Yung Hwa suggests that the test for new missiological theology must be whether it empowers and enhances the church in its life and mission. If that is so, then it must fulfill at least three criteria. The first is that it should help the church to be effective in its evangelism and pastoral ministry. Second, it should empower the church to act effectively in social transformation. And thirdly, it must take culture seriously.⁶⁸ Shamanic Theology of Sacred Sustainability seems to fulfill the three. But the question is, “is that enough?”
- 8) Because it proposes “new” things, it brings about some uneasiness.

Firstly. “Shamanism” as an anthropological term refers to a range of beliefs and practices regarding communication with the spiritual world. Fung’s approach wishes to permanently erase the “old” trend of missionaries to approach ancient tribal practices as demonology, superstitions, forms of untruths and unenlightenment. But old and new Christians have been catechized to avoid forms of theisms that present non-Christian reconstruction of the idea of God. To see missionaries participating in shamanic rituals and recommending other forerunners to undergo shamanic initiation rites, would redefine “witnessing” and confuse people, especially younger Christians.

Secondly. The rather repetitive recommendation “the Church in Asia must...”⁶⁹ includes every Christian, even those who have no missiological vocation, much less foundational theology to interact and reflect with shamans and their constituents. Mission-

⁶⁸ Hwa Yung. *Deliver Us From Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 2002).

⁶⁹ “The church of Asia must respond courageously to engage more intimately in the shamanic traditions of the indigenous peoples.. Must learn from the indigenous shamans in her evangelizing mission in Asia...Has to be involved in a dialogue of everyday interaction by which the shamans can evangelize the Church (and other “the Church in Asia must...”)

aries and the clergy who participate in a non-intrusive and harmonic relationship with Shamans by being respectfully present in latter's rituals are likewise indirectly inviting their traditional Christian members to do the same. The uneasiness will not only be on the part of missionaries, but on Christians whose classic image of evangelization still consists of direct public proclamations and indoctrinations.⁷⁰

I know that as Salesian (Christian) Educators in the East-Asia multi-religious context, many of us are struggling not to take advantage of our positions as "elders" (some sort of shaman in our own rights) in front of our non-Christian constituents/ students. We have been careful not to impose our belief and be perceived as a threat to their religion and their cultural identity.

On one side, there are those of us who continue to emphasize WITNESSING / LIVING (non verbal) as our form of evangelization and on the other those who wish to uphold direct PROCLAIMING / PROPOSING (Verbal).

As a communicator, I must correct the notion that considers witnessing (non verbal) or indirect proclamation as less intrusive and "violent." Sociological studies point that effective message sending is directly related to message reception. Albert Mehrabian's theory established this classic statistic for the effectiveness of communications:

- 7% of meaning is in the words that are spoken.
- 38% of meaning is paralinguistic (the way that the words are said).
- 55% of meaning is in facial expression (non verbal)

However this 50 year old theory is now being greatly altered by the interactive media of the internet and the rapid intrusion of communication technologies across cultures.

⁷⁰ As a communicator, I believe such a dialogue must be discussed and defined, not only in forums like this, but in homilies and more importantly as courses in the seminaries. Missiological Theology must be made part of the curriculum. If missiology were a matter of pure theology, studying it would be enough. But doing mission, after the initial response to the call, entails dispositions that are planted, nurtured and prayed for. The earlier it is introduced to the aspiring missionary, the better.

Thirdly. “Shamanic Theology” is special in its emphasis on “respect and listening with a discerning heart.” Doing mission is more than just making a proclamation or implementing missionary activities, it is a participation with God and all others who see him differently; a process of understanding; of bringing healing and wholeness. But while clearly avoiding the mistakes of “ecclesial colonization” or “exhibitionist messianism” (Pieris (2010 191) both the Shamanic Theology and the practical approaches it recommends as templates for approach⁷¹ can limit a more universal horizon and encourage a form of religious relativism that prioritizes local cultural expressions, some of which newly baptized Christians have detached themselves from to indicate their radical following of Christ.

Fourthly. There is the presumption here that the Shamanic rituals we seek to understand and engage ourselves in are either older than Christian tradition or uniquely original. But there are Asian cultures whose “shamanic rituals” have evolved from poor Christian evangelization or its defective absorption. The phenomenon of Caribbean voodooism and the “albularios” (village healers) of the Philippines have mixed animistic deities with Catholic sacramentals and rituals. Participation, collaboration, engagement or apprenticeship with these (shamans) will need deep spiritual intentions than just the motivation of respect for what is indigenous.

Lastly. Perhaps because I come from a country with a majority of Christians, I still hold the traditional paradigm that looks at mission as proclamation, as saving people, as conversions. I know that this view is anchored on the passage of the “Great Commissioning” of Mathew 28:16-20. I also know that several shifts have been proposed from the exclusive emphasis of one biblical passage to a more total biblical message. I am also aware that other shifts have moved from proposals to regular practices — to mention some: others have moved from the emphasis of conversion to harmonious existence; from mere indoctrination to common spiri-

⁷¹ multi-religio-cultural manifestations, for example.

tuality; from missionaries evangelizing to missionaries accepting to be evangelized.

- 9) Somehow, new shifts bring about new breeds of missionaries. There is a discomforting feeling that “treading with reverence and respect” around indigenous religious expressions we no longer recognize the urgent need to evangelize,...to bear witness.”⁷² How does the subtle approach fit in with the firm and urgently phrased mandate of “Proclaiming and Making Disciples of all nations?” Two separate studies five years ago of the state of vocations in the two provinces in the Philippines (FIS & FIN) were conducted. The question why we have few vocations even in our own Salesian Catholic Schools, yielded an answer that shifted the attention away from the poor response of prospective candidates to the anemic performance of the Salesians.

The result:

- There are less proposals from Salesian educators;
- The few proposals are too ambiguously presented
- Those who respond to the initial proposal are not nurtured and accompanied

The resolution:

We cannot put vocation campaign to simply witnessing and hoping that candidates will catch our good example, become curious and decide to commit. We need to have more direct, creative and followed-up proposals.

Perhaps something about this experience on Vocation Promotion can be learned when we talk about the East Asian situation of having little or slow Christian growth.

- 10) The presentor’s proposal for a Liturgy of Sacred Sustainability is something that many can do creatively on their own without waiting for marching orders. Personally, after reading so much about Shamans I was bracing for invasive suggestions that would mix indigenous rituals with our present Roman rite. I don’t see anything that will bring the proponents of *Redemptoris Sacramentum* up in arms.

⁷² Pascual Chavez, SDB. “Spirituality and Mission.” April 24, 2011.

The presentation gives a strong reminder that missionaries cannot reject human cultures. The fact is, old biblical paradigms are hard to let go.⁷³ There are those who still see the missionary task is a battle to be won for God against the kingdom of Satan; those who see missionaries as sent “like sheep among wolves” tasked to bring every aspect of culture under the rule of God, including those who continue to see other cultures as ruled by Satan. In current sociological terms, their approach is now considered “politically incorrect.” But there are those who still will see and teach things that way. They have become themselves “shamans” within the church. The behaviors they have inculcated in the generations of Christian missionaries have themselves become sub-cultures that will invoke the right to be treated respectfully by those who eagerly seek “new wineskins” for “new wines” (Mark 2:21-23).

As one who is a communication-culture-technology trend watcher, may I say that the next dominant shift in proclamation will not be primarily about theology, but about communication technology. We also have to seriously consider this.

There will never be a perfect theology or missiological paradigm because we will always be faced with multiple and evolving contexts. That is why forums like this will always be needed, and would never run out of participants.

⁷³ Perhaps the first resolution related to education is to discuss and proposals for missiological/ theological shifts. Mission candidates would do well if they are first exposed as a member of a Salesian community in a multi-cultural educative setting for a first level “lived-experience” with non-Christian “others.”



Initial Proclamation and Outreach Programs for Poorer Sectors of Society

Mr. Vivat Lauhabut *

Executive Summary

Not WHAT, but HOW ... It is my intention to share with you on what I think will make the Salesian mission more relevant in today's world "forged by digitization, ubiquitous connectivity, and globalization" (C.K. Prahalad and M.S. Krishnan: 2008). The focus will be on the HOW, by first going deeply back to how Jesus had implemented his mission in proclaiming the Kingdom of God 2000 years ago in Palestine, to further investigate shortly on how Don Bosco was doing 150 years ago in Italy, and come to the present context, characterized by greater diversity, with a proposal on a constructive, integral approach to the formulation of "initial proclamation" message and creation of compelling "outreach programs" targeting specifically 'the poorer sectors in society'.

"The poor you will always have", a very classical pronouncement of Jesus upon the time of his eminent crucifixion, holds true even today when scientific advancement and economic progress tend not to deliver what were promised. By the Poverty Net of World Bank, the statistics show that more than 3 billion people are living in utmost poverty, and even much more if we count all those earning less than the national GDP across countries around the globe.

International agencies, governments, business sectors, and NGOs, the religious included, are, for different reasons, engaging in providing care for the poor. Many strategies and specific measures have been devised to

* He has degree from the Salesian Pontifical University, Rome, Italy as well as from the Assumption University, Bangkok, Thailand. Currently he is the general manager of Chanwanich Company Limited. He specializes in crafting IT strategies, consolidate applications, and lead new e-learning development efforts.



help the poor. The Church, through her agencies and dedicated people throughout the centuries, has been amongst the first to reach out towards the poor. But why do we need, at this moment in time, to rethink and talk again about “the initial proclamation”? The answer lies in you...

On my part, along this session, I would like to bring you home to one of my suspects whether the Gospel values “like the pearl hidden in the field” are still worth the effort of finding and should anyone bother “selling everything” to possess it, even at any cost”?

CONTENTS

Executive Summary	81
1. What do You Mean by “the Poorer Sector in Society”?.....	82
2. Learn from Jesus and Don Bosco	84
3. A Constructive, Integral Approach to Initial Proclamation and Outreach Programs	56
4. Conclusion.....	57

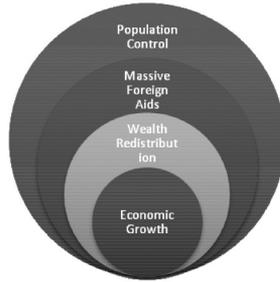
1. What do You Mean by “the Poorer Sector in Society”?

We first need to understand the poverty problems by identifying who the poor are, how many are they, where they live, and why they are poor. For specific statistics of each location, you may look at the World Bank’s Poverty Net, or some other sources available in your country.

What we could have noticed is that the answers to the above queries differ according the “poverty line” you draw, which in turn depends on the specific context in which you are. By the World Bank indicators, extreme poverty is where the people earn less than 1.25 US Dollar a day. Others, considered relatively poor, earn less than the national GDP. Overall, the poor seem to constitute more than 80 % of the world population.

Some key factors are considered related to or reflecting poverty: factors related to health, the environment, the economy, infrastructures, education, social factor, and family planning. Poverty, in turn, creates problems for the non poor: crimes, spread of illnesses and health problems, potential to follow demagogues, illegal immigration, and some others.

Existing Causes and Strategies to Fight Poverty

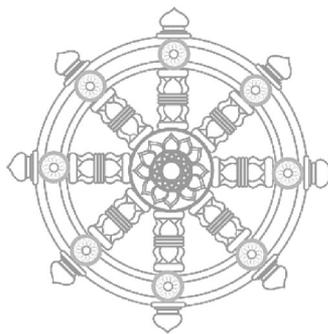


Funding organizations

- ▲ UNITED NATIONS
- ▲ WORLD BANK
- ▲ GLOBAL FUND
- ▼ GATES FOUNDATION
- ▼ SOME OTHERS...

Build your own picture of what causes poverty and how you would fight against it.....

	Causes	Strategies
WHO ARE YOUR POOR?	000	000
HOW MANY ARE THEY?	000	000
WHERE DO THEY LIVE?	000	000
WHY THEY ARE POOR?	000	000



2. Learn from Jesus and Don Bosco

Take Mt 3 - 7 and model how Jesus approached his mission of proclaiming the Kingdom of God. What could we learn, from the perspective of the initial proclamation and outreach programs, from the Beatitudes Model?

MT 3 - 7 PROCLAMATION OF THE KINGDOM

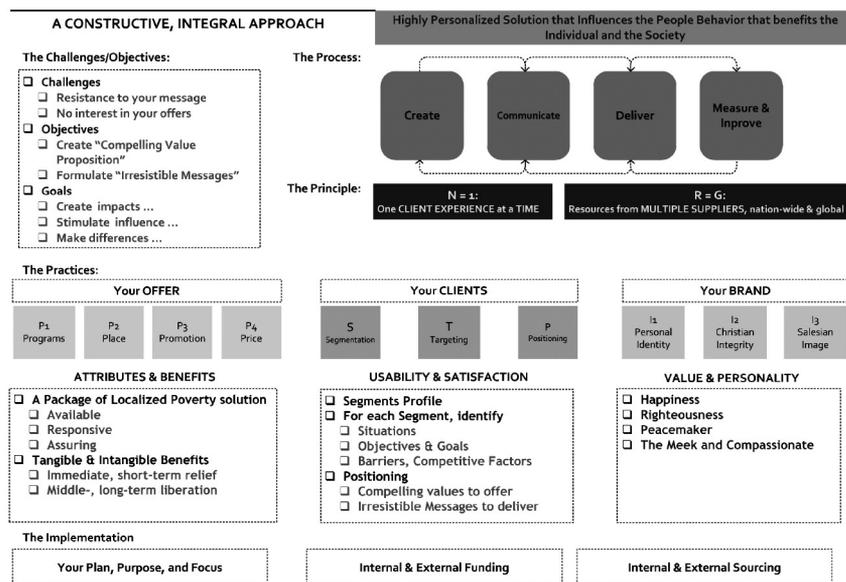
		Actions	Outcomes
MT 3:1 - 4:25	Narratives	Preaching of John	3:1 - 12
		Baptism of Jesus	3:13 - 17
		Temptation	4:1 - 11
		Return to Galilee	4:12 - 17
		Calling of 4 Disciples	4:17 - 25
			Jeus is KNOWN ***** Wonders Worker



The Oratory Model of DON BOSCO

PLACE	Actions	Outcome
AT THE ORATORY	GIVE THEM PLAYGROUND	Don Bosco,
	PROVIDE THEM WITH FOOD AND SHELTER	FIRST ACCUSED OF BEING INSANE
	GIVE THEM SCHOOLING	THEN CANONIZED
	TEACH THEM CATECHISM	*****
		THE POOR YOUTH HAVE BREAD & HEAVEN BECOME HONEST CITIZEN

3. A Constructive, Integral Approach to Initial Proclamation and Outreach Programs



4. Conclusion

The constructive, integral approach to the formulation of the irresistible “initial proclamation” message and the creation of the compelling “outreach programs” that are compelling enough that the recipients will not reject at first sight, does not claim to be the final words on the topic. It only constitutes “an approach”, which is

- decisively client-oriented
- fundamentally aligned with the exchange theory
- tactically process-centric around the modern marketing strategies
- intentionally result-focused wherein results are measured for sustainable improvement

And I conclude with the same words I quoted from the book of C.K. Prahalad and M.S. Krishnan entitled “The New Age of Innovation”. Driving Co-Created Value Through Global Networks” that

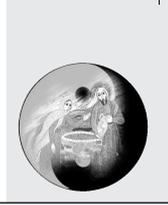
There is a fundamental transformation of business underway. Forged by digitization, ubiquitous connectivity, and globalization, this transformation will radically alter the very nature of the firm and how it creates value. No industry is immune to this trend. It will impact traditional industries such as education, insurance, health care, automobiles, and footwear, as well as emerging industries such as video games, search engines, and social networks. Coming to terms with the implications of this change is critical for survival and growth. (Page 11)

The approach I have shared with you is typically based on the principle and practices of “Social Marketing” by P. Kotler and N. Lee, especially on the book entitled “Up and Out of Poverty. The Social Marketing Solution” (2009).

At his point, I’ll leave you with what Prahalad and Krishnan said in the book quoted above that “This transformation is built on two basic pillars:

- 1) Values are based on unique, personalized experiences of consumers.
- 2) No firm is big enough in scope and size to satisfy the experiences of one consumer at a time. All firms will access resources from a wide variety of other big and small firms. (Page 11)

It is up to each one of you, as individual and as a community, to decide whether the message is irresistible and the offering compelling enough to induce necessary transformation in you and your community, in the way you view your mission and the approach you take in order to be relevant and significant, or even to survive, in the contemporary world.



A Response to Vivat Lauhabut

Fr. Lanfranco M. Fedrigotti SDB

First “unreflected” reaction: like Blessed Mother Theresa of Calcutta and the New York Management Firm? Mediators of more “reflected” reaction: Fr. Cyril Niphot Thienvihan, Fr. Fidel Orendain, Mr. Francis Wichai Srisura, Fr. Patrick Villasanta (Calauan), Fr. François Ponchaud, Sr. Teresa Furukawa Chieko

Two pillars of the how

The unique personal experiences of the “consumers” are the basis for transmission of values.

To adequately satisfy the needs of even one single “consumer”, in-sourcing alone is insufficient, out-sourcing is necessary.

The incarnated experience is the resource!

JESUS in Matt 3-7

Jesus acts

1. Poor Jesus waits for the poor-life-style forerunner to appear (3,1-12).
2. Poor Jesus lets the poor-life-style forerunner make initial proclamation: “God is king and cares for you (through the One who is to come)!” (3,2).
3. Poor Jesus joins movement of poor-life-style forerunner, identifying with sinful humanity by baptism, self-abasing solidarity that reveals his divine identity (3,13-17).
4. Hungry Jesus defeats Satan’s temptations, humanity’s fundamental problem (4,1-11).
5. Poor Jesus begins initial proclamation in Galilee, in known territory: “God is king and cares for you (through me)!” (4,12-17).



6. Poor Jesus begins by inviting co-workers to be poor fishers of men (4,18-22).
7. Poor Jesus offers initial proclamation, teaches, heals crowds of poor sufferers (4,23-25).

Jesus Speaks

1. First Beatitude of the poor, all Beatitudes target basic human situations and experiences (5,3-11)
2. Salt and Light: homely images from daily experience (5,13-16)
3. Old Testament, Israel's basic experience, accounted for (5,17-19)
4. Rich Scribes and Pharisees: main cultural influences targeted by Jesus (5,20)
5. Law of Moses, Israel's basic experience, interpreted in depth (5,21-48)
6. Almsgiving-Prayer-Fasting: Three basic human-religious activities targeted by Jesus (6,1-18)
7. Two-Treasures, One-Eye, Two-Masters: Basic human problem: duality of purposes, basic cure: singleness of purpose (6,19-24)
8. Trust-the-Father, Judge Thoughts-Words-Actions But Do Not Judge People, Trust-the-Father: Basic way of life
9. Thinking-Listening-Speaking Not Enough, Only "Do!" Enough!

Don Bosco of the oratory

"The Fundamental and Permanent Criterion for Discernment and Renewal of Salesian Activities and Works" (Special General Chapter XX, Document 2; Const. 40)

The pearl

"Bread and Heaven, Honest citizens". "Honest citizens and good Christians"? But see: "To make them good citizens here on earth and later, dwellers in heaven"

(Don Bosco, "Piano Regolamento per l'Oratorio", SGC 215)

Irresistible message

"Blessed are you poor, because God is king who cares for you (and only for you)!" spoken to any kind of poor by poor proclaimers.

The way

“Oratorio? A sense of: a) insertion in the local context, b) with missionary spirit, c) for poor youth”

Home that welcomes,

Parish that evangelizes,

School that prepares for life,

Playground where friends can meet and enjoy themselves” (Const. 40).

Vivat’s order: Playground, Home, School, Parish (Methodological order, logical, not chronological!).

Who are the poor?

“Absolute priority to the young and, among the young, absolute priority to the young who are poor and abandoned” (SGC, 45)

Reg. 1

- A. Extreme economic, social, cultural poverty that condemns them to failure.
- B. Affective, moral, religious poverty of indifference, atheism, delinquency.
- C. Emargination from society and Church.

Let us distinguish good poverty from bad poverty!

Good poverty, humanizing poverty, loved by God, satisfaction with essentials, the poverty of Mamma Margaret: “I was born poor, I live poor, I want to die poor”.

Bad poverty: dehumanizing poverty, hated by God, lack of essentials, the sour fruit of social injustice, for which God, who says “Blessed are the poor”, will judge the rich.

Good poverty (=evangelical poverty) the only solution to world’s economic ills (i.e. bad poverty)!

Only the poor (whether of good or bad poverty) can evangelize the poor, i.e. tell the poor: “Blessed are you poor!”.





Initial Proclamation in a Multireligious Context through Dialogue of Life

Fr. François Ponchaud MEP *

“Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel”, the apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians (1 Cor 1,17) ; but he adds “not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power”. The Apostles and Paul lived in a cultural world where the existence of God or gods, was more or less evident. Only salvation by one Crucified, proclaimed Christ and Lord, living and acting, was questionable ... and it raised questions to any reasonable man.

I am neither a theologian nor a theorist, but above all, a “down to earth” man, a person in charge of the National Catechumenate for more than twenty years. I am trying to ensure Church presence in Cambodia. It is thus from experience more than of theory that I would treat and share with you in the light of the Scriptures and of the texts the Second Vatican Council.

The Multireligious (Cultural) Context of Cambodia.

In Cambodia, people live in a complex religious universe, marked with worship of vital energies of Brahmanism, and especially by Theravada Buddhism, the State religion deeply rooted into the Khmer heart, in urban areas as well as in the countryside. But the wave of the Occidental culture, marked with practical materialism, however makes this traditional religious universe move quickly.

* He first arrived in Cambodia in 1965 to share the life of Christians of this country. Ten years later, the war forced him to leave but he continued to serve the people by denouncing the atrocities of the war in Cambodia. He returned in 1993 and continues his mission of sharing the life of the Cambodian people.



1. Like all the peasants of the world, Cambodians try to reconcile themselves with forces of nature: they honor a multitude of deities, owners of the ground (“Masters of water and earth”, the founders of villages, the genies (“protective deities of the forests, the mountains”), the Masters of their own beings, “the 10.000 powerful things” (unusual and rare objects, etc. They try to protect themselves from the evil spirits (souls of people died of evil death, who committed suicide, women died in parturition, victims of accidents), from the vampires, from ghosts, etc. All are afraid of all of them, or want to be in good terms with them. The existence of the invisible world is a cultural self-explanatory data, simply accepted, almost by all. But isn't the Bible itself full of beliefs in the spirits too? ... We still live in a largely “socialized” and marvelous world.
2. Brahmanism left few deep religious traces among Cambodians, if not in the royal ideology, rules of architecture, and in the cultural-religious layers, made of mythological accounts, from which Christians broadly drew their vocabulary: concept of divinity, royal designation for deity, sacrifices, marvelous stories close to the Gospel, etc.
3. But it is especially the Theravada Buddhism (or “Buddhism of the Old”), of the strict observance which is found in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand and Laos which socialized all the other religious expressions, and which influence the life of the village and the whole nation due to the strict control of the pagodas. Buddhism is a religion of wisdom, which does not know the concept of one Transcendent God, even if the “Law”, the *Para nirvana*, the “Beyond World”, might be an evocation of it. Buddha recommends much discretion to speak about spiritual realities: as human beings, we know only this world (*lauk*), we speak the language of this world (*laukya-phéasa*), whereas when we want to speak about Ultimate Truth, we must speak the language of the “Beyond World” (*lauk-utara-phéasa*). You surely know the story of the tortoise by which Buddha wants to explain why human beings are unable to get to know the Ultimate Reality: one day, one tortoise tries to explain living on earth to a fish. It was a waste of time and effort, the fish doesn't understand very much, because it does not have any experience of it! In the same way, we human beings don't have any experience of the



divine world! So, we have to be prudent in our peremptory assertions on God, Heaven, Salvation...

It is a cultural data that nature was born by itself. Thus it is impossible to take beauty of the world as a starting point of a divine revelation. Strictly speaking for a Buddhist, the concept of "person", as one "I subject" open to multiple relations, doesn't exist. Only the concept of "individual" exists, that is, one "being, ego, who tends to put oneself as the center of the world", the "contemptible Ego". The human being is nothing but "appearance" (*roup*), a knot of vital energies (*vinienkhan*) which are put together in order to form the being of suffering, impermanent and without real "I" subject which I am. These energies will be charged with positive or negative force, according to good or bad actions: This is called "Karma", the sequence of the causes and the effects, the fruit of our past which governs our future existence.

Life is thus nothing else than a stage of painful purification: reincarnation is the punishment deserved by a bad karma; death is only dislocation of the vital energies and transmigration to a new life of suffering according to one's karma.

At cremation, the monk or the *achar* (master of ceremony), reminds that one should not be afflicted by death. The departed was but one transitory appearance without "I" subject, his vital energies have been linked again with others to form another being... Buddha knew 506 successive lives before his karmic load - force which generates transmigration, becomes extinct.

Out of apologetic concern, one day I asked a group of Christians at Easter whether somebody had already seen anyone "resurrected" (live again). All of them had seen some, or heard of it. What do non-Christians think of our proclamation that Jesus is "risen" from the dead and established as Christ and Lord? Due to their understanding of life there is that kind of fear "of doing evil" which would burden the cycle of transmigrations.

There is no concept of personal relation with an unspecified divinity, and consequently no forgiveness neither to receive nor to be forgiven. "Who does evil, receives evil; who does good, receives good," "nobody can remove the evil of others," "the good and the evil follow the human being like his own shadow" are all known axioms.



How to speak of Jesus who “removes the sin of the world” (Jn 1, 29)? For a Buddhist, love is but an imperfect attachment. Who loves, is linked, needs the other, proclaims his lack, and generates his own suffering. The Buddhist ideal is thus “equanimity,” that is, to be without love or hatred. The ideal man is the monk who is detached, purified of any attachment. To take support on the desires of “*the man of happiness, love, tenderness and life*” makes but sink into the erroneous illusion that a Buddhist must banish by the meditation on “the true nature of things”. “God is love” is, thus, a counterproductive proclamation!

Negative a priori.

Anglo-Saxon groups of Christian inspiration, through their aggressive proselytism which is not very respectful of the religious Khmer culture, has generated a feeling of mistrust, if not hatred, with regard to all the Christians who are seen as coming to Cambodia to destroy “the Khmer religion”.

A very widespread clannish mentality of assistance be it in the society or in the political life, is another type of obstacle which misleads missionaries. One enters, apparently without any problem, the family, the clan, or the religion of one’s benefactor, patron or teacher; one changes vocabulary with disconcerting ease. There is a Khmer saying: “One enters the river by meanders; one enters the country while following the habits”. It is not shocking for a Cambodian to change religion because “religion” is above all a whole set of practices which produce merits. A sociological rite of membership, more than one deep adhesion with one Being and convictions, as a consequence of a conscious choice.

It should be remembered always that the Khmer word translated as “religion” means “point of view, moral teaching”, the goal of which is to lead to inner peace and the extinction of karma. The intellectual training of the Cambodians, primarily based on repetition, hardly encourages reflection or a personal choice, different from that of the group.

Discovering an “Unknown God”

In this context, how can we bear witness to a personal God, the Alive one, a Father who loves each one beyond any imagination, which respects the human being and opens him to freedom?

How to testify to Jesus who comes to share our life, our sufferings and our death, to put us, by his love, in relation to the Father, the Alive one, who walks with us? It is necessary firstly to accept oneself like a foreigner, and then to make oneself be accepted, to become increasingly conscious of the ditch, if not the abyss, which separates us from the Cambodian Buddhists.

At the same time, to accept the other as different from me, while trying to live, as far as possible, in communion with the people we were sent to, sharing “their joys, and sorrows, their hopes and anguishes”. This supposes a physical proximity that the religious establishments, parishes and institutes do not often allow! This supposes a long and painful intellectual effort to know, as much as possible, language, religious habits, approached with respect, like as many expressions of a desire of protection, desire of the Absolute. “To speak the language of the heart”, is, certainly, the basis of human interaction, but only by speaking the language of the people makes it possible for a deeper communication. It is tremendously important especially to listen before speaking. Like Jesus, “Word made flesh”, who lived more than thirty years before his public ministry. To invest a few years in a serious study of the language is already a missionary step! This time spent as initiation is not wasted time, but it follows the logic of Incarnation.

One does not proclaim the Good News though a translator, except when it is otherwise impossible. But through words one is able to speak to the heart, in the same language as the receiver. By experience, the difficulty of the missionary - mine after 46 years spent in relation to the Cambodian people - still is to remain too often apart from the feelings and major concerns of those he speaks to.

During that long time of discovery it is convenient to be reminded of the teachings of the Vatican II: “the Catholic Church does not reject anything true and saint in these religions. It considers with a sincere respect those ways of acting and of living, those rules and doctrines which, though they differ in many points from what itself holds and proposes, however often bring a ray of the truth which illuminates all men” (*Nostra Aetate* n.2). Isn't our ministry in the universal Church as missionaries to seek in the other “that ray of truth” which could enrich our Church, shaped in the Western way throughout the past 15 centuries because of its

nearly exclusive presence around the Mediterranean basin? What does God reveal of Himself in these various religious practices? This is a Copernican revolution of what mission is, but it is the basis of any missionary step!

It is important to be reminded of the Instructions given to the Vicars Apostolic of the Kingdoms of Tonkin and Cochinchina (Vietnam) by the Propaganda Fide in 1659. An excerpt follows below:

- *You must be removed from political matters and from the affairs of the State that you will never accept a position of civil administration even if you are formally invited and repeatedly asked to do so. The Sacred Congregation has strictly forbidden this and will continue to forbid it...*
- *To the people you must preach obedience to their princes, even to those who cause them trouble. Both in public and in private you must pray to God with all your heart for their welfare and their health. Do not criticize the action even of those princes who persecute you and do not accuse them of cruelty or reproach their conduct, but in patience and silence await the time of God's consolation...*
- *Do not use your zeal to convince these people that they should change their rites, their customs or their habits unless these are evidently contrary to religion and good morals. What could be more absurd than to bring France, Spain, Italy or any other European country over to China? Do not bring them our countries but the faith, that faith which does not reject or injure the rites or customs of any people as long as these rites are not detestable in themselves, but rather desire that they be protected and fostered. It is, as it were, written in the nature of all people that the customs of one's own country and that country itself should be esteemed, loved, and respected above any other in the world. There is no greater cause of alienation and hatred than to change the customs of a nation, especially when these customs have been in use as far back as anyone remembers. What then if, having abrogated them, you replace them with the customs of your country imported from abroad. Never make comparisons between the customs of these people and those of Europe; on the contrary show your anxiety to become used to them.*



Admire and praise whatever merits praise. As regards what is praise worthy, do not laud it as do the flatterers. You should, however, be prudent enough not to pass judgment on it or to condemn it excessively. As for customs which are downright evil, they should be condemned by a shake of the hand and by silence rather than by words. When souls have become disposed to receive the truth occasions should be grasped to uproot these customs painlessly.

(H. Chapoulie, *Le Siège apostolique et les Missions*, Paris 1955).

Three Typologies of Missionary Proclamation

The Good news which can make Cambodians happy is very much marked by Buddhism which teaches that life is only suffering, impermanency, without the subject “I”. Wouldn’t an initial proclamation in their midst consist of showing them that “their life has much value”, because they are “persons”, deserving free love from of a human being, from a community? Perhaps, they will discover one day that they are loved by a Father who made them his children, daughters and sons! This “Good News” fills in what is missing in Buddhism.

In the Acts of the Apostles, we have three examples of missionary “proclamation” of the Apostle of the Pagans:

- with the peasants of Lystra (14,8-18),
- with the Greek philosophers of Athens (17,16-34),
- with the rulers of the Synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia (13, 14-43).

I readily find here three typologies from what I very humbly tried to live in Cambodia: proclamation to the peasants, to the students, to convinced Buddhists and administration.

In the Cambodian countryside, the missionary tries to humbly put himself/herself at the service of the people abandoned by the Big and Powerful, while trying to meet their urgent needs: health, food, housing, teaching children. Didn’t Jesus feed and looked after the poor, while proclaiming the Word to them? I always regarded my human involvement with the poor as concretization of missionary pastoral work, not in order to attract them into the Church like a trap, but simply because they are the children of the same Father!



By helping the peasants in their immediate needs like digging of irrigation canals, of ponds, creation of nursery schools, installations of biogas, latrines or others, we give them concrete evidence that their “life has value,” that they are worthy to be loved as they are. Through the nursery schools we gradually educate the moms. It isn’t necessary to say neither to the moms nor to the children that their life has value and that they are “persons.” They just experience this from us.

One of the traps of the missionary is to be moved not reasoned love but by sympathy when confronted by the misery at the countryside. The danger is undoubtedly to help too much. What is necessary is to involve each one, according to his/her means. It is this which forms upright women and men, gives them back their dignity as “actors”. Several times we have tried to make them live the Christian values, without saying it. Involve them in work, help them develop love for those who are poorer than themselves, mutual help, dialogue, foster their reflection on man-women relationship, on marital love, on the education of their children, etc Certainly the people we help will not become Christians, at least in the near future but, perhaps, they will discover one day, the Love “who is the origin of this attention to them.” As missionaries we are convinced that by helping the poor it is the living Christ that we help! (Mt 25). We are also convinced that we, Christians or not, are children of the same Father who draws us all to Himself. Christ is already alive and acting in the life of people we help, they already got a sure experience of this presence.

More than a theory, isn’t faith revealed in this new way of living? Let’s not rush in eliminating the belief in the spirits, which is one cultural data which re-appears even those who are Christians for a long time. It is the development of their intellectual knowledge which will modify this widespread belief. Let us patiently wait until the people, either in urban centers or in the countryside, makes an option for Jesus the Lord. For the apostle Paul, it doesn’t matter whether the spirits may exist or not. What is more essential is to believe that Jesus the Lord is their Lord. Eph 1,21 could thus be translated as: “while raising him from among the dead, God placed Christ... above all the powerful things: the invisible forces, the guards of the forests, the founders of villages, the protective deities of mountain forests...”.

A sign of conversion to Jesus the Lord is the absence of fear of the

spirits as well as the liberating joy it generates. This is still true regarding the mountain tribes of Cambodia, where animism is the only religion. When possible, the witness of the Christian communities at the countryside is the concrete sign of this love, which determines their spiritual journey. That is why in every Christian community in urban centers as well as in the countryside, there is “a mutual aid committee” whose work is to express the unselfish love of Christ to the poorest, not only the Christians, but to all those who are in need. It is a fact that the majority of the people in the countryside became Christian because they were helped by the Church. One can quote innumerable testimonies:

- “I was sick, the Christian community helped me. Then, to thank the Christians, I went to attend their ceremonies. I found that what they lived was interesting, I asked to know this religion, and I became a Christian”.
- “Formerly, I thought of obtaining something from the Church. Now, on the contrary, it is me who helps the poorest”.
- “At the beginning, I wanted that my son can continue his studies. So, I went to the Church. Now, after four years, I have realized that the Church helped everyone, not only those who are Christian or want to become one. And then, especially, I have understood that the Church gave us a message: *your life has value!* The Church wants us to be upright people, and not beggars”, said someone who is presently in-charge of a small community.

Thus, it is necessary to wait a long time so that the “observer” may purify the reasons of wanting to become Christian. However, even using every precaution, some people get stuck in their initial idea, and they leave the Church when they realize that they will not be given privileged whenever assistance is given to all. Others give up practicing their faith and move away from their village or group.

In the light of the example of the Apostle Paul’s attitude with the people of Lystra and to the Greek philosophers and intellectuals, one could say: let us not be in a hurry to say that it was a complete failure. The example of Mrs. Damaris “and more others” prove the contrary. It is my own little experience while giving some “religious information” to the students of the Don Bosco School in Phnom Penh some years ago. With the person in charge, a Christian Cambodian of Buddhist culture

and a fervent convert, we tried to answer the questions of these young people about their life, future, their own Buddhist religion, and the Christian religion. They were expected to voluntarily come for six months. We unceasingly tried to connect their life experiences with our Christian experiences, trying to find images and examples they could understand. We often had to teach them their own Buddhist religion which they practiced by osmosis, more than by a reasoned choice. Through the marvelous stories of the life of the Buddha, we have made them think about the symbolic language in their own culture and in many passages of the Bible too.

They undoubtedly understood (even if not all) that we do not want to indoctrinate, nor do violence to their freedom, but to share with them a spiritual experience and further deepen their understanding of our common values. Some asked to become Christians. However, in 1996, the Apostolic Vicar of Phnom Penh wisely asked to postpone baptism of any young person in formation in religious institutions, until he/she has found work. His intention was to respect the freedom of the young people, and to prevent us from being tempted to benefit either from their situation of dependence or from our economic and financial superiority, as a way of incorporating them into our “religious clan.” We must remember that “one enters the river by his meanders... ”.

Other Christian groups do not have these scruples and they have many followers, but are these really converted to Jesus whose “Words set free”? Proselytism is a practice that is completely foreign to the spirit of Jesus! Mission demands great patience: “who sows, often is not the who harvests”! One does not become a Christian within six months! God did not reveal himself in one day. He has been educating humanity for millions of years. Moreover Mission is above all His work, as we so often ask in “Our Father”, without much attention: “Make yourself known as our Father. Come and reign over us. Accomplish your design of love on humanity”. “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (Jn 6, 44).

We follow the same process for adults who wish to become Christians. For nearly ten meetings, we speak about their life in order to let them deepen the spiritual experience they lived or they are living, on the occasion of a joy or sorrow, paternity, disease or evil, death, etc. We think

about how their own religion can help them, regarding love, children... Persuaded that Jesus has preceded us in them, we start from their spiritual experience, and offer them a global presentation of Christianity, while we witness these same events as Christians live them.

If Paul spoke to the people of Lystra and the philosophers of Athens, first of all he would proclaim his new faith to the Jews, who believed in God and firmly stood by their conviction that the only way of salvation is the Law of Moses. It is somehow this kind of experience I live while speaking with Buddhist monks, or convinced Buddhists. To proclaim is good of course! But we must be concerned too how this proclamation would be received! This is true for Cambodia, but also for the youth of Europe who are living in a different culture than the older generation and that of the Roman Catholic Church. Unfortunately what happens is often a dialogue of the deaf!

I like to quote one of my first mission experiences in Stoeung Treng in 1968. On Christmas day I paid a visit to the chief of the pagoda, at the time of a festival. He asked me about who I am, then about my religion. I told him that I honor God, the Father, who had created the world by love, etc. He, then, turned to his assistant on his right-hand side while saying to him: "this young French seems to be a nice guy, but what a naïve one! He believes all the stories relating to India!" I was doing my best "to give an account of the hope" that is in me (1Pt 3, 15), while using my brand new knowledge of the Cambodian language, but it was in vain. He couldn't "understand" because we were in two different intellectual and religious worlds. This experience deeply marked me. It is the experience which I currently make with adult catechumens, convinced Buddhist. How to join the other in his deepest self with the slightest chance of being misunderstood? It is undoubtedly urgent to revisit our theology, our ways of speaking of Man, God, Salvation so that our words may be inculturated and correspond to an awaited and desired salvation.

The simple fact that the Buddhist Cambodians do not have any idea of God, requires us to follow the journey of Mark in his Gospel. We start by introducing Jesus like a true man, (we shouldn't rush to present him as God!) who posed questions to his compatriots through his way of relating with the marginalized ones from the Jewish religion, and therefore, from the society. It is starting from one's practice, from one's way of life, later

he would proclaim with whom he was in relation with, his Father. He acts through his Father and for his Father. This discovery of the Father is a real source of joy for the poor, whom Buddhism does not offer, that is, to tell the truth and give hope. Jesus is also presented like a Master of wisdom, a “Famous-Master” (“*baram krou*”), like the Buddha, who taught about concrete matters. In this sense, the books of Wisdom of the Old Testament - especially Ben Sirach - would have to be more abundantly used. Didn’t Origen give this book to be read by the catechumens of his time?

The miracles of Jesus are as many human and spiritual realities concerning each one of us which are symbolically transformed: the blind man, the paralytic one, the leprous one, Lazarus. Each of this speaks about me! Like Buddha, Jesus, our brother in humanity, has overcome “the thirst for life” which constitutes “the sin of the origins” for a Buddhist (*tanaha*: desire to have, dominate, ignorance), origin of any evil. By Jesus’ act of amazing love for his Father and his brothers, he broke once and for all, the relentless cycle of the reincarnations and leads us towards the ultimate Truth, which for us has the face of one Loving Father. From now on it is not anymore necessary “to save merits” (*sansâm Bonn*) as a Buddhist must do. What is essential is to completely entrust to the living Christ.

In a cultural context where the transmigration of the beings (improperly called “reincarnation”), we pay a special attention to the translation of the word “resurrection,” a word which is translated in an erroneous way in several languages as “to live again,” with a meaning that is too restrictive which could possibly bring about confusion. Instead we chose to translate it as “Jesus received a glorious new life.” This is an expression which sounds well in Khmer: “the risen from among the Dead” is quite alive, with another life than ours; he communicates it to us by his Spirit. Moreover, this expression makes it possible for Christians to experience all the implications of the “resurrection” which appear in the first chapters of the Acts of Apostles.

Admittedly there is always a hiatus, when we let moral teaching to lead to a personal encounter with this Jesus living his new life, glorious or with the Father. In this encounter we also tried to modify the translation of the word “faith” which means “belief” which the Buddhist consider with contempt because obviously they prefer the experience “to en-

trust one's whole life to," something like the Buddhists who begin the recitation of the law by invoking the "triple refuge" ("I take the Buddha as my support, I take the Law as my support, I take monastic community as my support"). We have modified this formula in the ceremony of acceptance into the Church as "I take Christ, the Word, the Church as refuges". We also prefer the name of "Father" than that of God to stress the relational side of the faith. The Church is first presented just like a family, where we try to walk together towards the Father. In fact the translation of the word Church as "divine-together-communication," makes this presentation easier.

Sometimes we also use the Buddhist "breathing techniques" which help us create a vacuum and lets each one be filled by the Spirit. The "breath" and the "Spirit" are one and same term in the Bible: all human history is surrounded by the first breath of *Elohim-YHWH* in the nostrils of "the Earthy" and that of the "Arise from among the dead" on his disciples (Jn 20,22). This Buddhist technique - the contents of which are however profoundly modified - is accepted from the start by young Cambodians because it is in their culture. Undoubtedly should we develop the meditation, a basic Buddhist practice, not like an exercise of remote setting of the desires but as the reception of the Spirit into oneself symbolized by the breath entering through our nostrils. Through this Christianized meditation, punctuated by long moments of silence, without doubt one can integrate the Buddhist experience with that of Paul's who speaks about "meanings of the Spirit" in him. repetitive prayer - like that of Taizé - done slowly and with pauses for silence, is undoubtedly another way which attracts the Buddhists who feel the calm in their hearts. It is sometimes this calm which has attracted someone. In addition to personal contact - which is essential to the transmission of the message - the Church as a whole must be seen as less foreign, and accessible to the Buddhist culture in its liturgy as well as in its decoration, and more deeply in its theology. Here we have a vast area to be developed!

The Buddhist who tries to become a Christian becomes the object of virulent criticism, sometimes even of family exclusion and is considered a traitor who betrayed the religion of the Ancestors by entering the religion of foreigners. For some years now the Church of Cambodia has been trying to foster a "more Khmer face" by overcoming a certain number of

hostile prejudices. Since 1967 we have been honoring all the Saints the same day as that of the great Cambodian festival of the Dead, which any Cambodian worthy of the name is bound to honor. We burn incense sticks in front of the altar each Sunday. The absence of this rite is a major obstacle for a Buddhist, even if we had to Christianize its meaning. Several churches in the provinces take the form of pagodas, the roofs are decorated with dragon tails - signs of fruitfulness - the cross in the shape of a lotus, placed on the frontage, where Buddhists place the Law, and not on the roof, which would be a sign of domination. No "Crucified" on this cross, to answer the objection of Buddhists: "Why do you honor a dead God?" Indeed, our traditional imagery can also lead to error. "Our Lord is no more dead ! He is Alive!" The interior of certain churches is decorated with traditional murals which brought the praise by non Christians: "Jesus is one of ours; we are at home at your place because we feel at home". Surely, Cambodians will not all become Christians, but they feel recognized in their own culture, which is equal to being recognized as one having value.

Isn't this initial proclamation? Little by little, the Church is belonging to the local landscape. The government seems interested more with the charitable and intellectual side of the Church. Several times every year meetings are organized between the representatives of various religions present at Cambodia: Buddhism, Christianity, with its Protestant components, Islam, Bahai, etc In 2009 the topic of the meeting was related with the contribution of the various religions in the construction of a just society. The Buddhists insisted on "mercy-compassion" which was to impregnate human relationships; the Evangelicals of all denominations gave all their biblical verses; a Cambodian Catholic priest came with an extract from the social doctrines of the Church, starting from the end of the 19th century to Vatican II. He compared the socio-economic situation of the end of the 19th European century with that of the current Cambodia: the capitalists then built factories in the cities, the peasants left their lands to come to work. They were exploited just like the Cambodian workers, men and women today due to lack of adapted legislation controlling the appetites of the capitalists. After several "trial and error" the Church drew up its social doctrines, gradually adapted to the evolutionary situation of the working world. Up to the Vatican II and the recent encyclical *Caritas*

in Veritate of the Pope Benedict XVI (2009). Many civil servants were attracted by this address of some pages. The Church has a corpus of social doctrines it did not intend to impose, but to propose in the world and to the men of good will. Here too, the Gospel becomes one News which can bring happiness!

Conclusion

Jesus will become the Christ of the Cambodians only if he can fill their deep spiritual longings. Beyond the generalized materialism one can note a desire for protection, a desire for interior and external peace (which among the young people is more important than love, a desire for illumination, for wisdom, for quality in human relations, a desire for purification, and a fear for evil, etc.

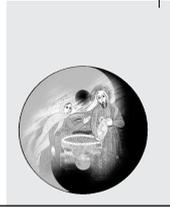
All would not be acquired by knowledge not by teaching but through a spiritual experience of communion to His life. The Church has not come to destroy the spiritual search of the religions, of the people, but to “fulfill” them (Mt 5, 17).

Had Jesus lived in Cambodia, he undoubtedly would have been Buddhist, even a monk, and he would have brought his message of liberation to the core of Buddhism. But he has left this task to us. No one will change religion painlessly. Religion is a whole system of representation of the world, of values, the basis of a culture, which is, then, modified.

Like Abraham who begins one step towards the Father, the whole Church embarks on a journey of which no one exactly knows the route. In the same way that in ancient times the entry of the Greeks into the Judeo-Church deeply modified this Church and opened it to the Universal. Similarly, the entry of the Buddhists into the Church of Jesus-Christ will deeply modify its face. But we still must have the audacity to dare the innovation and freedom of the children of God, without choking “the Observer” with a scholastic theological formulation of the Middle Ages.

translated from the original text in French





A Response to François Pouchard

Sr. Teresa Furukawa Chieko FMA

I do not know well the multi-religious context and culture of Cambodia and even the theory of Brahmanism, therefore I cannot express my opinion on this regard. However reading the text of his lecture, I noticed that we Japanese have many points in common with the Cambodians, especially Shintoism which is the traditional religion of Japan. Shintoism is animist, thus it is based on the forces of nature and honors a multitude of deities who are the proprietors of the land.

In certain regions of Japan, people believe in the transmigration of spirits as a result of Karma. I have so often heard that the fortune or misfortune of man (mishaps, strange diseases, misadventures, disasters, etc.) depend on “Karma” which are the consequence of either good or bad deeds in the previous life. Man must live honestly in this world, otherwise, some misfortune will happen after death.

I think that Cambodians have a deep religious heart, more than us Japanese. Buddhism has seeped into their daily lives for many years. Their religion is closely combined with their culture. Therefore, it is very difficult to accept the initial proclamation of Jesus. In fact, ultimately, this would require changing the way we living, thinking and acting.

I think as Fr. Pouchard says, the Cambodians will accept also the initial proclamation of Jesus and believe in the unknown God through the witness of the proclaimers who live their faith with joy.

Based on my experience on how I accepted the initial proclamation of Jesus, let me stress, as Fr. Pouchard said, the importance of the witness of missionaries. Witness is worth more than many words. Let me now share my story.

My family was Buddhist. In my house there was the Buddhist family

altar. My parents habitually offered flowers and incense at the altar. I also knelt before the altar. Like so many other Buddhist families of Japan, however, we did not live Buddhism faithfully. Entering the middle and high school run by the FMA, I heard for the first time about Jesus during our religion class. At first I did not understand many Catholic terms. Gradually, I began to understand them and also their content but it took so long to arrive at the conviction of having the One and True God. These questions often cropped up in my mind:

- Why is man born? Where did he come?
- Why live? Where do I go after death?
- Is there really only One God?
- What does it mean that Jesus is the Son of God who came to save us?
- Is the Catholic religion the true religion? etc ...

Then I used to observe what the missionaries, the sisters, and the Christians say and how they lived. I think people prefer the practice of faith more than theories. It 's very important to announce Christ with words, but the witness of joyfully living one's faith is much more important. Thus, first of all, the proclaimer of Jesus must live fully in Christ and be in profound communion with Him. From my experience. I can say that in initial proclamation it is very important to faithful bear common witness to the Word through our work.

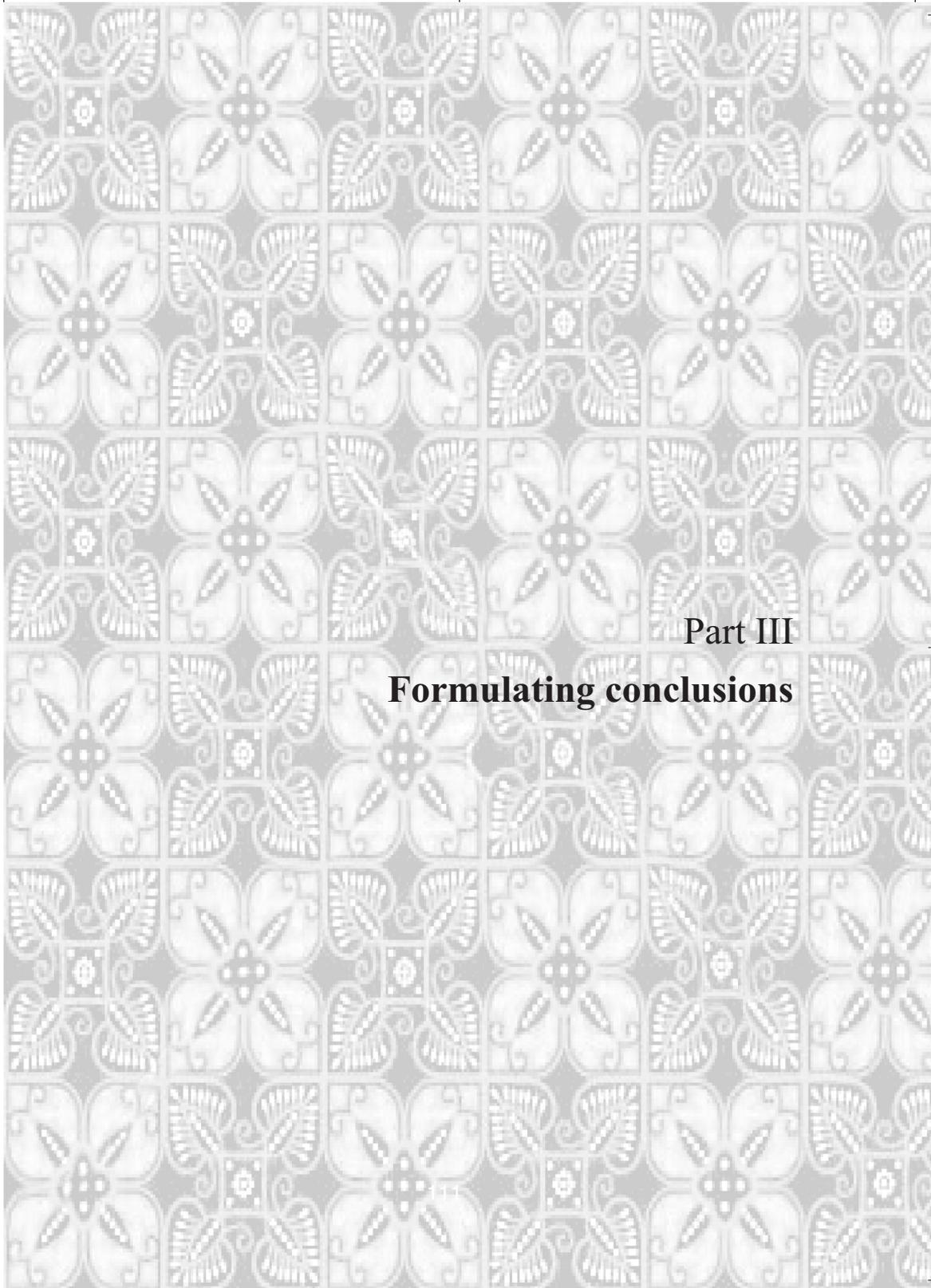
In the secondary school where I studied, a Salesian missionary priest taught us enthusiastically and with great confidence about God, about Christ, etc. He was very wise. We felt that he really believed in God So I said to myself, "Why cannot I believe like him? There were missionaries in our school. I met them every day. I asked myself why did they come to Japan from distant places, leaving their home and their family to come here where the language and customs are totally different? At that time it seemed impossible to me that one could leave everything for God. There were also several sisters, missionary teachers in our school. Looking at them, I noticed that they were happy, fraternal charity reigned among them. They were humble, kind, gentle, and welcoming.

Through all these I was finally convinced that the One True God exists, and I followed the call of Jesus and finally received baptism and

then, the consecrated life. A Japanese Bishop, in the report to the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia said: “The human person is convinced more through witness than through words. This is especially true for us Asians. Asian cultures give importance to the contemplative dimension, self-denial, simplicity, humility, silence, etc.. The Gospel message will not reach Asians, until they see the works of God in us Christians. People prefer the Gospel based on the daily life rather than hear the teaching of the Gospel spoken with beautiful words. The person who makes the initial proclamation must be consistent with his/her words and deeds and witness the joy of faith. I think that the Cambodians, like the Japanese will believe in the One True God through witness. Finally, I would like to emphasize the concept of motherhood of God: God who embraces the universe, the immanent God in the hearts of all people, the infinite kindness of God, ever forgiving, etc.. I believe that Cambodians as well as the Japanese will come to know the God who loves all people, by observing and experiencing the works of missionaries and Christians.







Part III

Formulating conclusions





Emerging Insights and Perspectives during these Study Days in View of a Renewed Missionary Praxis



Fr. Joseph Phuoc SDB & Sr. Alma Castagna FMA *

We, the representatives of our brothers and sisters of the Salesian Family in 8 countries of East Asia, gathered for the Study Days in Sampran from August 14-18, to pray, reflect and study the theme *Initial Proclamation in the Threefold Context in East Asia*.

During these days, we listened to the Word of God which invited us to engage ourselves to enter new frontiers in terms of geography, society, culture, and religion to introduce the Person of Christ to our brothers and sisters in this East Asia region. We felt challenged by the invitation and impulse of the Universal Church in facing the fact that either Jesus has not been proclaimed or that Christian faith has been abandoned in this part of the Asian continent or that many people are indifferent to the Gospel message. In the light of the actual and different contexts where we live and work, but also based on our common heritage of Salesian charism, spirituality, educational pedagogy, we shared our limited experiences and insights. In such a way, we enriched each other which led us to a better understanding of initial proclamation and its implications.

We would like to share humbly the result of our, study, reflections and discussions, trusting that God will continue to use our Salesian Family to spread the joy and happiness of knowing Christ. The text reflects what we came to understand and what we are challenged to move forward, to be more engaged in overcoming our limitations and restrictions. We pray that this simple text which synthesizes our discussions on behalf of the Salesian Family in East Asia may encourage our Provinces to reflect more and study more to better foster the initial proclamation of Christ.



Initial Proclamation

We understand that initial proclamation is a ministry of the Church, constituted by all forms of witness, dialogue, word, friendship and action that stir up a desire, curiosity to know the person of Jesus on the part of those who have not heard about Him, abandoned Him or who are indifferent to the Christian faith. Initial proclamation is the first step in the whole process of evangelization. It is the nucleus of our mission of proclaiming Jesus Christ. We are careful, however, not to understand 'first' in a strictly chronological sense.

I. Presentation of Jesus' Face in Asian Context

Fascinated with the beauty and greatness as well as the salvation in the Person of Jesus, we commit ourselves to share this gift to peoples of East Asia, especially the young. We are challenged to search for different ways to stir up in people the desire to know Jesus. We are aware that Jesus is the Good News for the men and women of this large region in their search for the meaning of existence and for the truth of their own humanity, a Christ that is truly the Savior of millions of people in Asia who are suffering from various forms of poverty, who yearn for Him in their own religious aspirations and practices to liberate themselves and other human beings.

We, members of the Salesian Family, believe that the real Face of Jesus is most effectively channeled through our own life and work. While consciously aware of the possible and actual preconceptions and prejudices against the traditional presentations of Jesus, through a step by step pedagogy, by our loving acts and words, we present Jesus as the Great Perfect Man, the Man of Divine Wisdom, the Healer of sufferings, the Humble Servant of God, the Compassionate God who shares in the fate of millions sufferers, until that moment when Jesus is accepted as the Unique and Universal Savior.



II. Initial Proclamation in the Contexts and People Whom the Members of the Salesian Family are serving

We are aware of the rich diversity of people we are serving. In East Asia, our people live their daily lives in very specific social, cultural and religious backgrounds which are very Asian in their characteristics.

In fact, the majority of people in Asia are struggling with material poverty yet profoundly rich in their religiosity and cultures which are expressed through symbols and rituals in different local religions, traditions and cultural practices. Initial Proclamation cannot help but take into consideration this rich heritage of East Asia.

1. First of all, Salesian mission is evangelization by education. It is primarily or preferentially geared towards the poor young. Hence, the Salesian Family members' main concern and most of their time is directed to giving a hand to this section of the population, a means to survive and help them to enter their society as responsible citizens and workers with efficient skills for sustainable jobs. We are convinced that we cannot proclaim Jesus without bringing Jesus' help to alleviate the miseries of these suffering people, so that they can live with the dignity of the Children of God.
2. We are aware that many of them come to us to receive help and they appreciate our services for their human development. Regrettably, they are not interested in learning more about Jesus, nor do they engage themselves into more profound questions regarding the meaning of human life. But in our context out witness and concrete services are the only means to reach and touch our people's minds and hearts.
3. In other situations, groups of the Salesian Family are working in non-Christian contexts, and are serving people who are followers of other religions. Their conduct in accordance with their own religious traditions could also challenge us to transform their understanding and experiences of God. Conversely, they make us humble and fascinated with what God has done for them, especially their penchant for contemplation which spurs silence, self-detachment, care and compassion for other people. These are resources for the initial proclamation of Jesus Christ.



4. In particular, the heavy past still lingers on in the mind and heart of many followers of other religions, including those who are highly educated. The legitimate pride for one's own cultural and religious heritage could be an obstacle for our proclamation. In some countries, by national law, there is still an explicit prohibition of proclaiming the name of Jesus.
5. At the same time, one has to acknowledge the superficial inculturation of Christianity in this East Asian region. The effort of inculturation of the Gospel and the way of expressing Catholic faith in local language and culture has been much discussed. In some places, religious education textbooks are just translated versions. Our past attempts to inculturation and the weight of the history of the Church in East Asia are some of the factors to be considered in the perception that in many places Christianity is still considered a foreign religion imported from the West even though it has been existing for almost five centuries!
6. Regarding those Catholics who have received only a superficial Christian presentation of faith and, therefore, live their faith either as something cultural or in a routine manner, as well as those who have left the Church, we are constantly aware that these people need anew Initial Proclamation which would stir up in them the desire to know Jesus Christ and to personally encounter Him. Included in this group are Catholic migrant workers or immigrants or those who are in mixed marriages. Without help, they could be easily uprooted from their Catholic communities. Conversely, a new initial proclamation could lead to their deeper personal commitment to Jesus, hence, they can be the new force in their host country in fostering the initial proclamation of Jesus.
7. In some of our countries, ecumenical relations exist between the Catholic Church and other ecclesial communities. Our relationship and collaboration with other Christians could strengthen our common effort to initial proclamation. Yet, in other places, the situation is becoming more complicated as the anti-Catholic agenda of some Christian groups makes dialogue and collaboration more difficult if not impossible. Somehow, there is an ongoing competition among Christian groups which becomes confusing not only our Catholics

but also the other Christians, especially those who are not well formed in their faith.

8. Finally, there are Catholics who collaborate with us in our schools, oratories, parishes or missionary stations. They are really forces working with us for the fostering of initial proclamation. Together with them, we form them to make them more consciously aware that they are agents of initial proclamation in their actual situation. At the same time, we work with them to help them face the challenges of how to live faithfully to their cultural as well as religious roots in the midst of a new and continually developing cultural phenomena, especially in the area of Social Communication.

In fact, we take into consideration the impact of technological advances in Social Communication. It is obviously becoming a new missionary frontier for the members of the Salesian Family who should somehow be the pioneers in this new Areopagus as 95% of those who use new technology are the young of society.

III. *Members of the Salesian Family as Proclaimers*

We note first of all that it is the Triune God himself who takes the initiative of proclamation: through the person of Jesus Christ, God draws himself to persons regardless of religion, ethnic origin, culture or social status. The Gospels narrate to us how Jesus offered people a differentiated journey of faith according to the characteristics and needs of each one. Jesus as the model of our life and action, and the theology of the Incarnation is the theological basis for entering into dialogue with our brothers and sisters who already have religious beliefs and practices.

In our Asian context a great contribution to initial proclamation was given by lay people (catechists, teachers, those who work in charitable services) who continue to collaborate with us in continuing to bring Jesus with enthusiasm to the people. By proclaimer we refer to both religious and lay in their common effort to bear witness to the love of God. Every Christian is a proclaimer a preacher through his/her witness of life.

We bring with ourselves the fascination and beauty of our faith, which arise from our personal relationship with Jesus and a deep communion with Him, to spur people to develop an interest in Jesus Christ

and introduce them to an encounter with Him. Through our personal and community life, our apostolate, especially our service to the poor, we make the conscious effort to stir up people to raise questions regarding the ultimate meaning of life and work and to help them to search for the answer in Jesus Christ. In respect for the freedom of each one, we will not take his/her place, but we let him / her freely choose Christ.

We also let ourselves be challenged by the lives and beliefs of the followers of other religions, ready to change our own behavior and personal attitudes, even enrich our understanding and experience of God as well. We allow ourselves to be fascinated for what God has done in them. At the same time this demands from us patience and effort to search for various ways to be accepted in the latter's friendship.

The ability to discern the appropriate "moment" and the right motivation to foster initial proclamation demands from us, proclaimers, to be well formed both in human and Christian virtues particularly poverty, patience, openness, empathy, love, humility, joy, understanding, acceptance of transformation.

The formation of the evangelizers need training to acquire professional competencies related to the mission and services: languages, knowledge, anthropology, theology, spirituality, human sciences, planning and competence in the field of traditional and modern means in order to have an effective approach to initial proclamation.

Despite this ability to "take advantage" of the appropriate moment, initial proclamation cannot be left only to the creativity and intuitions of the proclaimer, but he/she must be able to organize and plan the necessary consequent steps to be taken.

IV. *Methods*

Living in Asia, where religious beliefs are firmly rooted in the mentality of people, in initial proclamation, it is necessary to have a lot of patience in assisting this step by step journey to conversion, to re-express the Good News in terms of the cultural and religious values of the people and to put initial proclamation in the broader context of evangelization whose necessary consequent steps need to be planned.

We believe that proselytism is neither respectful of the people we

meet, nor faithful to our charism, which uses reason and loving kindness as our approach. Instead, tapping into the experiences and sensibilities of the people, we share with them our spiritual experience and encourage the development of the talents of each one. We consider this as a path to deeper understanding of reality and the people we serve.

Our method of initial proclamation, therefore, must be inculturated to be both liberating and responsive to the needs, desires and aspirations of the people. These are, as already mentioned, those trigger moments which stir up an interest in the person of Christ, especially in non-formal education environments.

Furthermore, in our East Asian society, it is important and necessary to reconcile technology and traditions, and bring the sacred back into cultures that are gradually being secularized. Precisely in the Asian religious context, rich in the contemplative dimension that promotes silence and meditation, it will be particularly important to give space for silence and prayer, which is the ground for initial proclamation. As for those countries where a majority of the population are Christians, it is important to stir up the foster a personal adhesion to Jesus Christ a critically appraise forms of popular religiosity and superstitions which continue to affect the expressions of the Christian faith in order to purify them.

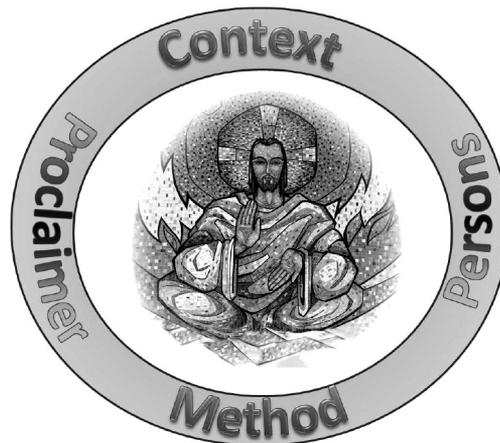
For members of the Salesian Family in East Asia, opportunities to mediate and harmonize the relationship between appreciating the cultural values and obeying the demands of faith are numerous. In fact, education needs to be nurtured and promoted by the cultural values, meanwhile, evangelization sets the direction of human fulfillment.

In our initial proclamation of the person of Jesus Christ, according to the spirit of Don Bosco and the other founders of the branches of the Salesian Family, we shall keep in mind those elements of faith, of Salesianity and of humanism in the relevant situations.

Many traditional Salesian structures (schools, oratory, boarding-houses ...) still offer opportunities for initial proclamation. It will be important, therefore, to create a climate and environment, where one breathes the family spirit, of cultivating friendly relations and confidence as a proper mediation to share the love of Christ. Our preventive system of education envisions spirituality as the soul of its action. It will be important, therefore, to strengthen this aspect in the individual person and the community where one lives the Preventive System.

V. Summarizing

We synthesized all our discussions throughout these Study Days with this icon below:



In order to face up to the challenges of initial proclamation in the three-fold context of rich cultures, ancient religions and poor multitudes of East Asia and in order to concretely apply the above reflections we need to

1. Exert conscious effort to stir up the interest and desire to know the Person of Jesus.
2. discover humbly and patiently the Mystery of Jesus in the people we serve and transform ourselves to better reflect the Face of Jesus in a way that could be readily understood by Asians such as Jesus the Perfect Man, the Healer of suffering, the Servant of God, the Compassion God.
3. Immerse ourselves in the social, cultural and religious milieu of our people, in order to understand their mentality, the questions they raise, the answer they offer as well as their way of presentation of the Transcendent.

4. Stress on inculturation and interreligious dialogue in our formation and on immersion in the actual situation of poverty as well as the world of communication.
5. Deepen our awareness that the way of life of the Christian community as well as of our religious community, our joyful witnessing and passion for Christ are what attract people, hence, they are the primary and important forms of initial proclamation.
6. Rediscover the relevance of our current Salesian settings [schools, oratories, parishes, boarding houses, missionary stations .. .] as important settings where initial proclamation could take place with respect and love.

Our Prayer

We entrust ourselves and the people we are serving, especially the poor youth through the intercession of our Mary Help of Christians as we pray to her:

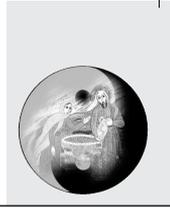
*Mary the Mother of the Church
we give you thanks for your Yes to God and for your journey of faith
as first disciple and missionary of Jesus.*

*We want to live in communion with all the disciples of your Son Jesus,
together with the pilgrim Church
in order to bring the Gospel to all.*

*Mary, inspire us with the courage to talk
about the world to Jesus and about Jesus to the world.*

*Help us, O Mother to follow Don Bosco, a tireless storyteller
in order to share with humility, patience and courage
the experience of our personal encounter with Jesus
in our communities, among the young and with every one we meet.
Amen.*





Practical Proposals

PRACTICAL PROPOSALS - FMA

To create the climate, in all the sectors of our mission, in which one lives truly the love of Christ

To transmit this encounter to the sisters of the Province involving the provincial council and mission animation team

To continue the reflection on initial proclamation, above all committing ourselves in deepening the documents of the local Churches and to know the initiatives of other institutions who are working in this field in order to create a networking

To accompany and empower the Christian youth, so that they may become missionaries for other youth.

PRACTICAL PROPOSALS - SDB

We make conscious efforts to stir up the desire to know the person of Jesus. We need to develop personal skills (linguistic, information technology, good knowledge of cultures, religions and socio-political, etc...) and prepare oneself through immersion.

To promote proper understanding of the life and nature of the mission, missiological formation should be included in our program of initial formation.

To re-enforce the role of the mission animator of the Provinces. Missionary animation in the provinces is done in 2 dimensions, *ad extra* and *ad intra* to give special importance to *inter gentes*.

Awareness is to be given to individuals as well as the communities the need to live a life of Christian witness to Christ so as to proclaim Christ to others.

To empower lay members of the Salesian Family (co-operators, volunteers, SYM members, etc...) so that they too may become agents of the initial proclamation.

To make proper use of our traditional settings (schools, oratories, youth-centers, etc...) as auspicious places for initial proclamation and also to launch out to the new frontiers of ministry and apostolate.

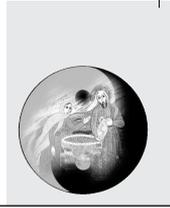


Part IV

STORYTELLING

In preparation for the Study Days participants were asked to gather stories in the place where they live and work to share their experiences regarding the initial proclamation of Jesus to young people and adults. The following are some of these stories.





Kolbe is an Example of Virtue

Fr. Daniel Masaharu Torigoe SDB

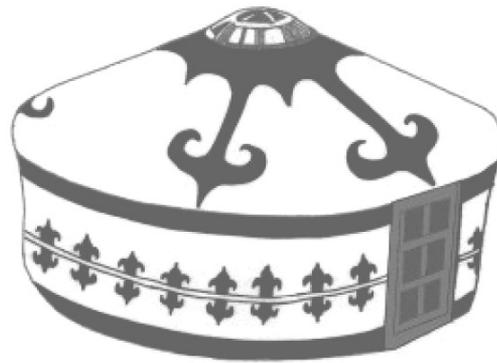
I teach a religion class to the 7th graders at Salesian Junior and Senior High School. One of the topics of the course was on the life of St. Maximilian Kolbe. Last year I had an interesting experience in one of my classes. That day, toward the end of the presentation, I was explaining why Fr. Kolbe died at Auschwitz and why he took his companion's place to save his life. The reaction of the students to the story was like "Wow, he is great!" They really liked the story. I didn't expect any applause on their part. But that's what they did. They appreciated a Christian virtue!

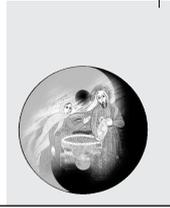
To be honest, I didn't think that they would find any positive meaning in giving up one's own life to save others, since they are so influenced by modern society and tend to have materialistic mind-sets. Self-sacrifice is not accepted in modern philosophy. Their positive reaction to the virtue made me re-construct my image of young people in Japan. I now believe that somehow they seem to have already been prepared for Christianity even though they were not raised in a Christian environment.

It is often said that the only concern of young people in Japan is academic attainment, which promises future wealth, prestigious employment and a luxurious life style. It might be true. But at the same time, some Japanese youngsters really know the "Christian language" and have a keen sense for evangelical counsels, even in a consumerist society.

I spent some time considering why they have some sort of foundation, or something in common with the Christian virtues. Then I came to the conclusion that Japanese culture and the traditional Japanese value-systems have created a smooth path to Christianity for them today. One of the influential elements of Japanese culture might be Confucianism. Confucianism, ethics rather than religion, as the foundation for much of social life and many ideas about family and nation, gave us the idea that

family stability and social responsibility are human obligations. And this is where Japanese virtues meet Christian virtues. Enlightened by Confucianism and other elements of Japanese culture, one can be led to what Jesus taught, “Love one another!” Once planted in the soil of Japanese traditional culture, the seed of Christianity will be able to grow and bear fruit!





Different Routes to Baptism

Salesian Seminarian Anthony Pun Ming Chi

In the last two years I taught and accompanied a group of young catechumens (baptized on Easter Vigil this year) of Star of the Sea Parish, Chai Wan, Hong Kong. Below are the stories of some of them. I have chosen 4 stories. The first two are two young girls from my class in the Star of the Sea. And the last two come from St. Anthony's Parish. They share a common story of how they got to know God and decided to join the catechumenate program:

1. They have certain connections with Catholic or even Salesian schools. They may be past pupils of, or their children are now studying in, a Catholic school. They first knew about God and the stories of Jesus through formal education in a Catholic school.
2. Religious education may not lead a person to the faith, but at least it leaves a mark in his/her heart. The seed will grow when the time is right. It seems that for some of them, the turning point was an invitation from friends and family members. It made them reflect more about their life experiences which stirred up their curiosity to know who Jesus is.
 - I studied in a Salesian school. Interestingly, the only subject that I passed was Religion. However, I do not think I understood deeply about God and the Scripture. 23 years later, I joined the Catechumen class because my kids are studying in a Catholic school. I felt a bit uneasy at the very beginning because of my long working hour before the class. I often had to rush from my workplace to the

parish. But gradually, the catechumen class became an integral part of my life. I have learnt a lot in Fr. Joseph Lee's lesson.

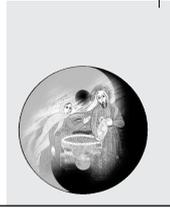
Anonymous (male, baptized 2010)

- I first knew about the Catholic religion when I was in kindergarten. I studied in the Precious Blood Kindergarten, which is a Catholic kindergarten in Hong Kong. I listened to bible stories and sermons. And I learned how to pray. But after I graduated from the kindergarten, I did not continue to believe in God. Until I reached Form 4 (tenth grade), a friend of mine invited me to join the Church. I also realized that I have many friends and classmates who are Christians. So, I decided to go to the Parish of Star of the Sea, which is close to my residence. At first, I did not know what I should do in the catechumenate class, or even why I was there. I later understood that one has to be baptized in order to become a Catholic. I eventually decided to go back to God. This is a chance given by God and I should not miss it!

Karen (female, 17-year old, baptized 2011)

- It is grace that I was baptized with the support of my family. I remembered the time when I was still a student. Some friends in the school invited me to join the activities in the church. I had actually been to the church for a few times. However, my family reacted vigorously. From then onwards, I was afraid to mention anything about religion in the family. Yet God did not abandon me. In times of distress I found prayer very relaxing. With the invitation of my friend, or better to say, under the guidance of God, I had another chance to know more about Him. And I became the daughter of God through baptism on April 3rd 2010.

Anonymous (female, baptized 2010)



The Poor are Evangelizing Us!

Fr. Patrick Villasanta SDB

The FIN Provincial Chapter of 2010 decided to launch a new Salesian presence at the Southville 7 Calauan, Philippines. This is a resettlement site of more than 6000 families who came from various slums of Manila and a big bulk of informal settlers along the River Pasig. The place is projected to reach a population of 10,000 families or 50,000 to 80,000 relocatees at the end of the year 2011. The people really suffer hunger and thirst and a loss of hope for the future because of few job opportunities within the area and neighboring towns. This, indeed, is a 'social volcano' where crimes, vice and a host of social issues and concerns can move stealthily, if without proper education and evangelization programs. Here, it is not easy to preach spiritual matters when these people clamor for their basic needs (electricity, potable water, daily income, etc.). In such a context, we utilized a Socio-Pastoral Program as an initial proclamation of Jesus to our people.

As part of our socio-pastoral care for the people, we have devised livelihood programs that may bring about work, food at table and most especially foster their 'dignity' yet founded on human & spiritual values and integrated with our Salesian culture and spirituality. We also find the opportune moment to intersperse their income generating activities with human and spiritual formation as well as Salesian educational and spiritual values.

But these poor people are also witnesses to us of their a strong sense of God in the daily events and undertakings in life. They have so much faith in God. I believe they experience God in a wonderful way. We are amazed listening to their religious experiences. Although the majority of these people are Catholics, we have also a few Protestants, Buddhists, Muslims and followers of other religions in our community.

Faith-sharing based on the Basic Ecclesial Community (B.E.C.) spiritual program has been started with some families. Bible Study and inspiration talks have also been introduced as stepping-stones to a progress and deepening of the journey of faith of our people.



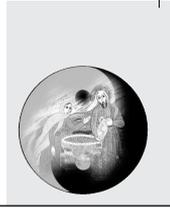


The Cost of her Christian Faith

Sr. Maria Yawasang Lakana FMA

Our teacher Saudi describes her conversion as a painful but important step in her life. she was Buddhist. She came to our school as a student of the dressmaking course about 12 years ago. As she came in contact with the sisters she began to see that their daily life is given to the poor with joy and sacrifice. This made her to ask why. Little by little she understood that their secret was a person: Jesus. Gradually the desire to know Jesus grew deep within her. Then she asked to become a catechumen and after 3 years of catechumenate she was baptized. She made her journey to Christianity with great difficulties and much suffering. It was not easy for her to abandon Buddhism which, traditionally, is the faith of her ancestors and of her parents. As a good daughter she is expected to respect, obey, and continue within this religion. From the first moment she decided to become a Christian she found herself against the whole village and her family, who accused her of being an ungrateful daughter because he had decided to become a Christian. For this reason she got ill and the disease was seen as a sign that her decision was not welcomed because she had betrayed the spirit of the ancestors. So she prayed and asked God to enlighten her what to do. Finally with firm determination and willpower she decided to formally request at the Pagoda, in front of her family, to be allowed to leave Buddhism and embrace Christianity. It was not an easy decision but she decided to place herself in the hands of God who had become for her like an irreplaceable friend. From that moment on, she completely recovered. She is now a teacher and a catechist. She bears witness and is known to all that Jesus has forever changed her life.





Our Martyrs' Heroism Attracts

Fr. Daniel Masaharu Torigoe SDB

I interviewed a boy who goes to a public high school. He was just baptized at the Easter Vigil on April 23rd of this year (2011) at Yamato Parish, where he went through the catechumenate program. Here is the story of his faith journey:

"I didn't like atheism. Let me explain my own experience. Once I went to a famous Buddhist shrine with my friends. They really wanted to go to fortune tellers, but they didn't even pay attention to the statue of Buddha himself, who is 'the owner of the shrine'. I was shocked. My friends are really atheists, and I didn't like that kind of attitude. Since then, I wanted to have a faith.

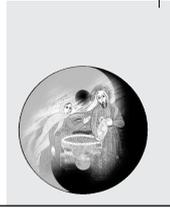
At first, I studied Shintoism, which didn't impress me at all. And then I moved on to Buddhism, and to other Asian religions, which didn't interest me either. Then, I shifted my attention to Islam. I have to say that I found Muslims to be more tolerant than those who have different philosophies from theirs! And I think that the reason is the fact that they were nomadic, that they have constantly encountered different tribes and cultures. But I didn't feel so comfortable with it as well. So I continued to searching for a religion that could satisfy me, until I encountered Christianity.

It all started when I finally I decided to make a phone call to the parish. Then, beginning last summer, I went through the catechumenate program because I found Christianity, especially Catholicism, acceptable. One thing that continues to strike me is the lives of the Japanese martyrs, such as Takayama Ukon and Hosokawa Garasha. Their example really influenced my decision to be baptized in the Catholic Church. When I think of them I say to myself: 'it must have been much easier for them to abandon their Christian faith. But for them, that option was totally unac-

ceptable so they tried to be faithful to the Lord. They chose Christ and sacrificed their own lives for their faith!”.

The fact that the Japanese martyrs centuries ago still inspire young people today in the 21st century is a very strong message to us.





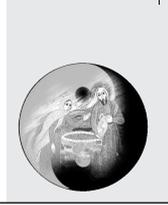
Faith Lived through Charity

Br. Carlo Bacalla SDB

Theresa, 18 years old, is an active member of our youth center. She animates a group and gives Christian formation to her members. She grew up practically in a Christian community where 95 percent are Catholics. Her parents and relatives were baptized in the Catholic church. As a child she frequented the youth center where she attended Sunday catechism and participated in its activities. She regularly participated in the activities of the youth center. Every evening she was attending the youth group meetings and prayed the rosary daily. When she finished her secondary school she narrated to me that while growing up in that Christian environment she learned that she must put her faith into practice by acts of charity. So she decided to start at home by doing errands like bringing medicines to her parents' customers. She said she started doing it when she was six years old.







Stories of Hong Kong Neophytes

Fr. Lanfranco M. Fedrigotti SDB

We have invited our neophytes in Honk Kong to share why and how they began the journey that led them to baptism. Below are their stories.

- I had the habit of attending church activities in the past, but I was not consistent, due to various reasons. Thanks to the recommendation of my friend, I applied for the enrolment of my daughter in St. Anthony's School and I got to know St. Anthony's Church last year. My friend also suggested to me to attend Fr. Joseph Lee's Tuesday night class. There I received an entirely different understanding about God which made me feel so satisfied, not only in my thoughts, but also in my heart. I enjoy very much attending that class with my husband, even though he is not Christian. The time we are together listening to Father Lee is a fantastic moment. God leads my husband and me to Fr. Lee's class to share and to study God in St. Anthony's Church. Thanks be to God for giving us such a great opportunity. With God in my heart, I become stronger and more grateful.

Kam Nga Mei (female, baptized 2010)

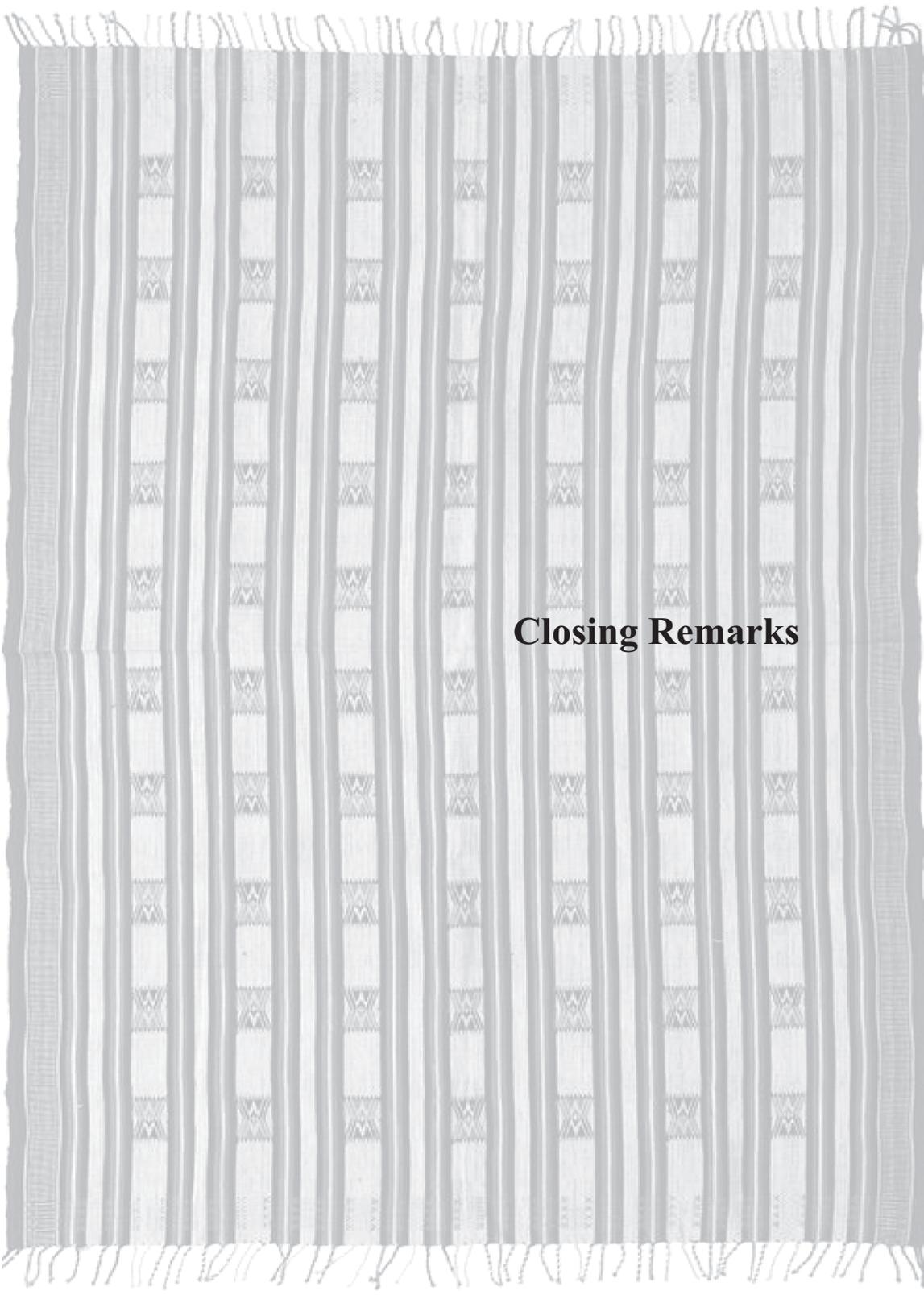
- I feel very fortunate to be baptized together with my two-year old daughter and my one-year old son. I feel that our Lord will always be with us and guide us through a righteous path. I have been benefited also from the Bible study and the Tuesday group discussions. Listening to our sisters and brothers helped me to understand the Bible and the true way of being a Catholic.

Chan Kit Ming (female, baptized 2010)



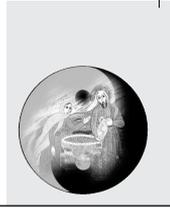
- The Catholic faith is not something new to me, for almost 14 years I had my education at a Catholic institution. However, it took me a long time to decide to be baptized. After so many excuses and self justifications, the attraction of getting baptized became undeniably strong. Easter this year has become a milestone in my personal spiritual life. I might not have made big leaps or huge changes in my daily life after Baptism. But I clearly remember how I reacted when my sons did something I disapproved. Instead of getting angry and scolding them, now I have learned to be more patient. I used to worry about a lot of things. Now I am at ease, compassionate, able to love and care. I believe these small things are the fruits of the Lord Jesus' grace and love. I am truly grateful that these have enriched my life.

Sam Wan Cheung (female, baptized 2009)



Closing Remarks





Three Words to Remember this Meeting

Sr. Alaíde Deretti FMA

I would just like to say 'Thank You' in three words as a remembrance of our meeting:

1. Return to Jesus of Nazareth the Son of the Living God

That His Spirit continue to work in us to make us new creatures every day.

The Person of Jesus: attitudes, actions, style of meeting all people and above all the marginalized becomes for us:

- constant journey of conversion, of spiritual growth
- criteria for discernment of our actions and works

Jesus is life, truth and way.

2. Community Witness

To be new missionary communities. This attracts because it welcomes all, and are expressions of God's love for all.

Communities in dialogue build bridges among various, social/cultural groups of different faiths and sensibilities. No one is excluded!

It Proposes, whispers Jesus and His Kingdom, and promotes the dignity of each person, the image of God.

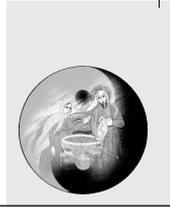
3. Integral educative passion in every mission and activity

Education in dialogue and towards dialogue, *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Promoting the best in each person and to propose to be honest citizens to those who are called to be true Christians.

Each one of us, as persons and as communities, is the initial proclamation of Jesus.

Thanks for your life given to Christ for the salvation of all!





A Renewed Commitment to Initial Proclamation

Fr. Václav Klement SDB

I would like to conclude this Study Days by recalling together with you the seven emerging lines of action shared by the East Asia Salesian participants, in order to be more committed to the initial proclamation of Christ in our Provinces:

1. We make **conscious efforts to stir up the desire to know the person of Jesus**. We need to develop personal capabilities (linguistic, information technology, good knowledge of cultures, religions and socio-political) and prepare oneself through immersion.
2. To **promote proper understanding of the life and nature of the mission**. A missiological formation should be part of the programs of initial formation.
3. To strengthen the role of the **Delegate for Missionary Animation** in the Provinces. Missionary animation in the Provinces is done in two dimensions, “ad gentes” and “inter gentes”; we would like to give special importance to “inter gentes”.
4. Awareness is to be given to individuals as well as the communities the **need to live a life of Christian witness to Christ** so as to proclaim Christ to others. (Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 22).
5. To **empower lay members of the Salesian Family** (Salesian Co-operators, Past Pupils) and youth (Volunteers, SYM members, Animators) so that they too become agents of the initial proclamation.
6. To **make a deeper commitment initial proclamation of Christ in our traditional settings** (schools, oratories, youth and vocational training centres, social works) and also reach out to the **new frontiers** of our ministry to the youth.

Our gratitude to the two new Thai Provincials Fr. Paul Prasert Somngan SDB and Sr. Anna Maria FMA and all Thai confreres who prepared and cared for us during these Study Days always with the typical hospitality and smiles. Thanks to the Social Communication Center of Bangkok headed by Br. Chitti who made available to us many useful materials on 3 DVDs which will be given to you today.

During these past five days we have also shared some important points for the missionary animation in the SDB Provinces of East Asia:

1. Living in Asia is a grace and invitation to share our faith in Jesus Christ especially with many non Christian youth, who have also the right to meet personally our Lord and Savior. In this context the theme of the 2012 Salesian Mission Day 'Telling the story of Jesus' (taken from the First Asian Missionary Congress in Chiang Mai, 2006) is a great opportunity both for our formation and youth ministry in next months. Please, take advantage to be (not only by talking) better storytellers of Jesus!
2. At the moment each EAO Province is developing its own model of Missionary Animation. There are experiences of international volunteer groups, missionary newsletter, the Cagliero11 is translated and used in the local communities, missionary formation during the different stages of initial formation, prayers for the missions and promotion of missionary vocation *ad gentes* to other regions of the Congregation. Let us network and share materials!
3. In order to effectively stir up the missionary spirit of our Salesian confreres, the regular presence and reporting to the Provincial Council and Rectors meeting twice a year seems be very important.
4. To live in our fast changing globalized world, as true disciples and missionaries of Jesus, we need more and more a solid missionary formation. I'm deeply convinced that it is very important to form the missionary mind and heart of our confreres in order to be effective 'signs and bearers of God's love' to the young people today.

With an assurance of my prayers for each one of you!

The Study Days in the Light of the Word of God

*Every session opened with a biblical reflection
by Sr. Maria Ko Ha Fong FMA**

* She studied education in Turin and theology in Germany in Münster. She holds a doctorate in Biblical Theology. She is a lecturer in sacred scripture at the “Auxilium” Pontifical Faculty of the Science of Education in Rome and at the Holy Spirit Seminary of Hong Kong.





1. Jesus with Nicodemus

“Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews” (3:1): This is how John introduces him solemnly, stating his name, his religious affiliation and his social status. We see here a man of authority and of good reputation, a ruler of the Jews, which means a member of the Sanhedrin, which, for us today, is equivalent to being a member of the parliament. He was a learned man, a *“teacher of Israel”*, as Jesus himself would say during his dialogue with him. Therefore, Nicodemus was a qualified interpreter of the law. All these prerogatives show him as a political and spiritual guide of the people, a perfect representative of Judaism, an official exponent of Jewish orthodoxy and tradition.

With self-assurance, Nicodemus comes to Jesus. He starts the conversation by speaking in first person plural, very much aware of his responsibility and duty: *“Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you are doing unless God is with him.”* (3:2). He affirms to have understood the origin and the identity of Jesus. He thinks himself capable of a dialogue with Jesus, as with a colleague. As a learned man, he believes himself capable of interpreting and of correctly appraising the signs that Jesus does: he must be a man sent by God, equipped with valid credentials. From Jesus’ actions, he goes back to His identity, from the effect to the cause: a reasoning that doesn’t provoke contradiction and is in perfect conformity with the canons handed down by the pharisaic school. The mystery of Jesus would be totally there, logically reduced to a justified case, confined in a preset frame. For Nicodemus, Jesus is not *the teacher*, but *a teacher* worthy of being so. Nicodemus is a sincere and good person, but who is very much bound to his social status and his rigid intellectualism. He is an “admirer” of Jesus, but is not willing “to follow him” and to become his disciple; at least he was not when he came to visit Jesus, hidden by the darkness of the night.

The dialogue during this meeting is the first discourse of Jesus’ public ministry. Therefore it is loaded with a singular importance in the Gospel of John. In the dialogue, it is Nicodemus who says the first word, but it is Jesus who leads its unfolding. In fact, after the first affirmation, Nicodemus’



speech becomes shorter and with less security as the dialogue progresses, until he arrives at total silence; while the words of Jesus, systematically introduced by the solemn expression: “*Amen, amen, I say to you*”, become longer and stronger.

Already in the first expression, Jesus puts in discussion Nicodemus’ security and upsets his reasoning. He speaks to him of the necessity “to be born from above”, of “being born of the Spirit”, and he doesn’t understand these. It is immediately seen that the dialogue proceeds on two parallel lines that do not meet. Jesus speaks on the spiritual level; on the contrary, Nicodemus remains on the physical, earthly, immediate. “*How can a person once grown old be born again? Surely he cannot re-enter his mother’s womb and be born again, can he?*” With these questions Nicodemus reveals himself as truly “old”, incapable of opening himself to the new, to think and to live with flexibility and freedom. His reasoning is fixed on what has already happened, on what is already known and, therefore, on something that is under control. Instead, Jesus invites him to look ahead, to take a leap, in the unknown. While Jesus exhorts him to *enter the Kingdom of God*”, he ponders on the problem of repeating the past, that of “*entering the mother’s womb*”; while Jesus indicates to him the way of being born again, he thinks about the absurdity of being born as an old person.

However, Jesus does not content himself with only bridging the distance. He leads his interlocutor to make the further step that would free him from his closed-mindedness and from the darkness that is symbolised by the maternal womb and, therefore, to the physical origin of man, in order to take a leap towards the light, absolutely new and transcendent, that is, the Kingdom of God that Israel has always waited for.

This new way of being born, and therefore of being and of living, contains something that will remain a mystery for human logic and unreachable by human means. It is the work of the Spirit. Man is born from above, that is by the mysterious power of the Spirit. He participates in the freedom of the Spirit and, without separating himself from his physical and sensible nature; he enters into a sphere that transcends the flesh. He acquires a new ability to see, a new criterion for judging and a new way of acting. The



Spirit transforms him and makes him similar to the Spirit.

Nicodemus pretends to know Jesus, but in reality he only knows some signs. He has in his hands a few data whose deep and complete meaning he doesn't grasp. He must be born again, from above, of the Spirit; he must be transformed by the Spirit so that he may understand the mind of Jesus and believe him. This birth is not fruit of human effort, as what he may think as a Pharisee; rather it is a free and gratuitous gift from above.

Did Nicodemus take this leap? The evangelist does not want to give us a reassuring response. The conclusion of the dialogue remains open. Conversion does not have instant effects. Nicodemus finds it difficult to understand the full sense of Jesus' discourse, although he is strongly attracted by its newness and depth. In the end he still shows the perplexity of any man, of a strict and traditional Pharisee: "*How can this happen?*" The question still reveals the pretence of reducing mystery to a doctrine that can be demonstrated and verified. And Jesus answers him with another question: "*You are the teacher of Israel and you do not understand this?*"

The story's conclusion must be deduced from the ulterior development of the story. This Pharisee who was attracted by the person of Jesus, will courageously defend him against the whole Sanhedrin (*Jn 7,48-52*); after the death of Jesus, Nicodemus will solemnly honour his body with precious ointments and, together with Joseph of Arimathea, will provide a worthy burial to this esteemed Teacher (*Jn 19,39*).

From an encounter "at night" Nicodemus slowly goes towards the light, as Jesus says "whoever lives the truth comes to the light" (*Jn 3:21*). Nicodemus is the paradigm of a believer whose faith progressively emerges from the shadows of ambiguity and of fear in order to become mature and capable of public witnessing.

2. Jesus with the Samaritan woman

Under the scorching heat of the midday sun, Jesus, tired and thirsty, sits beside a well (*Jn 4:5-42*): it is an evocative image. In every culture, the well

is something that has a strong link with life. It protects the fresh water that gushes forth from the heart of the earth. It speaks of a gift that is humble, free and generous. It evokes the effort of drilling and of drawing. It suggests a tranquillity that is present in the mysterious depth. The well, a vital knot in any community, is also a place of encounter, the place where lives meet, where water is asked and is given, where unexpected interpersonal relationships are forged, where strangers become friends. The well is a place that is particularly important to the woman. While for men, the public plaza and the city gate are the typical places of coming together, for women, it is the well. The well offers them the possibility of social life, of exchanging news and experiences, of participation and of solidarity, of sharing the little events of everyday life: joys, sorrows, problems, worries, desires, dreams, curiosities. The well offers a free space for connecting the private with the public, personal and community life, work and leisure. In the Old Testament we find the figure of different women at the well and different encounters with the well as setting: between the servants of Abraham and Rebecca (*Gen 24,11-14*), between Jacob and Rachel (*Gen 29:9-11*), between Moses and the daughters of Jethro, priest of Midian (*Ex 2,15-22*) etc.

Here we find Jesus seated by the well, ready for an encounter that will prove to be transforming. A woman arrives with her jar to fetch water. It is Jesus who takes the initiative of the dialogue. He makes her a request: *"Give me a drink"*, something that is very simple and obvious in a normal situation, but which could sound provoking in the context of the old feud between Jews and Samaritans. Then we can understand the woman's silly and disdainful reaction: *"How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?"*

Jesus doesn't mind the offensive irony. Jesus takes the courtesy denied him as an opening for a dialogue that dispels the hatred among the two people and widens the woman's narrow horizon: *"If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."* Jesus implies an astonishing overturn of the situation. The woman, however, has difficulty in understanding. How can this unknown man give her water when he doesn't even have the means of drawing from the well? How can he dare to pre-

tend, promising her living water, of being greater than the patriarchs who had dug this well? Even if she has not as yet overcome her doubts about this “Jew”, nevertheless the woman’s tone becomes lighter. She calls him with more respect: “Sir” and ends by asking him to “*give me this water*”, thus inverting their roles.

But the woman’s astonishment is still to increase. Jesus tells her: “*Go call your husband and come back*”. There is an unexpected turn in the dialogue; the order is direct, explicit and precise. In a totally unexpected way the woman feels the need to go to the depths of her life. Her attempt to extricate herself from this embarrassing situation by saying that she doesn’t have a husband sounds trite. She is forced to enter within herself and to be aware of the truth without escaping and without defending herself.

God loves to reveal Himself by revealing man to himself. When God breaks through in one’s life and penetrates the heart, man cannot but feel the sentiments of the psalmist that confesses: “*Lord, you have probed me, you know me ... where can I hide from your spirit, from your presence, where can I flee?*” (*Psalm 139*). It is from the same state of the soul that the Samaritan woman exclaims with surprise: “*Sir, I can see that you are a prophet.*”

In the journey of faith, the deepest discovery of oneself and the truest knowledge of God go together. In fact all of man’s experience of God could be summed up in the two-fold question: Who are you? Who am I? Even Saint Augustine prayed thus: “that I might know you and that I might know myself”.

Under the guidance of Jesus the woman discovers herself. She also gradually discovers who is this mysterious man that converses with her: a Jew that goes beyond nationalistic barriers, one that is perhaps greater than the patriarch Jacob, one who wants to give her something precious, one who knows how to search the heart, a prophet. But the discovery does not end there. There is still something greater in this man seated at the well.

As the dialogue continues, the woman asks Jesus about the real place of worship. For centuries this has been a controversial question that pitted

Jews against Samaritans. It is clear that the woman is still trapped inside the old and blind schemes, from which Jesus frees her now, by drawing her attention on the newness that happens in the present: *“Believe me, woman, the hour is coming, ... and is now here.”*

The woman finds it difficult to follow him. She doesn't find the right place to put herself, but oscillates between a fossilised past and a vague future. *“I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Anointed; when he comes, he will tell us everything.”* At this point, Jesus makes an explicit self-revelation that helps the woman to make the decisive leap. *“I am he, the one who is speaking with you.”* The Messiah is not only to be described through old dreams, nor to be expected in an unknown future. He just needs to be recognised because He is already present. But Jesus does not put himself as the final goal to which he wants to bring the woman; rather, it is the Father, who lovingly *“seeks”* his *“true worshippers”*. Jesus is the space that is open to the Father. Jesus wants to communicate this message to the Samaritan: You do not seek God, rather, God seeks you, knows you and loves you. You have been found by God.

At the end of the encounter the woman forgets her jar and runs to the city to proclaim Jesus to other people: That which was her only concern is now abandoned. And Jesus forgets his tiredness and his need to drink, because his real thirst, that of communicating salvation, has been quenched.

3. Jesus with the royal official

The account of the pagan royal official is similar to the account of the healing of the centurion's servant which we find in the Synoptic gospels (*Mt 8,5-13; Lk 7,1-10*), and more so to the account of the healing of the daughter of the Canaanite woman (*Mk 7,24-30; Mt 15,21-28*), wherein faith appears to be tested, like here, by a first apparent refusal on the part of Jesus.

The royal official arrives at faith because of his gravely ill son. He goes to Jesus urged by paternal love and desperation. It isn't a religious or moral

problem that moves him. His is a human problem. He would not have understood anything of that profound discourse of Jesus with Nicodemus, nor of his dramatic dialogue with the Samaritan woman. The royal official is a simple man, with problems of everyday life, with the problem of suffering.

He doesn't know well who Jesus was. He only heard about the miracles performed by him. Compared with the intellectual Nicodemus who knows to deduce the divine origin of Jesus from the miracles performed by Him, this man sees in Jesus a miracle worker who can heal the sick with his physical presence and with his touch. Because of this he asks Jesus to go from Cana to Capernaum before his son dies. For the royal official, Jesus represents the last recourse.

Jesus' response sounds quite strong: "*Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe.*" It is formulated in the plural, therefore, Jesus criticises not only this man, but the whole popular mentality that exalts him only as a miracle worker, that whole current that looks for the sensational and extraordinary.

"*You may go; your son will live.*" In the end Jesus gives the grace that has been asked, and gives him even more. "*The man believed what Jesus said to him*": It is John's typical expression to indicate authentic faith (cf. 2,22; 4,41-42; 17,20). The royal official makes a leap of faith: from believing in Jesus' power to make miracles to trusting his word and his person. Jesus is not only a miracle worker. He is the Word of the Father, creator and life-giving. His word is alive and life-giving. Whoever believes in him and in his word, believes that He alone has the word of eternal life (cf. 6,68). Like in the case of the Samaritan woman, her faith is born and grows in the measure that one grows in the knowledge of Christ.

As in the case of the Samaritan woman, here as well, faith shows its force of attraction. Faith tends to conquer others through one's witnessing. It is not only the royal official who arrives at the fullness of faith in Jesus, but "*his whole household came to believe.*"

There is an interesting detail that we must not overlook. Throughout the account the personage is called either by his profession: “the royal official” or simply “this man”. It is only when news is given of the healing of the son that he is presented as “the father”: *The father realised that just at that time Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live,” and he and his whole household came to believe.* The love of God experienced in the encounter with Jesus makes human love more authentic, true and intense.



“What Are You Looking For?” “Come and See”

Biblical Reflection on Jn 1, 35-42a



John's account of the vocation of the first disciples, reveals also the “first proclamation” of Jesus to mankind. The episode is very different in style, structure and context to the account transmitted by the synoptics. There we have the scene by the sea of Galilee; Jesus is passing, he stops and calls the brothers Peter and Andrew, James and John, saying to them: “Follow me! I will make you fishers of men” (Mk 1,17; cf Mt 4, 16-22; Lk 5,1-11) Here we have a different account: not near the lake of Galilee, but in some unspecified place, almost to suggest that the first meeting with Jesus can be repeated anywhere during the time of the church. The disciples are not called together, but in different moments, like a chain attraction.

1. Literary setting

The episode 1, 19-51 lies between the prologue (1,1-18) and the first revelation of Jesus to the world, which takes place in Cana (2,1-12). After an intense contemplation of the mystery of Jesus the author invites his readers to follow the historical facts of the works of God the Son made man that reach out to people, arousing in their hearts a faith response. The Eternal inserts himself in time, the Almighty takes up his dwelling in limited space. He passes from the transcendent sphere to the human scene, from ecstatic poetry to concrete human facts.

The passage is structured in a scheme of 4+3 days with the recurring refrain: “the day after” (1,29. 35.43) and “three days after” (2,1. These ‘days’ interest exegetes very much. Many link them to the seven days of creation. The scheme is:

First day (vv. 19-28): the negative witness of John the Baptist – he confesses that he is not the Messiah and affirms his function to prepare the way for the manifestation of the true Messiah.

Second day (vv. 43-51): the positive witness of the Baptist – he witnesses that Jesus is Son of God.

Third day (vv.35-42): following the witness of the Baptist, two of his disciples follow Jesus, and one of them Andrew leads his brother Peter to Jesus; Jesus gives him the name Cephas.

Fourth day (vv. 43-51): Jesus takes the initiative and calls Philip, who then brings Nathaniel to Jesus.

After three days (2,1): these days reach a climax in 2,1-12: beginning of the manifestation of the glory of Jesus through the first “sign” given during the wedding at Cana.

Our reflection will concentrate on the facts of the third day.

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples , and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed: “Look, here is the lamb of God!”. The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them: “What are you looking for?”. They said to him “Rabbi, where are you staying?”. said to them, “Come and see”. They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah”. He brought Simon to Jesus.



2. A chain attraction

The scene began with the disciples and John the Baptist. Jesus passes. The text doesn't say where he is going nor where he has come from, nor why he is passing that way. He simply passes and remains unnoticed until someone points him out: "Look!"

John the Baptist whose life was geared to "testify to the light, so that all might believe in him" (Jn 1,7), watched Jesus walk by and exclaimed confidently and with passion: "Look, here is the lamb of God!" The strength of his witness is all-embracing and his enthusiasm contagious. Two of his disciples set out to follow Jesus. One of them, Andrew, happy to have found the Messiah, calls his brother Simon and leads him to Jesus. The next day Philip, once he has become a disciple, brings in Nathaniel. So those attracted to follow Jesus create a chain and the circle of disciples Jesus' disciples widens.

Underlying this chain of attraction, narrated by the evangelist in a beautifully smooth style, there is the invisible and more fundamental attraction.

The Father attracts: For John, to go to Jesus is first and foremost the fruit of an attraction exercised by the Father. "No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me" (Jn 6,44), says Jesus. The Father's initiative is not always explicitly apparent but it is always there, real and often surprising.

Jesus attracts everyone to himself: The Father who no one sees, reveals himself in Jesus and draws all his creatures to himself through Jesus, above all manifesting his tremendous love, the total gift of self on the cross. Jesus himself says: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (Jn 12,32). During his earthly life, Jesus' whole being, his words, his actions, all attracted and fascinated so many people who with sincere hearts, were open to God.¹ The witnesses and disciples, before drawing other people to Jesus, were first attracted to him themselves. They transmitted their attraction to others.



3. A chain motion

From John's first proclamation: "Look, here is the lamb of God", a series of movements take place, that at first sight seem only external: follow, seek, listen, speak, see, find, remain, however, they also describe much more intense and deep interior movements. Body, senses, heart and intelligence: the whole person is involved. Andrew's affirmation at the end is a confession of faith and at the same time the first proclamation to his brother: "We have found the Messiah!". It is a point of arrival and a new departure. In following Christ there is a receiving and a giving, a seeking and finding, a coming and going, a togetherness of words and looks, of thoughts and convictions, of love and passion.

As we cannot meditate on the whole passage, we shall focus our attention on Jesus' words: "What are you looking for?", "Come and see!". These are the first words of Jesus in the Gospel of John and represent a sort of first proclamation made by Jesus himself. "Come and you will see!" is also the word proposed in the 2011 Strenna to the whole Salesian Family.

4. What are you looking for?

Aware of the hesitant steps behind him, Jesus deliberately "**turned and saw them**". It is he who takes the initiative, he turns round to welcome and increase the desire of those who follow him. He turns round to urge them to take the leap of faith in him.

Ancient Israel had an ardent desire that the Lord would turn and show his face. The psalmist manifests this explicitly when he prays: "Turn, O lord, how long? Have compassion on your servants!" (Ps 90,13). Now Jesus turns to his two future disciples with a question: "What are you looking for? It's a hard question that makes them clarify their deeper motivations: what are you looking for in following me? what do you seek in me, who am I for you?, what do you expect from me? The Congregation for Consecrated life, in the text: "*The service of authority and obedience*" that has as



leitmotiv the search for God, cites this question of Jesus to his first disciples and comments: “In this question we can read other radical questions between the lines: what is your heart seeking? what are you concerned about? are you seeking yourself or the Lord your God? Are you following your own desires or the desire of him who made your heart and wants it to be fulfilled as he knows it can be? Are you running behind passing things or are you seeking the One who does not pass? (n.4).

After many years of intimate communion with God and fervent service in the Church, Augustine asked himself these questions: “Who are you for me? ... Who am I for you?” (*Confessions* 1,5-6); “What do I love when I love my God?” (X,7). These are serious questions that make us go deep within ourselves. “Return to your heart”, exhorts Augustine, there you will see the image you have made of God” (*Homily XVII on John*, 10).

A fact that strikes us spontaneously when we read the Gospels attentively is that Jesus appears to be greatly sought after. Many people look for him, individuals and groups, for various and more or less intense reasons. They seek him all the time, in all kinds of situations and places throughout his life. At his birth he was sought out by the magi who had come far to adore him, by the shepherds invited by heavenly messengers, by Herod who wanted to kill him. As an adolescent in Jerusalem his parents sought him anxiously, fearing him lost in the confusion of the crowds of pilgrims. During his public ministry he was sought by his enthralled disciples, by his worried relatives, by the suffering who needed his help and by his adversaries who wanted to find fault with him. Toward the end of his life he was sought by the priests and scribes who wanted to eliminate him, by Judas to betray him, by the soldiers to capture him. Even after his death friends and enemies sought him at the tomb.

Did Jesus let them find him? Not always. To those who seek him for their own purposes, Jesus reacts with a clear refusal. When the disciples, faced with the hassle of the inhabitants of Capernaum, tell Jesus: “Everyone is searching for you”, Jesus ironically responds: “Let us go to the neighbouring towns so that I may proclaim the message there also, for



that is what I came out to do” (Mk 1,36). Jesus avoids every effort to cling to him, he refuses those who try to possess him, to make him fit into their mind set. He opposes those who want to restrict the universal horizons of his mission, reducing him to a cheap healer, a country magician.

In the same way he responds with cutting words to the crowd who are looking for him after the miracle of the multiplication of bread: “you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves (Jn 6,26). Jesus unmasks their searching for him for their own selfish, small-minded reasons. He knows that the crowd does not really seek him but are out for all they can get from him.

Sometimes Jesus frustrates the immediate expectations of those who seek him, not in a final way but so as to open them up, to purify and transform them. He lets them find him, but elsewhere, on another level, in another way. “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Lk 2,49). With this question to his parents, Jesus recognises the sincerity of their searching for him, he accepts and brings them to another level. He likens their search for him to his continually seeking the will of the Father. He unites them in this tension toward the same goal.

Often Jesus responds with a tremendous surprise gift, an answer that goes way beyond the request. He doesn’t only “fulfil” expectations, he goes beyond, he doesn’t just satisfy the search for him but transcends it, he lets us find him in an original way, beyond anything we can think of, greater and more beautiful than man dares to dream. Climbing a tree, Zaccheus “was trying to see Jesus”, but Jesus gives him the great surprise of going to his house. In reality it is not Zaccheus who is seeking Jesus but Jesus who is looking for Zaccheus, because “ the Son of Man came to seek out and save the lost”. (Lk19,10). The woman with a haemorrhage who timidly and secretly tried to touch Jesus’ garment, received healing and public praise.

Toward the end of the Gospel we find Jesus posing the same question. He is facing Mary Magdalene in front of the empty tomb: “Why are you

weeping?” “Whom are you looking for? (Jn 20,13). Mary was looking for his dead body, instead she finds he is alive! From the beginning to the end the questions “What are you seeking and who are you seeking” embrace the whole Gospel.

5. Come and you will see

When the disciples ask: “Rabbi, where are you staying? ”Jesus answers with an invitation “Come”, and a promise: “You will see”. To become a disciple, it is not enough to feel admiration, nor to express desire, nor make your own research, nor rely on the witness of others; you must meet Jesus, have a personal experience of him. The first proclamation of Jesus was not hasty. He did not force people to accept because they felt drawn to him, nor was he content with superficial devotion. He did not hand over a doctrine to be understood or precepts to observe, but called for a personal relationship with him. The “Come” to Jesus and “See him” are expressions that for John mean faith and communion in love. It is a “seeing” that discovers ultimate reality, the obvious centre, the original source, the hidden divine presence that is the foundation of all that is. Jesus invites us to an intense experience of himself, to listen to him, contemplate him, dialogue with him, let him love us and teach us, lead us gradually into his mystery, to become one with his heart and mind, until we reach what St. Paul says: “we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2,16), “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2,5).

The first proclamation made by Jesus inspires our first proclamation, as John Paul II wrote: “The first proclamation has a central role that cannot be substituted, because it introduces us into the mystery of God’s love, which calls us in Christ, to form a personal relationship with God” (*Ad gentes* 13) and “opens the way to conversion” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 44).

The two disciples agree to begin this process and John concludes the first meeting with the words: “**they came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day**”. Here we have an interesting change of perspective: from the place where Jesus stays to the

place where the disciples stay. They wanted to know where Jesus was staying now Jesus himself becomes their dwelling place. The “Come and see” for Jesus, is not an external movement but an inner dynamism, a remaining in him in communion of life and love. Later, Jesus exhorts: “Abide in me as I abide in you” (Jn15,4-5), and promises: “Whoever serves me must follow me, and wherever I am, there will my servant be also”(Jn 12,26); “I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also” (Jn 14,3).

There is still another point to underline. “To see Jesus” means also “to see the Father (Jn 12,45; 15,18), the one who remains in Jesus, remains in the Father, because he, the Son dwells close to the Father’s heart (Jn1,18).

This remaining with Jesus and in Jesus, becomes for the disciples an inexhaustible inner resource for their life and mission. Remaining constantly in him like the branches on the vine and letting ourselves be penetrated always more intimately and deeply by him, the disciples life Those who abide in me and I in them, bear much fruit (Jn15,4-5).

The evangelist does not tell us what the disciples actually saw, he reports the dialogue they had with Jesus once they had gone after him and then the result of the meeting: “We have found the Messiah!”. The “Rabbi” at the beginning of the episode has become the “Messiah”, seen, experienced, loved, and now he must be proclaimed to others.

In this short and very full episode, the evangelist has traced in a wonderful way the journey of the disciple of Jesus, from the initial attraction to seeking, from timidly following Jesus to remaining with him. The whole journey is guided by Jesus. It is he who attracts, dialogues, helps and clarifies motivations, invites into an experience, to enter into intimate communion with him.

At the end John notes: “ It was about four o’clock in the afternoon (The Greek text says the tenth hour). Perhaps this is a personal remembrance. We tend to remember exactly the time of strong moments of love in our live. But the sentence can also have a symbolic meaning to indicate



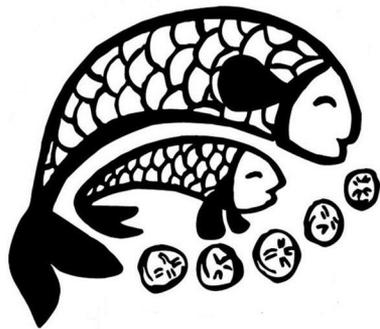
fulfilment (10 is a perfect number). In Hebrew terms, it is used to mark the end of the day. The two disciples reach the end of that day and begin a new one after their meeting with Jesus. Their life now has a new meaning, a new quality, a new vision and a new orientation guided by a new love.





How Many Loaves Do You Have? Go and See!

Biblical Reflection on Mark 6, 30-44



The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to

eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognised them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." But he answered, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "That would take more than two hundreds denarii! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?" "How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see." When they found out, they said, "Five – and two fish." Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

It should have been a tranquil, restful day spent in intimacy with the Teacher. The disciples had returned from the mission and had many adventures to recount, many experiences to share, many emotions to elaborate. Jesus listens to them attentively. He knows their tiredness and the effort these first time missionaries have sustained. He knows they need to renew their strength and so he invites them to go to a quiet place to spend some quiet time with him. But their lovely plans are suddenly upset. The people have seen their boat arriving near their resting place and they have rushed to reach them. Mark helps us to imagine the race between the boat on the lake and the people on foot along the shore. Eventually the people win because when Jesus arrives at the resting place, it is already crowded with people.

How does Jesus react? Mark's description is concise and dense with meaning. "He saw...he had compassion..." Jesus' glance embraces the agitated crowd desirous of meeting him. The spectacle moves His Good Shepherd's heart. He sees faces that are sincere and good, that are uncertain and lost, that are anxious and restless, that are full of dreams and desires. He sees faces that ask questions, faces that are marked by suffering and the burdens of daily life, faces that are searching and await enlightenment, guidance, and comfort. He seems to find himself before a flock that is without a shepherd and feels deep compassion for them. (The Greek word *esplanchnisthê* used by Mark can be translated with "It wrung his gut".) Jesus sees, feels moved, and begins "to teach them many things". Thus he goes from his glance to his heart and from his heart to action.

And the disciples? As Jesus is looking at the crowd with compassion, they are worried of the setting sun. While Jesus lets the people reach him, investing on them his time and energies, his heart and mind, his disciples are thinking about how to send them away. They take the initiative to propose something to Jesus while he is totally immersed in teaching the crowd. "This is a remote place and it already very late. Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." They know how to evaluate the situation well in regard to time for it is late, to place for it is remote, and to people for they are many. Thus they draw a conclusion and make a



proposal. It is a common sense proposal, logical, realistic, opportune, appropriate and convenient. It is easy to execute, foreseeing, and even wise. However, it conflicts with the logic and sentiments of Jesus. The disciples do not intend to take responsibility for the people. All should provide for themselves and see to themselves! They solicit Jesus 'to close the school' and dismiss the crowd.

Jesus does not comment on the apostles' suggestion. Instead, he invites them to think in another direction. Rather than distance themselves from the people's needs, why not try to ask themselves, 'What can we do to help them?' He gives them a clear mandate, **"You give them something to eat."**

He urges the apostles to leave their 'comfort zone', to go from a passive mind-set to active involvement, from negative inertia to industrious search, from the temptation to delegate to creative commitment, from the attitude of taking distance to a deeper immersion in history. Jesus stimulates them to use their head but even more, their heart. He wants all those who follow Him to share His own compassion for the people. They must have His tender, great heart, His strong and caring love. Paul will say, "The love of Christ moves us" (2 Cor 5,14).

He will experience that love is the powerful motor that calls all our human resources into action. We are dealing with the "fantasy of love" (Blessed John Paul II in *Novo Millennium Ineunte*, 31, 50), with the apostolic passion of Don Bosco's *Da Mihi Animas*, and with the "I entrust them to you" addressed to Mother Mazzarello.

Seeing the Teacher's insistence, the disciples make another suggestion. **"That would take more than two hundred denarii (half a year's wages for a normal worker)! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?"** They have formulated it as a hypothetical question because they know it is an unrealistic and impossible solution. They calculate the cost, make an estimate, and see the sum is difficult to meet. But even if they could pay it, where would they go to buy so much bread in a remote place at the end of the day? Stimulated by Jesus,



they have by now abandoned the initial idea of dismissing the crowd and have begun to use the imagination thinking in a more constructive way. They have the good will to help, but they are still in their perspective of common human sense.

Jesus, considering their two proposals, suggests a new one from a different perspective. **“How many loaves do you have? Go to see.”** He invites them to look into their own knapsacks, paying attention to the little they have with them. No escaping the problem, no delegation, no buying with money, the first thing to do is to examine their own resources better. They need to discover and gather all they already have in order to share it. Jesus does not ask them, ‘Do you have any bread?’ but **‘How many loaves do you have?’** He is sure they have something, however little it may be. A proverb says, ‘No one is so poor as to have nothing to give.’ **“Go to see.”** They need to search. They need to act. Those who search seriously, those who dig deeply, find something to offer. Sometimes we do not even know we possess something and we become aware of having it only at the moment we decide to share with others.

The five loaves and the two fish are very little, way out of proportion to the size of the crowd. However, poverty may be the material for a miracle. Passing through the Lord’s hands, sharing multiplies.

Accepting their humble contribution, Jesus asks the disciples to have the people sit in groups on the grass, so that the persons who at first seemed like sheep without a shepherd, now find themselves arranged for a banquet. They are the guests of Jesus and his followers. The account then proceeds from verbal communication to that of gestures and symbols. Jesus uses a series of gestures that are dense with meaning. **“Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people.”** In Jesus’ hands, the loaves donated by the disciples become the holy place in which human poverty encounters God’s infinite spaces. The fruit of the earth and of human labour, enabled by detachment and generous offering, now rise to heaven in Jesus, to God’s throne. It is pleasing to God and He blesses it.



At the end, Jesus returns the loaves and fish to the disciples. They had placed them in the Teacher's hands as their humble gift. Now they take them back, blessed and broken, to share them with the people. The loaves and fish have been multiplied to satisfy five thousand persons. The disciples have been transformed. At the beginning they appeared to be distant spectators who had little empathy, content with quick solutions that did not engage them. Now they are totally involved in Jesus' compassion for the people. They have become his industrious collaborators in working the miracle.





“Go Up and Join that Chariot!”

Biblical Reflection on Acts 8, 26-40



On the desert road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza, a man, seated on his chariot, was reading Sacred Scripture. He was not a Hebrew, but a eunuch who had come from Ethiopia, an area that bordered on the Roman empire. The

Spirit said to Philip: “Go up and join that chariot”. Then Philip approached. The meeting began with a question that showed interest, continued with them sitting beside each other with the Sacred Scripture between them, a dialogue developed, then catechesis and finally, it ended in baptism. We know the episode well. Luke recounts it in a lively manner in *Acts of the Apostles* (8,26-40). It is an example of “first evangelisation” in the early Church.

The angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, ‘Set out at noon and go along the road that leads from Jerusalem down to Gaza, the desert road.’ So he set off on his journey. Now an Ethiopian had been on pilgrimage to Jerusalem; he was a eunuch and an officer at the court of the kandake, or queen of Ethiopia; he was her chief treasurer. He was now on his way home; and as he sat in his chariot he was reading the prophet Isaiah. The Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go up and join that chariot.’ When Philip ran up, he heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ He replied, ‘How could I, unless I have someone to guide me?’ So he urged Philip to get in and sit by his side. Now the passage of Scripture he was reading was this: Like a lamb that is led to the slaughterhouse, like a sheep that is dumb in front of its shearers, he never opened his mouth. In his humiliation fair judgement was denied him, Who will ever talk about his descendants, since his life on earth has been cut short?

The eunuch addressed Philip and said, 'Tell me, is the prophet referring to himself or to someone else?'. Starting, therefore, with this text of scripture Philip proceeded to explain the good news of Jesus to him. Further along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is some water; is there anything to prevent my being baptised?' He ordered the chariot to stop, then Philip and the eunuch both went down into the water and he baptised him. But after they had come up out of the water again Philip was taken away by the Spirit of the Lord and the eunuch never saw him again but went on his way rejoicing.

1. Set out and go...

Our passage is to be found at a turning point in the general plan of the *Acts*. It seems as if Luke structured this second book, basing it on the programmatic words of the Risen Christ to his disciples before returning to his Father: "you will receive the power of the Holy Spirit which will come on you, and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judea and indeed to earth's remotest end» (*Acts* 1,8). One could look at the organisation of the Christian mission in three great stages. Linked to the movement in space there is the chronological progress and the spiritual growth of the Church under the guidance of the Spirit.

- Ch. 1-7: Set in Jerusalem, describe the preaching of the apostles and the consolidation of the first community, the ideal model of the Church.
- Ch. 8-12: The spread of the Gospel outside Jerusalem, in the other parts of Judea and Samaria.
- Ch. 13-28: The expansion of the Gospel outside Palestine, until it ideally reaches 'earth's remotest end', passing through Asia Minor, Greece and especially Rome, the centre of the empire.

At the beginning of Ch. 8 the situation seemed depressing. After the death of Stephen, hatred for the Christians did not end, rather "a bitter persecution started against the Church in Jerusalem, and everyone except the apostles scattered to the country districts of Judea and Samaria" (*Acts* 8,1).



But Luke discovers rays of light among the shadows and sees everything as part of God's mysterious plan. The 'dispersion' of the Christians really marks the beginning of the spread of the Gospel outside Jerusalem. In fact, "Once they had scattered, they went from place to place preaching the good news" (*Acts* 8,4) and so the number of Christian nuclei multiplied. The ardour of the Gospel pushed them towards new frontiers, not only the geographic ones, but especially those of the heart. And so we see Philip who begins his mission in Samaria.

Our story starts with an indication that everything begins with a divine initiative. "The angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, 'Set out at noon and go along the road that leads from Jerusalem down to Gaza, the desert road'" (*v.26*). It is the Lord who points out to Philip the road on which he will meet the future non Hebrew Christian. It is the Lord who directs the 'course' and the 'growth' of the Word of God (cf. *Acts* 6,7; 12,24; 13,49; 19,20) beyond Jerusalem in the whole world. The road seems desert, but it is, in reality, a launching pad.

The opening imperative is interesting: "Set out and go", we seem to hear the command of Jesus to a paralysed man (cf. *Mk* 2,11; *Mt* 9,6; *Lk* 5,24; *Jn* 5,8), or the word that Peter said to the crippled man at the Beautiful Gate (*Acts* 3,6). It is said to Philip the evangeliser too and, in him, to the whole Church "set out and go". It is an invitation to move from the position already reached, to cross the threshold and go beyond borders, to seek new lands for the Word of God, new peoples to be drawn to Christ. In the Old Testament, Israel usually thought that other peoples, in order to take part in the gift of salvation, had *to come* to Jerusalem, *to come* to the chosen people. In the prophet Isaiah we read: "It will happen in the final days that the mountain of Yahweh's house will rise higher than the mountains and will tower above the heights. Then all the nations will stream to it, many people will come to it and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths'" (*Is* 2,2-4). But in the revelation of the New Testament the situation changes. The source of life no longer comes from Zion or from the temple, but from the Son of God incarnate. He does not say 'come', indicating a place, but rather 'go' into the whole



world (cf. *Mt 28,19*). Jerusalem is no longer the place of concentration, rather, it has become a place of diffusion. It is no longer a question of coming to Jerusalem to obtain salvation, but rather of leaving Jerusalem to bring salvation to all. The Church is not an immobile custodian of the faith, but must ‘get up and go’, because, as Pope John Paul II said: “Faith is strengthened in giving it!” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 2) and Benedict XVI echoes him: love “by its nature, must be shared with others. Love grows through love” (*Deus Caritas Est*, 18).

2. The Spirit said to Philip: ‘Go up and join that chariot.’

Philip was not on the road to Gaza by chance. It was the Spirit who placed the divine plan in his person and in his actions. The Spirit said to Philip: “Go up and join that chariot”. It is an invitation, an urge to grasp the occasion, to profit from the favourable moment, not to lose the opportunity which may never return, to take the first step, to come close, to go to meet the other person without waiting for him to come. Apostolic passion urges one to go ahead, as Paul says: “the love of Christ urges us” (*2Cor 5,14*).

The Spirit tells Philip to go up to the chariot, but does not tell him who he will find in the chariot or what he is to do or say. The Spirit that ‘breaths where it will’ (*Jn 3,8*), that has “groans too deep for words” (*Rm 8,26*), does not dictate concrete commands to be executed, but stimulates human intelligence and creativity and enkindles human love. It acts in a surprising way and urges on towards unexpected goals. It does not like to dialogue with human persons within the narrowness of their schemes and desires, but launches them towards broad spaces, towards the heights of the divine plan.

The Spirit tells Philip to go towards the unknown, to face the new, to allow himself to be surprised with trust because it is the Lord who is working. The apostolic passion urges one to bring Christ to others with creativity and ardour, but does not lead evangelisers to attribute the success



to themselves, to their own competence and diligence, to the value of methods and strategies. Paul recognises this: “For what is Apollos and what is Paul? The servants through whom you came to believe and each has only what the Lord has given him. I did the planting, Apollos did the watering, but only God gave the growth” (*1Cor* 3,5-7). The Psalmist too states: “If the Lord does not build the house, in vain do the builders labour” (*Ps* 127,1), but the security of being called to collaborate with God, the awareness of being part of a big project, and of feeling oneself urged on by God’s passion lead us to say with joy: “With God we will do great things” (*Ps* 108,14).

3. Sitting on his chariot, he was reading the Scriptures

On the chariot was a man, an Ethiopian, and an eunuch as well. He was one of the human group that the orthodox Jewish teaching considered an outsider and excluded from salvation (cf. *Dt* 23,2). Yet he went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and he read the Sacred Scripture attentively. His effort was sincere and his openness of heart admirable, his search was attentive and yet he could not understand. The Scripture is open in his hands, it neither imposes itself nor opposes. The Word of God transcends barriers. In what language or what form was the Ethiopian reading the text of Isaiah? We cannot know. However that text in the hand of a foreigner and a pagan seems highly symbolic and filled with prophecy. It witnesses to the fact that the Bible is available to be understood by different cultures, that the Word of God willingly accepts being translated into different languages, transformed into different ways of human communication. This is a sign that God loves all and wants to speak to all men and women, without any distinction.

The Spirit does not work only in the evangeliser, but also in people of any sex, age, race or culture, making them open and disposed to the Gospel. When Philip approached the chariot he was amazed to see the Ethiopian reading Scripture and to find him so desirous and in a way already having begun to receive salvation. He recognised that he was not the



sower, but rather the reaper. In reality the Spirit had been working in both, facilitating their encounter. He urges on and precedes the evangeliser, supports his apostolic passion, and at the same time, he prepares the recipient for the announcement, nourishes his passion to search for truth and for fullness of life. Neither one nor the other can attribute the success of the encounter to himself, but recognises with wonder the provident love of God and the beauty of the work of the Spirit.

The Ethiopian, happy to have met someone who grasps his deep longing, invited Philip **“to get in and sit by his side”** (v.31). Philip, who was curious in the beginning and ran to catch up with the chariot, now draws close, sits beside a friend and talks with him, with frankness, admiration and cordiality about the things of God. The Word of God creates communion and harmony of heart. The passing on of the Gospel takes place, not through theoretic discussion or abstract speculation but rather through the experience of love, in mutual respect, in the simplicity of mutual sharing, in dialogue and friendship.

In the *Acts* Luke presents the first Christians as a community that lives daily life in simplicity, totally immersed in the people. Externally they are not distinguishable from the common people, but because of the integrity of their lives, they “were looked up to by everyone” (*Acts* 2,47; 4,33). They had a serene and cordial relationship with the people. Preaching to the crowds, especially to the pagans, generally aroused great enthusiasm. The experience of Christ had made them authentically human, optimistic, they loved everything and easily discovered the good, the beautiful and the true in the people they met. Luke often underlined the trust, the sincere mutual respect that existed between those who proclaimed the Gospel and the gentiles, who easily allowed themselves to be “cut to the heart” by the Word of God (*Acts* 2,37-41).

4. How can I understand if no one instructs me?

Scripture is not automatically understandable. It can appear obscure, as if covered by a veil (cf. 1Cor 3,14-16). The Ethiopian eunuch was not

lacking openness of heart, but he needed an explanation to enlighten his mind and set his heart on fire, like the one Jesus had given to the two disciples of Emmaus. And Philip offers it to him, not as a master of exegesis, but as someone who, from a faith perspective, suggests the right wavelength to tune in to the Christian message, as someone sharing his own passion. “A fire can only be lit by something that is, itself, on fire” (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 23). The brief dialogue between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch illustrates the Christian approach to Scripture perfectly.

The Gospel is not a doctrinal system to be believed, it is not a collection of moral prescriptions to be observed, rather it is good news that changes life. For this reason it is not to be transmitted through cold methods and detached techniques, but with human warmth, life witness and love. But, as Paul VI observed, life witness alone is not enough, “even the most beautiful witness will be powerless in the long run, if it is not illuminated, justified [...] explained by a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus. The Good News, proclaimed by life witness, must therefore, sooner or later, be proclaimed by the word of life. There is no true evangelisation if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom, the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, is not proclaimed” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 22).

Quoting the extract from Isaiah (53,7-8) Luke wanted to give the reader an example of a pre-baptismal proclamation that uses scripture as its starting point. What characterised the Christian proposal that then resulted in the sacrament is the good news about Jesus of Nazareth. The early Church proclaimed with courage and frankness (Acts 4, 29.31; 13,4) and as we see here, also with art. Philip began the dialogue with maieutic type of question: “Do you understand what you are reading?” and thus establishes an interactive relationship. This approach to people was very much used by Jesus too. For example, one can think of the questions: “What are you looking for?” (Jn 1,38); “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” (Lk 10,26) “Who is my mother and who are my brothers?” (Mk 3,33); “Why do you call me good?” (Mc 10,17); “Why are you afraid? Have you no faith yet?” (Mk 4,40); “Do you know what I have done to you?” (Jn 13,12); “Why are you crying?” (Jn 20,13)

The proclamation of the Gospel needs to be done with passion and beauty. It is a case of presenting the attraction of Jesus as people who are themselves fascinated. Apostolic passion urges the Church, at its beginnings as today, to incessantly search for ways and means to offer its great treasure with human warmth, with gentleness, and with the art of the heart.

5. He went on his way rejoicing

After his baptism the eunuch did not see Philip any more. He continued his journey, but he is no longer as he was before, he is interiorly transformed. This newness of heart permeates his whole person and is even visible from outside: he is full of joy.

Joy is a theme that penetrates all of Luke's work. The atmosphere of joy that permeated the Gospel continued in the early Church. In the narration of the *Acts* even during persecutions, the apostles are filled with joy, "glad to have had the honour of suffering humiliation for the sake of the name of Jesus" (*Acts* 5,41). At every stage of the spread of the Gospel, Luke always remarks on the joyful reaction, both of those who proclaim it and in those who receive it with sincere hearts. After having listened to the preaching of Paul "it made the gentiles very happy to hear this and they gave thanks to the Lord for his message" (13,48). Paul and Barnabas too, full of joy and emotion, enthusiastically told of the conversion of the pagans "this news was received with the greatest satisfaction by all the brothers" (15,3).

The Gospel is a proclamation of joy: the joy of human persons who receive the gift of salvation, the joy of God who gives it. To the joy of God's gratuitous giving, humans respond with the joy of sincere gratitude. It is not a question of a passing emotion, but a deep sentiment that involves and moves the whole person. Joy is always diffusive, contagious. "The one who has discovered Christ – said Benedict XVI to young people at the end of the World Youth Day on Cologne – must lead others to Him. One cannot keep a great joy for oneself. Preaching the Gospel, therefore, means sharing this immense joy with others". Paul confesses to the community of



Corinth: “We have no wish to lord it over your faith, but to work with you for your joy” (2Cor 1,24). John confides to his Christians: “We are declaring to you what we have seen and heard, so that you too may share our life. Our life is shared with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing this to you so that our joy may be complete” (1Jn 1,3).

Apostolic passion urges Christians to pass on to others the joy they have in their hearts, to give it freely as they in their turn received it freely (cf. Mt 10,8). The Ethiopian eunuch no longer sees Philip, but he continues on his way full of joy. The evangeliser does not establish a relationship of dependency. He can disappear, but the seed of the faith continues to develop, the fire lit continues to burn, the love of God continues to transform life and joy continues to sustain one on the journey.

Philip too felt full of joy, a “sweet and comforting” joy (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 80). This is the joy of seeing the pagan receive the Gospel, the joy of having won someone for the kingdom of Heaven. But Philip will be joyful above all because he himself has come a bit closer to the Kingdom of Heaven. He would have heard the story told by eye witnesses of this scene: when the disciples came back from their practical missionary training “filled with joy” because of the visible fruits and immediate success obtained, Jesus shared their joy, but at the same time revealed a motive for deeper joy to them: “do not rejoice because the spirits submit to you; rejoice instead that your names are written in heaven” (*Lk* 10, 20). The evangelising mission benefits not only the recipients of the mission, but in the first place the apostle.





Mary the “first Evangelised” and the “first Evangeliser”

Biblical Reflection on Mary



The Biblical presentation of Mary is for me, a Chinese, something similar to a painting on silk with the following typical characteristics: a few brush-strokes, plenty of white space, light colours, not totally defined contours, simple and unpretentious subjects, an atmosphere of sacred silence. The few brush-strokes fall harmoniously in appropriate points and spring out energies: thanks to them, even the white space becomes dense with meaning. The whole thing invites us to

launch ourselves towards infinity and to let ourselves be involved in the mystery.

The Gospel passages in which Mary appears are very few and in total Mary has spoken only six times. For twenty centuries, the Church contemplates this serene beauty; and it still succeeds to discover ever new meanings, new lights and new energies for its own journey. “*De Maria numquam satis*”, affirms St. Bernard. The contemplation of the few evangelical passages about Mary has never ended.

Let us concentrate our reflection on two of these few brush-strokes, in which the character of Mary as the “first Evangelised” – the first to receive the Good News of God’s plan of salvation to be realised in Jesus Christ and the “first Evangeliser” – the first to bring Jesus to the other.

1. From *Fiat* to *Magnificat*

While Mary crosses the crooked ways up the mountain, an interior itinerary of faith unfolds within her, going from the docile adhesion of the *fiat* to the joyful explosion of the *Magnificat*, from being visited by God to being a visit of God for others.

a. “*Mary went quickly*”

- A missionary journey

Mary has travelled a lot during her life, much more than the common Jewish women of her time: from Nazareth to Ain Karem and back to Nazareth, from Nazareth to Bethlehem, to Egypt and back to Nazareth, to Cana, to Jerusalem, etc.

From Galilee to Judea she covers the same distance that Jesus would later have to cover. Walking quickly up the mountain, Mary evokes the famous prophetic text, “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messengers announcing peace....” (Is 52, 7).

The care she takes in her journey towards Ain Karim, as well as the solicitude in the wedding of Cana, reveal the active, enterprising, creative and resolute style of Mary. Her going in a hurry is an image of the missionary Church that, soon after Pentecost, invested with the Holy Spirit, sets on her journey to spread the good news up to the extreme corners of the earth. Paul knows this hurry very well: “the love of Christ urges us” (2 Cor 5, 14).

- A journey from “*Seeing a sign*” and “*being a sign*”

Mary leaves from Nazareth and sets on her journey after a “sign” that the angel had given her, «Your cousin Elizabeth also, in her old age, has conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month” (Lk 1, 36). In the modest house of the Priest Zachariah, the aged Elizabeth waits for a son, given to her in a surprising grace. This is for Mary a proof of God’s power, for whom nothing is impossible (See: Lk 1, 37).

Mary's trust is strengthened by the "sign" God had offered to her, but in reality, she herself is a sign of God given to humanity, "a sign of hope and consolation" (*Lumen Gentium* 68). In fact, Mary signs the dawn that precedes the rising sun, signs the gushing in of salvation into history, signs the "fullness of time" (Gal 4, 4). While Isaac, the child of Sara, and John, the son of Elizabeth bring the message that God can do everything, the child of Mary is the God who can do everything, the all powerful God made a hidden and weak man.

In Mary's faith journey, there is a circular movement between discovering the sign of God in others and being the sign of God for others. It is a matter of a marvellous solidarity among the believers. The encounter between Mary and Elizabeth reveals it in the fullness of its beauty.

- A journey of the New Ark of the New Covenant

While going up the mountain, Mary feels that she is not alone. The Son of God is present, hidden in her. Luke describes this journey in a clear analogy with the transfer of the Ark of the Covenant towards Jerusalem, narrated in 2 Samuel 6, 2-11. The leaping of John in the maternal womb reminds us of David's joy before the arch and the words with which Elizabeth greets Mary reproduce the exclamation of the king, "How is it possible that the Ark of the Lord comes to me?" The greeting of the angel in Nazareth, "The Lord is with you", that Mary finds difficult to understand, now becomes a real experience and a deep conviction. Mary, Mother of the *God-with-us*, is now the ark of the new Covenant, the new abode of God, a new transparency of the divine presence among men, a new motive for everybody's joy

- A journey that unites contemplation and action

Mary does not look at the distances, at the eventual risks; she does not calculate the time or the fatigue. The ardour in her heart puts wings in her feet. She feels urged and sent by the Son within her. However, her walking is not just an external movement; it is a going, yet remaining in the Lord, a journey with him in her heart. It is her interior life that moves, directs and gives sense to her external actions; it is silence that makes the word mature.

An internal, lively activity corresponds to her external solicitude and work. “Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart” (*Lk* 2, 19.51). Luke has wanted to underline the reflexive and wise attitude of Mary before the mystery, by repeating this sentence twice.

The disciples of Jesus, particularly consecrated persons, must learn from Mary, a wise teacher, the secret of the vital unification between interiority and activity, between the “to be” and the “to do”, between “believing” and “working”, between “prayer” and “work”, between “memory” and “creativity”, between concentration “ and “diffusion of the Word of God; between keeping everything in the heart” and “walking in a hurry”, between “welcoming the Gift of God” and “making oneself a gift of God” for others.

b. “*Mary entered the house*”

With her walking along uncomfortable streets to reach the other in his own house, Mary inaugurates God’s style, the style of service, of loving care, of solidarity with people in need. The incarnate God becomes in her the God who enters the human fabric and permeates our daily life. Salvation acquires a domestic tonality. “Today I must enter your house”. “Today salvation has entered this house” (*Lk* 19, 5.9): what Jesus will later say to Zaccheus, is somehow an anticipated reality through Mary.

c. “*Mary encountered Elizabeth*”

Mary and Elizabeth are two women tending towards the future of their womb, two women who guard within themselves an ineffable mystery, a stupendous miracle. The awareness of being the object of God’s particular predilection unites them; the common mission of co-operating with God for a marvellous project arouses their enthusiasm and makes them to explode in a blessing and a song of praise; the experience of a prodigious maternity joins them in solidarity. Thus the two women are for one another places of their discovering God, motive to praise and thank him. In recognising each other as sign of God, their densely intuitive communication, permeate with respect for the mystery, turns into blessing, song and poetry.



The reciprocal confrontation of faith makes the reciprocal prophecy to flow, animated by the strength of the Spirit, and both of them become a sign of God's solidarity with humankind.

From *fiat* up to the *magnificat* becomes the exemplar itinerary of every Christian who fulfils his pilgrimage of faith from the initial adhesion to the project of God, towards the full rejoicing in the beauty of the project itself.

2. From *Fiat* to *Facite*

At Cana, Mary plays a prophetic role. The two words Mary pronounced at Cana "They have no wine" (*Jn* 2, 3) and "Do whatever he tells you" (*Jn* 2, 5), underline this dimension. Mary reads our human history to its very depth, can see unknown problems in it, picks up not yet verbalised groans, can see still nameless sufferings. She can see the essential knot of the jumble and presents it to her Son, the only one who can unbind it. Meanwhile, with a sure indication, she prepares the servants to welcome the divine help.

«Do whatever he tells you», these are among the few words pronounced by Mary in the Gospel, the only ones addressed to men, for which they are justifiably considered as the "commandment of the Virgin». It is also her last word recorded by the Gospel, just like a "spiritual will". After this, Mary will no longer speak; she has expressed the essential idea, opening the hearts to Jesus, who alone has "words of eternal life" (*Jn* 6, 68). In these words of Mary we perceive the echoes of the Sinaitic formula of the covenant. At the conclusion of the covenant the people promise, «Whatever Yahweh has said, we will do» (*Ex* 19, 8; 24, 3.7; *Dt* 5, 27). Mary personifies Israel obeying the covenant, not only, but she also is the one who induces no longer to the covenant, but to Jesus, from whom a new covenant begins as well as a new people. This appears even more clearly if we read these words of Mary as parallel with the last words of the Risen Lord in the Gospel of Matthew, «Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations (...) teach them to observe all the commands I gave you» (*Mt* 28, 19).



Therefore, Mary leads us to follow Jesus, to obey his word and to consider him as an absolute reference. Mary helps to form the new community of Jesus, indeed she helps Jesus to make his friends in the sense revealed by him: «You are my friends, if you do what I command you» (*Jn* 15, 14).

The “Do whatever he tells you” pronounced by Mary is not just a theoretical invitation, but an exhortation matured in a personal experience. The word enters the life and the heart of the interlocutor only if it flows from the heart and the life of the person who speaks. Being expert in trusting the Word of God, Mary can help others to do the same. Her faith is contagious, the *fiat deeply lived* by her becomes a convincing *facite* addressed to others.

It is necessary, for us consecrated persons, like Mary, to have the antenna simultaneously tended towards God and towards history. Only a deep relation with God and a wise understanding of the world, can make our words and actions, the *facite* with which we help others, flow from our personal *fiat* in adhesion to God.

Mary the *Alpha* and the *Omega* of Time a Reflection on the Solemnity of the Assumption

Biblical Reflection on Mary



How did the world and human life begin? Where do we come from and where are we going?: these are problems neither of abstract speculation, nor of idle curiosity: they are borne from the profundity of the human being and are therefore fecund terrain for dialogue and for an “initial proclamation” of Jesus.

God, in dialogue with man, meets these questions that He himself has placed in the heart of the creature made into His own image. In the first book of the Bible – the *Genesis*, He reveals to man something of that which was “in the beginning”; and in the last book – the *Apocalypse*, He alludes to the “end of time”. Above all, He has given us the interpretative key to these two extremes of time: Jesus Christ, “the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end” (*Rev* 1, 13). In Him, runs the entire in-between period that has become “history of salvation”. Close to Jesus Christ, however, there is the mysterious, discreet and silent presence of a woman.

From the *Genesis* to the *Apocalypse*

In the narration of the *Genesis*, after the fall of man, God denounces the serpent and announces good news: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed; He shall crush your head and you shall lie in wait for His heel” (*Gn* 3:15). The *Apocalypse* symbolically presents history as a fierce battle. At one side, there is the woman “clothed

with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head, a crown of twelve stars” (*Ap.* 12:1-2); on the other side, appears the wreckful dragon, attempting to devour the newly-born son, and is cast down.

From the beginning to the end, history develops into a complex and eventful plot, in a continuous battle between the reign of God and adverse forces. Nevertheless, its beginning has been marked by the promise of salvation. Right there at the instance of man’s fall into sin, beside the punishment, the good news resounds. At the end, the promise will be fulfilled. The triumph of God is guaranteed.

But who is this woman? Church tradition sees in these pages the figure of Mary, the mother of Jesus and of the Church. For John Paul II, it is Mary who “from the first chapters of *Genesis* until the *Apocalypse*, accompanies the revelation of the salvific plan of God for humanity” (*Redemptoris Mater* 47).

Beginning and fulfillment

As woman in the beginning, Mary is the sign of hope, the bearer of salvific promise. As woman of the fulfillment, she is the sign of the definitive victory of God over Satan, of goodness over evil, of light over darkness, of love over hatred, of joy over sadness, of life over death.

From the dawn that precedes the rising of the sun to the woman clothed with the sun, from creation “in its beginning” to “the new heavens and the new earth” of the final fulfillment, the perspective of history is clearly marked and intoned by hope. The Church, journeying amid the difficulties and trials of history, looks at Mary who shines forth on this earth as “the true sign of hope and comfort” (*LG* 68). Mary guarantees that time is favorable and will have a satisfactory end. Mary witnesses that God is faithful to His word: “At the beginning, I foretell the outcome; in advance, things not yet done. I say that my plan shall stand; I accomplish my every purpose” (*Is* 46:10).

The Immaculate and the Assumed into Heaven

The woman of the *Genesis* and of the *Apocalypse* bears not only the entire salvific project of God, but also the vocation of every human being and his itinerary in reaching God. The two realities of the life of Mary, de-



fined by the Church as dogmas of faith – the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption into Heaven – enlighten this project.

In Mary, all holy, conceived without sin, shines the pure beauty of the human being, thought of and wanted by God since the beginning. That which Adam and Eve would have realized, now fully radiates in Mary. In Mary, assumed into heaven, we see the first fruits and the anticipation of mankind saved from death and perfectly configured to the resurrection of Christ. Mary reminds man how he would have been if he were faithful to God and foretells how he would become and where he would arrive if he accept to walk along the sequela Christi.

If we would ask God: “What was your fist dream for us, how did you think of us “in the beginning” before the creation of the world?”, He would probably answer: “Look up to Mary”. And if we would ask Him: “How do you want us to become “at the end of time?”, His probable answer would still be: “Look up to Mary”.





Activity Sheets for Community Meetings of Ongoing Formation

*These 10 activity sheets
are intended for the local community
so that these Acts of the Study Days
may be used for its ongoing formation*





Sharing the Word

Introduction

We start our Bible Sharing reading an excerpt from the Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* no. 95 and from the Final Statement of FABC's First Bishops Institute for Bible Apostolate (1995). This is followed by a brief moment of silence for personal reflection:

“95. In calling upon all the faithful to proclaim God's word, the Synod Fathers restated the need in our day too for a decisive commitment to the *missio ad gentes*. In no way can the Church restrict her pastoral work to the “ordinary maintenance” of those who already know the Gospel of Christ. Missionary outreach is a clear sign of the maturity of an ecclesial community. The Fathers also insisted that the word of God is the saving truth which men and women in every age need to hear. For this reason, it must be explicitly proclaimed. The Church must go out to meet each person in the strength of the Spirit (*1 Cor* 2:5) and continue her prophetic defence of people's right and freedom to hear the word of God, while constantly seek-

Seven Steps Bible Sharing

FIRST STEP: We invite the Lord

We invite the Lord through song or prayer to send us his Spirit to help us understand his Word.

SECOND STEP: We read the text

The guide invites someone to volunteer to read aloud the text. A moment of silence follows. Then the guide invites each on to read the text silently.

THIRD STEP: We dwell on the text

Each participant reads aloud the word or words (only short phrases or individual words) that have impressed them three or four times.

FOURTH STEP: We are quiet

The guide invites someone to read the reflection on the text. This is then followed by personal reflection for around three minutes.

FIFTH STEP: We share what we have heard in our hearts

After the time of quiet we share briefly with one another what we have heard in our hearts or our faith experience in order to help each other to grow in the faith.

SIXTH STEP: We search together

What does this Scripture text mean to our community today.

SEVENTH STEP: We pray together

The guide now invites everyone to say a personal prayer.

ing out the most effective ways of proclaiming that word, even at the risk of persecution. The Church feels duty-bound to proclaim to every man and woman the word that saves (cf. *Rom 1:14*).”

The Asian Bishops wrote: “as we heed our mission to become God’s people in Asia, we realize that promoting the Word of God cannot be merely just another apostolate. Beyond mastering methods of the Bible study or sharing, be they modern or traditional, the Bible Apostolate must lead each one to that personal experience and encounter with the living Lord, He who heals, transforms and builds up lives and communities. ... We call on our Churches to balance sacramental ministries with the ministry of the Word ... Our homilies and liturgies must celebrate and make alive the Word of God in our peoples’ lives.”

The Word of God

Chose a passage from the texts used for biblical reflection during the study days.

Reflection

For the third step each one reads silently the *Biblical Reflection* of Sr. Maria Ko.

Initial Proclamation

Introduction

“Finally, the person who has been evangelized goes on to evangelize others. Here lies the test of truth, the touchstone of evangelization: it is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn.”⁷⁴

The term Initial proclamation refers to the start of the rich, dynamic, and complex process of integral evangelisation in Asia’s three-fold context: rich cultures, ancient religions and oppressive poverty.⁷⁵ Initial Proclamation is just the start of the process of evangelization. It comes first chronologically but is not extended in time. Its goal is to stir in the listeners an interest in Jesus Christ. It may lead to an initial adherence or a revitalization of faith in Him.

It is the beginning of the pedagogy which introduce people step-by step to the mystery of Christ.⁷⁶ The customary content of Initial Proclamation is the short, joyful and engaging account of the death of Jesus on the cross, his resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit. “In the complex reality of mission, initial proclamation has a central and irreplaceable role, since it introduces man ‘into the mystery of the love of God, who invites him to enter into a personal relationship with himself in Christ’ and opens the way to conversion.”⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 24.

⁷⁵ FABC 1, *Evangelisation in Asia Today*.

⁷⁶ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 20.

⁷⁷ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 44.

Meet Jesus

Mark 6:30-44 How many loaves do you have? Go and see

The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." But he answered, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "That would take more than two hundreds denarii! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?" "How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see." When they found out, they said, "Five – and two fish." Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

Read the Gospel text aloud and request each one to reflect personally on the following:

How does Jesus react? Mark's description is concise and dense with meaning. "He saw...he had compassion..."

Jesus sees, feels moved, and begins "to teach them many things". Thus he goes from his glance to his heart and from his heart to action.

And the disciples? What are they worried about?

Jesus gives them a clear mandate, "**You give them something to eat.**"

“How many loaves do you have? Go to see.”

“Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people.”

Finally, the disciples are totally involved in Jesus’ compassion for the people. They have become his industrious collaborators in working the miracle.

Discover

Three elements of crucial importance in the task of preaching the Gospel in Asia, today are:

- Inculturation, which renders the local church truly present within the life of our people.
- Dialogue with the great Asian religions, which bring them into contact with the Gospel, so that the seed of the Word in them may come to full flower.
- Service of the poor, uniting with them in their struggle for a more human world.

Questions to reflect upon

Why then does the proclamation of Jesus Christ remain necessary and urgent in Asia?

Which motivation will spur the Asian local Churches to invite others to become Jesus’ disciples in his Church?

How can our community get more involved in Initial Proclamation?

Take a few minutes to reflect on the questions.

Share

Share your reflections with your community members in a fraternal spirit.

Celebrate

Guide 1: The Federation of Asian Bishop's Conference (FABC) has pointed out that the ultimate goal of mission in Asia is "to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God: to promote the values of the Kingdom such as justice, peace, love, compassion, equality and brotherhood in these Asian realities."

Hymn: God's Spirit is in my heart or any other...

Pause for silence

Prayer:

Guide 1: Lord Jesus, strengthen our personal relationship with you. Help us to nurture it day after day through prayer, scripture reading and sacraments. May your Holy Spirit sustain our desire for holiness and our passion for you spur us on to proclaim your love to all. **R.** Lord hear our prayer

Guide: Lord Jesus, give us your own compassion, teach us to establish personal human relationships with our brothers and sisters. In the pluri-religious and multicultural context of our nation, teach us to be open with others, make us feel comfortable with different cultures and life-styles. In our daily life, make us alert to look for opportunities to serve others with genuine love and acceptance and by doing this may we find ample opportunities to share our personal experience of the Lord with others. **R.** Lord hear our prayer.

Commit yourself

"Faith is strengthened when it is given to others"⁷⁸

Make one practical commitment that will help you to share a bit of your faith with a person of another religion.

⁷⁸ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 2



Quote to remember:

A proclaimer has to make him/herself the bearer of the world's needs and has to let the love of Christ to move him/her (Cf. 2 Cor 5,14).





Initial Proclamation: What Is It?

The Concept of Initial Proclamation

The guide asks someone to volunteer and read the definition of initial proclamation. This is followed by a brief moment of silence for personal reflection:

“In the light of the FABC documents and the reflections during the Study Days in Europe and South Asia, initial proclamation could be defined as the **witness of life** of every Christian and of the whole Christian community and the **set of activities** in specific contexts that, while safeguarding the **freedom of conscience** with loving **respect** and **esteem**, aim at **eliciting or stirring up an interest for Jesus** making it possible to initiate the gradual and dialogical process of **proposing the person and message of Jesus Christ**. It is directed not only to those who do not know Christ, but also to those who, having known him, have walked away from him; to those who, believing that they already sufficiently know him, live the Christian faith routinely; to those who search for God and to those who live a life deprived of any meaning so as to **lead them to an initial adhesion to Jesus Christ or to a revitalization of the Christian faith**.⁷⁹

It must be stressed that for the FABC initial proclamation is neither a method nor an activity nor a celebration. It is neither planned nor organized. It happens on the spot in the midst of ordinary daily life. It is that moment, that spark that could ignite the flame of faith in Jesus Christ. There are as many ways of fostering initial proclamation as there are forms of making an invitation. Conversely, the one who receives initial proclamation could freely listen and accept it, reject it or allow oneself to be ques-

⁷⁹ André Fossion, “Proposta della Fede e Primo Annuncio,” *Catechesi* 78, no. 4 (2008-2009): 30-34; Joseph Gevaert, *Prima Evangelizzazione* (Turin: LDC, 1990), 68-71, 80-84; Idem, *La Proposta del Vangelo a chi non Conosce il Cristo* (Turin: LDC, 2001).

tioned as exemplified by the encounter of Jesus in John's Gospel with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (Jn 4,3-42), or the encounter of Phillip with the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts, 43-54). As explained above initial proclamation, then, is a proclamation of Jesus Christ that is respectful of their freedom of conscience. It could never do violence to the person's conscience nor could it be mistaken for proselytism. However, "**we shall not be timid when God opens the door for us to proclaim explicitly the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior and the answer to the fundamental questions of human existence.**"⁸⁰

(An Overview on the Topic of the Study Days: from Prague to Sampran)

Initial Proclamation

John Paul II, insisted on the importance of initial proclamation in *Ecclesia in Asia*, 20. The guide asks someone to volunteer and read the text below. This is followed by a brief moment of silence:

"The presentation of Jesus Christ as the only Saviour needs to follow a *pedagogy* which will introduce people step by step to the full appropriation of the mystery. Clearly, the initial evangelization of non-Christians and the continuing proclamation of Jesus to believers will have to be different in their approach. In initial proclamation, for example, "the presentation of Jesus Christ could come as the fulfilment of the yearnings expressed in the mythologies and folklore of the Asian peoples". In general, narrative methods akin to Asian cultural forms are to be preferred. In fact, the proclamation of Jesus Christ can most effectively be made by narrating his story, as the Gospels do."

Our Experiences

- What was your understanding of Initial Proclamation before? What is your understanding now? What shift of understanding did you have regarding Initial proclamation?
- Read one of the stories narrated during the Study Days. Is there anyone who would like to share his/her own story?

⁸⁰ FABC V, 4.3 in *FAPA*, vol. I, 282.



Sharing for Deepening

- How can we foster Initial proclamation (as start of the evangelisation process) especially with the youngsters in our context?
- In what way does the style of life of each member and of the whole community contribute to initial proclamation among the people of different cultures and religions we meet and work with everyday?
- What are the challenges and opportunities of initial proclamation for our religious community?

Pray

We conclude by putting into spontaneous prayer all our hopes and fears in responding to the challenges and opportunities of initial proclamation in our context.





Attracted by Jesus to Attract Others

Introduction

What is initial proclamation? We can think of very captivating images to explain what it is all about. It is like a process or journey, sowing seed or casting a net, or a response to an expectation. This proclamation is to be done in the context of the lives of those who receive it, in an attitude of love and esteem for the listener. “In proclaiming Christ to non-Christians, the missionary is convinced that, through the working of the Spirit, there already exists in individuals and peoples an expectation, even if an unconscious one, of knowing the truth about God, about man, and about how we are to be set free from sin and death.”⁸¹

Meet Jesus

Jn 1:35-42 – John’s Disciples Follow Jesus

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!” When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?” They said, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?” “Come,” he replied, “and you will see.” So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon. Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.

⁸¹ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 45.

Discover

Two main forms of Initial Proclamation:

- As a collective and institutional attitude of the Church in all its public events.
- As concrete individual and communitarian action in everyday life with individuals and groups.

Questions to reflect upon

How can we enhance Human Promotion and Empowerment with a convincing proclamation of Jesus?

Spurred on by our profound love for Christ how can we renew our commitment to proclaim Jesus Christ and his Gospel?

How can we bring in the change of life because initial proclamation is a must in order to offer dignity to the human person?

How can we draw inspiration from the first proclamation of Jesus to humankind (Jn 1:35-42)

Share

Take a few minutes to reflect on the questions and share your reflections.

Celebrate

Hymn: I have decided to follow Jesus or any other

Guide: This evening, let us thank God for planting in our hearts a deep love for Him and for His Son Jesus. In the silence of our hearts let us now thank Jesus.

Guide 1: What are you looking for?

Guide: I am looking for you Jesus. I want to spend more time with you.



Guide 1: “Come,”

Guide: Lord Jesus, you draw me to yourself and I feel a strong attraction for you my Lord. Grant to each of us present here a deeper experience of you. Teach us to abide in your love. We want to have your mind and heart Jesus (cf. 1 Cor 2:16).

Commitment

Take one initiative that can inspire you in your initial proclamation based on the first proclamation made by Jesus (Jn 1:35-42).

Quote to remember:

“Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”⁸²



⁸² Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 1.





Storytelling: Sharing my Faith Experience

We start our gather with a song or a prayer.

Discuss

Read and discuss text below.

The Asian Mission Congress (2006) considered storytelling as an important way in the initial proclamation of Christ in Asia because stories have the dynamic power to transform the values and perspectives of its listeners.⁸³

“As pointed out, whether we live in multireligious context or in areas where the majority are Christians, initial proclamation is necessary. In a “fully participatory Christian communities where people experience that they “belong” and that together they are the Church,”⁸⁴ we Asian Christians are challenged to proclaim by sharing the story of our personal encounter with Jesus the Savior. Unlike direct proclamation which could appear to East Asians as a culturally insensitive and religiously disrespectful monologue, the telling and retelling of the personal experience of Jesus on the part of the storyteller, takes place in the context of a web of relationships among our fellow East Asians from diverse cultures and various religions, many of whom are poor. Our love for Christ and for our Asian brothers and sisters impels us to narrate the story of Jesus and our personal encounter with him. Such a storytelling becomes initial proclamation when through

⁸³ Asian Mission Congress 2006, *FAPA*, IV, 274; *EA* 20.

⁸⁴ FABC V, 3.3.3 in *FAPA*, vol. I, 281.

the story, the storyteller inspires hope and strength among the listeners to face their struggles in daily life. Thus, the story becomes a compelling invitation to follow Jesus Christ. Yet, we tell and retell these without any thought of forcing them on the listeners.

To be effective the Christian storyteller also needs to be formed by and constantly drinks from the living water of God's Word and ponder it in his/her heart. Yet, the main actor in *missio inter gentes*, hence in initial proclamation, is not the person of proclaimer but the Holy Spirit, the Great Storyteller. This "entails perceiving and honoring the divine Spirit at work in all peoples, cultures and religions."⁸⁵ Indeed, it is the Spirit who sets ablaze the hearts of the storyteller and the listeners⁸⁶ and stirs up interest in the person of Jesus Christ!"

... Hence for us, it does not matter whether we are in school or in a parish, whether we are involved in education apostolate, in pastoral activity or in human promotion. All our life and activity, no matter where, is, in fact, and ought to be, initial proclamation. No matter where we are assigned we are, therefore, missionaries. Let whatever we do, then, be filled with missionary zeal and ardor which were so characteristic of Don Bosco, the founder and center of our Salesian Family!

(An Overview on the Topic of the Study Days: from Prague to Sampran)

Discover

- What has the Church said about this topic?

John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* (1999)

"20. The presentation of Jesus Christ as the only Saviour needs to follow a *pedagogy* which will introduce people step by step to the full appropriation of the mystery. Clearly, the initial evangelization of non-Christians and the continuing proclamation of Jesus to believers will have to be different in their approach. In initial proclamation, for example, "the presen-

⁸⁵ FIRA I, 2.4 in *FAPA*, vol. III, 120.

⁸⁶ "Message of the First Asian Mission Congress," in *Telling the Story of Jesus in Asia*, 338-339.

tation of Jesus Christ could come as the fulfillment of the yearnings expressed in the mythologies and folklore of the Asian peoples”. In general, narrative methods akin to Asian cultural forms are to be preferred. In fact, the proclamation of Jesus Christ can most effectively be made by narrating his story, as the Gospels do. The ontological notions involved, which must always be presupposed and expressed in presenting Jesus, can be complemented by more relational, historical and even cosmic perspectives. The Church, the Synod Fathers noted, must be open to the new and surprising ways in which the face of Jesus might be presented in Asia.”

Narrate

Below is a story of a young Korean who became Christian through his Christian friends who also accompanied him at every step in his journey of faith, yet allowed the Spirit to act in his heart: *“My name is Myung Hun. I was a person with a rather negative attitude, without great dreams and a life that is far from exemplary. A chain of events show the hand of God in my life: A friend of mine invited me many times to visit the Catholic Church, but I did not take notice of it. One day in the cafeteria of the University I saw him making the sign of the cross before eating. I was so impressed by his gesture that after I felt like I was ‘caught’ by someone unknown to visit the Church. One day, while waiting at the bus stop, I saw a poster advertising a movie that my friend had earlier recommended that I go and watch **“Don’t cry for me Tonj”**, about Fr. John Lee a missionary in Sudan. After watching the movie I felt so many things in my heart. I wondered why he gave his whole life and all his energies to others. On the other hand, I realized that when I die, perhaps nobody will even cry for me! Then I decided: “I want to be baptized!”*

So I started the catechumenate in the Church next to the University, then I joined the Bible study group on campus. 3 days before the feast of Don Bosco, I received an invitation to participate in the recollection of the Salesian Youth Movement. I also accepted the invitation of the Assistant Parish Priest to serve as an assistant at the children’s catechism. At the University I also accepted the invitation of the chaplain to be a tutor of the young Korean-Chinese migrants who have no one with them. I did all these because I discovered the joy in serving others which I have never felt be-

fore. Last year I was baptized on the day of Pentecost and I chose the name John Bosco. Looking back at the journey I have made these past two years I realized how the good Lord has guided me to the knowledge of Jesus through friends who proclaimed to me Jesus with respect and freedom, accompanying me step by step. Thanks to them the little flame of faith has now become a great light. Now I want to share Jesus too with other young people!”

- What has the Bishops’ Conference of our own country said about this topic?
(if a document about this matter exists read a number or a part of the document)

- What is the role of storytelling in our Salesian educative practice?

Share

Let us share in small group(s) our experiences.

- How did I experience the presence of Jesus in my life?
- How did I discover the call of Jesus to follow him?

Celebrate

(make a big circle for all the participants)

- Hymn
- Opening prayer
- Gospel: *Jn 20, 19-21*
- Intercessions (spontaneous)
- Our Father (sung)
- Conclusion

Dialogue with Our Brothers and Sisters of East Asia

Introduction

The mandate of Jesus spurs us onto commit ourselves to Initial Proclamation. A deeper awareness of the Church's mission in the context of the Asian reality can offer us some more motivations. We encounter our brothers and sisters of other religions among whom the rays of that Truth, which enlightens everybody coming into the world, are already present. This hidden presence is the starting point for the Church's proclamation. Gradually through the proclamation of the Good News, the proclaimers and the hearers will grow into the fullness of the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ.

The proclamation is "Dialogical, for in proclamation the hearer of the Word is not expected to be a passive receiver. There is progress from the 'seeds of the Word' already present in the hearer to the full mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ. The Church must recognize a process of purification and enlightenment in which the Spirit of God opens the mind and heart of the hearer to the obedience of faith."⁸⁷

Meet Jesus

Jn 4:1-42 – The Samaritan woman

Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman is a very fascinating one:

"At the end of the encounter the woman forgets her jar and runs to the city to proclaim Jesus to other people: That which was her only concern is

⁸⁷ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Dialogue and Proclamation Reflection and Orientations On Interreligious Dialogue*, 70 e.

now abandoned. And Jesus forgets his tiredness and his need to drink, because his real thirst, that of communicating salvation, has been quenched.”⁸⁸

As you read the Gospel text, keep your eyes fixed on Jesus and His style of interaction. Jesus meets the woman at the very practical context of her life. He enters into a dynamic dialogue with her and the final result is indeed stupendous: The woman forgets her jar and runs to the city to proclaim Jesus to other people...

Discover

Members of other religious traditions already in some way share with us in the mystery of salvation. If the Church is in love with her Lord, she will feel the urge of sharing with them what she alone can offer: the Good News that the human face of God and his gift of salvation is found in Jesus of Nazareth. “Here we are at the heart of the mystery of love”⁸⁹

“*Dialogue* can be understood in different ways. Firstly, at the purely human level, it means reciprocal communication, leading to a common goal or, at a deeper level, to interpersonal communion. Secondly, dialogue can be taken as an attitude of respect and friendship, which permeates or should permeate all those activities constituting the evangelizing mission of the Church. This can appropriately be called ‘the spirit of dialogue’. Thirdly, in the context of religious plurality, dialogue means ‘all 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. It is in this third sense that the present document uses the term dialogue for one of the integral elements of the Church’s evangelizing mission.”⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Sr. Maria Ko, The Encounter of Jesus with three different persons in different contexts (John 3-4), Study Days on *The Salesian Mission and the Initial Proclamation of Christ in the Three-fold Context of South Asia*, Kolkata (India), August 7 -11, 2011.

⁸⁹ Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 83.

⁹⁰ Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 9.



Questions to reflect upon

What more can we do in our communities to strengthen the Triple Dialogue with Asian Cultures, Religions and the Poor?

Can you identify the “seeds of the Word” present in believers of other religions?

Indicate ways through which we can help our brothers and sisters to meet Jesus.

Share

After silent reflection on the above questions, share your reflections with the community.

Celebrate

Hymn: Great things happen when God mixes with man or any other appropriate one.

Guide: Lord Jesus today we want to praise and thank you because as early as 1970, the Asian Bishops’ Meeting with Pope Paul VI passed a resolution to engage in “an open, sincere, and continuing dialogue with our brothers of other great religions of Asia, that we may learn from one another how to enrich ourselves spiritually and how to work more effectively together on our common task of total human development”. Lord, your Spirit has guided us in this delicate task, continue to be with us. **R.** Lord we thank you and implore your blessings.

Guide 1: For us in Asia: “interreligious dialogue flows from the nature of the Church, a community in pilgrimage journeying with peoples of other faiths towards the Kingdom that is to come” (BIRA IV/4, article 2). Walk with us Jesus on our journey, be our constant companion and help us to discern the “seeds of the Word” present in other religions. **R.**

Guide: In particular, “religious dialogue is not just a substitute for or a mere preliminary to the proclamation of Christ, but should be the ideal



form of evangelization, where in humility and mutual support we seek together with our brothers and sisters that fullness of Christ which is God's plan for the whole of creation " (BIMA I, article 10). Lord Jesus, teach us to grow in genuine humility and make us your messengers of love and dialogue to share life in solidarity with the Asian peoples and serve life, as Jesus has done. **R.**

Guide 1: "We religious believers are co-pilgrims, who share intimate spiritual experiences and reflections with one another with concern and compassion, with genuine openness to truth and the freedom of spiritual seekers (sadhakas). In this process we become increasingly sensitive to human suffering and collaborate in promoting justice, peace and ecological wholeness... We walk together on the path of dialogue and service towards harmony as sisters and brothers bound in one Love and drawn by one Divine Truth" (BIRA V/3, article 6). Lord Jesus, bless us with your own love and compassion. As co-pilgrims, make us truly sensitive to the sufferings of our brothers and sisters. **R.**

Commitment

What more can you do to sharpen your skills for dialogue with believers of other religions?

Quote to remember:

"Being Asian is best discovered and affirmed not in confrontation and opposition, but in the spirit of complementarity and harmony. In this framework of complementarity and harmony, the Church can communicate the Gospel in a way which is faithful both to her own Tradition and to the Asian soul."⁹¹

⁹¹ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 6.

Examples of Initial Proclamation

Instruction for Sharing:

Someone reads aloud the texts below for general comprehension. Then each one personally reads it again in silence for attention to specifics. On the second reading, each one underlines words and phrases which one may consider important, and makes notes in the margins of anything that one does not understand; questions one would like to ask the group, and examples or applications that might occur.

Our Text:

From the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences *Journeying Together Toward the Third Millennium* (1990), n. 6.1-6.2.

“We have up to now emphasized deed. But mission is more than deeds. It involves the very being of the Church. Therefore we ask: “What should the Church *be* in and to this changing Asian world marked by so much diversity, poverty, suffering and injustice, and with so many movements for social transformations?”

The Christian community, it seems to us, must live in *companionship*, as true partners with all Asians as they pray, work, struggle and suffer for a better life, and as they search for the meaning of human life and progress. Because the human person created in Christ, redeemed by Christ and united by Christ to himself is the way for the Church, the Church must walk along with him / her in human solidarity.”

Our Examples:

Matteo Ricci

Relationship, which is a core East Asian value, is also the core value in dialogue. This is the reason why in the multi-cultural contexts of East Asia Christians are called, with followers of other religions, to be companions and partners with everyone as they pray, work, struggle and suffer in search for a better human life. This web of relationship friendship plays an important part as shown by Matteo Ricci's Chinese experience.

In his book *De Amicitia* Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) underlined that the whole idea for friendship is the reciprocal need for the other and for mutual help. He defined friendship as the experience in which a person and another trusted person are able to go beyond their own limits. Every human person needs friends in order to do good to one another which, in turn, brings happiness to everyone. Similarly each one happily receives the good that the other does to him or her and gives rise to the desire to treat the other as one wishes to be treated. Affection to one's own friend, in turn, gives rise to trust. He also insisted that affection and trust ought to be accompanied by reason in order to purify it from every form of falsehood and injustice and consequently elevate and deepen it. With reason friendship becomes even more precious. Friendship is purified from egoism by reason and eventually transformed into spiritual delight, a delightful encounter.

Another important work of Ricci is *The True meaning of the Lord of Heaven*. It follows the thomistic process in illustrating natural truths which are common to all people because they are understandable with the sole use of reason (like God as Creator, immortality of the soul). Rational investigation, on the other hand, is open to revelation. Through these works Ricci found a common ground with the Chinese to communicate Christ and friendship with him.

Alexandre de Rhodes

In his effort to dialogue with religions and cultures in order to make Christianity take root in what we now call Vietnam Alexandre de Rhodes (1612-1660) exerted a lot of effort to master Vietnamese language as *conditio sine qua non* for an effective preaching of the Gospel because the language is not only a way of communication but a way of experiencing reality of which religion is an expression. With a good command of Viet-

namese he developed four fundamental attitudes which became his guideposts in sharing the faith in Vietnam.

In order to preserve cultural practices which were good and have neutral theological meaning and at the same time purify ennobled and perfect those which have potentially objectionable elements, he adopted double criteria to help him discern which cultural practices are to be preserved or rejected: Reflect if what is asked of the local Christians is required by Jesus and discover if a particular cultural practice is opposed to the Gospel.

On the one hand, he fought for the local Christians to preserve their cultural practices while vehemently opposing the introduction of Christian practices, even if these are good, which could set Vietnamese Christians culturally apart from their compatriots. On the other hand, he insisted that missionaries adapt to the local customs. He himself showed appreciation of many Vietnamese traditions, took pleasure in Vietnamese food and cuisine, native delicacies and local fruits.

Perhaps his most important legacy was the publication of the first Vietnamese catechism. *The Catechism for those who want to receive Baptism divided into eight days*. Since we are at the first encounter of Christianity and Vietnamese culture De Rhodes sought to make a synthesis of his own theological and cultural tradition and those of the Vietnamese people by listening to and familiarizing himself with the Vietnamese socio-political, cultural and religious traditions. In order to move not only the catechumens' minds but especially their hearts he used sacred images, bodily gestures, philosophical wisdom and ethical sayings embodied in thousands of sayings and proverbs which are often couched in rhythmic verses rather than in prose in order to underline that Christian teachings regarding these matters conform to human reason and popular wisdom as well as unfold their practical implications.

He sought to find equivalent expressions in Vietnamese of western terms and concepts. When there were no real equivalents he paraphrased technical terms. Perhaps his greatest contribution is that he developed the term *Duc Chua Troi Dat* to conveying the creative power and nearness of God. In the *Catechism* he also often added the prefix *Duc* (noble) as a title which indicates greatest honor even if his preferred term for God seem to be *Thien Chua*, a term most commonly used for God by Vietnamese Christians even today.

Questions for Discussion and Sharing:

- 1) According to you what is the relevance of the example of Matteo Ricci and Alexandre de Rhodes to the challenge of initial proclamation in your context? Could you explain?
- 2) “Beyond the generalized materialism one can note a desire for protection, a desire for interior and external peace (which among the young people passes before love), a desire for illumination, for wisdom, for quality in human relations, a desire for purification, and a fear for evil, etc.” (*Initial Proclamation in a Multireligious Context through the Dialogue of Life*)

What does this mean to you?

- 3) “But there is terrible downside to this process of cultural globalization. [...] Its spirit, informed by neo-liberalism, secularism, materialism, hedonism and consumerism, is alien to the religious-oriented cultures of Asia. Relational, interconnected and interdependent lifestyles of Asian peoples are also undermined. Many values of the technological culture run counter to Asian family values” (FABC VIII, in *Religion and Young People in Our Secular Age*).

Has the Bishops’ Conference of our own country said something similar to that of the FABC? (if a document about this matter exists read a number or a part of the document)

How could we foster initial proclamation among our youth in our globalized and secularized context?

Conclusion:

We conclude our gathering with a song or a prayer.

Witnessing to Jesus Christ the Saviour, Who Took Flesh as an Asian!

Introduction

Ecclesia in Asia acknowledges Jesus Christ the Saviour as an Asian.

“In ‘the fullness of time’ (Gal 4:4), he sent his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ the Saviour, who took flesh as an Asian! Exulting in the goodness of the continent’s peoples, cultures, and religious vitality, and conscious at the same time of the unique gift of faith which she has received for the good of all, the Church in Asia cannot cease to proclaim: “Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his love endures for ever” (Ps 118:1).”⁹²

The Federation of Asian Bishops Conference has affirmed together with others, that “the proclamation of Jesus Christ is the centre and primary element of evangelization”⁹³ and highlighted witness of Christians and of Christian communities to the values of the Kingdom of God and called for a proclamation through Christ-like deeds.

“For Christians in Asia, to proclaim Christ means above all to live like him, in the midst of our neighbours of other faiths and persuasions, and to do his deeds by the power of his grace. Proclamation through dialogue and deeds – this is the first call to the Churches in Asia.”⁹⁴

⁹² John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 1.

⁹³ Statement of the FABC All-Asia Conference on Evangelisation, Suwon, South Korea, August 24-31, 1988.

⁹⁴ FABC V, art 4. 1.

Meet Jesus

John 13 – Jesus Washes His Disciples’ Feet

¹ It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

² The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵ After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”

⁷ Jesus replied, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”

⁸ “No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.”

Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”

⁹ “Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!”

¹⁰ Jesus answered, “Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.” ¹¹ For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

¹² When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. ¹³ “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶ Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.



Discover

“We join Jesus in serving life by washing the feet of our neighbours.”⁹⁵

“Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”⁹⁶

The First Form of Evangelization Is Witness

“The first form of witness is *the very life of the missionary, of the Christian family, and of the ecclesial community*, which reveal a new way of living. The missionary who, despite all his or her human limitations and defects, lives a simple life, taking Christ as the model, is a sign of God and of transcendent realities. But everyone in the Church, striving to imitate the Divine Master, can and must bear this kind of witness; in many cases it is the only possible way of being a missionary.”⁹⁷

Questions to reflect upon

Witness is an effective means to work with people of other religions for peace and for common good. What do you think we can do as a community to make our witness more effective?

What values of our culture are favourable for Initial Proclamation?

Share

Share your reflections aloud to enrich everyone present.

Celebrate

Hymn: Yes, they know we are Christians by our love... or any other

⁹⁵ FABC VI, article 14.3.

⁹⁶ Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41, cf. also 21, 76.

⁹⁷ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 42.



Guide: We are aware that in many places Christ cannot yet be proclaimed openly by words. But he can and should be, proclaimed through our witness of life and though our desire to live in peace and harmony with those who do not share our faith. Walk with us Lord we pray. **R.** Lord hear our prayer.

Guide 1: Enlighten our minds and hearts Lord that inspired by your Holy Spirit, we may appreciate the human and religious values owned by our brothers and sisters of other religions. **R.**

Guide: Teach us Lord to collaborate in those activities which promote human dignity. **R.**

Guide 1: Lord Jesus, in the early Church, you allowed faith to grow through witness and personal contact as the main means of proclaiming. Even though they were lacking the rapid means of communications we enjoy today, the world of those days became evangelized in a short time and grew far beyond the Jewish community to Greece and Rome and up to Spain. Lord, allow this to happen even in our lives today. **R.**

Commitment

Commit yourself to proclaim Christ with prudence and to cultivate within you respect and tolerance towards people of other religions.

Quote to remember:

“Love grows through love.”⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas est*, 18.

Saint Francis de Sales: Heart Speaks to Heart

Introduction:

St. Francis de Sales was a missionary and a preacher in the difficult historical situation Chablais. Though he lived in a different cultural milieu his example could enlighten our commitment to foster initial proclamation in Oceania. The saintly Bishop was born on August 21, 1567. He was ordained priest on December 18, 1593. As a young priest he sought to win back Catholics who had become Protestants. He was elected and ordained Bishop of Geneva in 1602. As a missionary in the Chablais, and later as a Bishop, Francis won the people due to his personal gifts of charity, serenity and openness to dialogue, together with his brilliance as a spiritual guide. His example and message is extremely relevant for us in Oceania. He stated that there is a longing for God in the soul of every human person. His God is Father and Lord, husband and friend, who has maternal and nurturing characteristics, he is the sun to which the night is mysterious revelation. Such a God draws the human person to Himself with bonds of love, "because love has no prisoners nor slaves, but reduces all things under its obedience with a force so delicious that, if nothing is strong as love, nothing is amiable as its force" (Treatise on the Love of God, Book I, Ch. VI). He died in Lyon on 28 December 1622.

Instruction for Sharing:

Someone reads aloud the text below for general comprehension. Then each one personally reads it again in silence for attention to specifics. On the second reading, each one underlines words and phrases which one may consider important, and makes notes in the margins of anything that one

does not understand; questions one would like to ask the group, and examples or applications that might occur.

Our Text:

At the end of the first chapter of Book VI of his *Treatise on the Love of God*, describing mystical theology and prayer St. Francis de Sales wrote: “Do you mark, Theotimus, how the silence of afflicted lovers speaks by the apple of their eye, and by tears? Truly the chief exercise in mystical theology is to speak to God and to hear God speak in the bottom of the heart; and because this discourse passes in most secret aspirations and inspirations, we term it a silent conversing. Eyes speak to eyes, and heart to heart, and none understand what passes save the sacred lovers who speak.” These words became the inspiration of Bl. Henry Newman’s motto *Cor ad Cor Loquitur* (Heart speaks to Heart)!

St. Francis de Sales pointed out that “...as soon as a person gives a little attention to divinity a sweet feeling within the heart is experienced which shows that God is God of the heart... This pleasure, this confidence that the human heart naturally has in God certainly comes from nowhere else than the congruity between God’s goodness and our soul.” St. Francis de Sales believed that the human heart was made to beat in rhythm with God’s heart, and he wrote about these two motions as the love of complacency (receptivity) and the love of benevolence (active love). His motto was “Live Jesus” and he taught by example, trying to practice the little virtues of humility, patience, simplicity, kindness, and gentleness. The latter was something distinctive to Salesian spirituality.

During the General Audience of March 2, 2011 Pope Benedict XVI stressed that the Christian humanism of Saint Francis de Sales has lost none of its relevance today. Below is an excerpt of the Pope’s address.

“God is the God of the human heart” (“*Treatise on the Love of God*,” I, XV): In these seemingly simple words we see the essence of a great teacher’s spirituality, St. Francis de Sales, bishop and doctor of the Church [...] In 1602 he became bishop of Geneva, at a time when the city was the stronghold of Calvinism, so much so that the episcopal see was ‘in exile’ in Annecy. As pastor of a poor and tormented diocese, in a mountainous land-

scape in which he knew well both its harshness and beauty, he wrote: “I found [God] full of sweetness and gentleness among our highest and roughest mountains, where many simple souls loved and adored him in all truth and sincerity; and deer and chamois ran here and there among the frightening frost to proclaim his praises” (Letter to the Mother of Chantal, October 1606).

[...] “Reading the book on the love of God and even more so the many letters of direction and of spiritual friendship, one perceives what an expert St. Francis de Sales was on the human heart [...] Not for nothing, at the origin of many paths of pedagogy and spirituality of our time we rediscover the stamp of this teacher, without whom there would be no St. John Bosco or the heroic ‘little way’ of St. Thérèse of Lisieux.”

Our Context:

“We bring with ourselves the fascination and beauty of our faith, which arise from our personal relationship with Jesus and a deep communion with Him, to spur them to develop an interest in people and introduce them to the encounter with Christ. Through our personal and community life, our apostolate, especially our service to the poor, we make the conscious effort to stir up people to raise questions regarding the ultimate meaning of life and work and to help them to search for the answer in Jesus Christ. In respect for the freedom of each one, we will not take his/her place, but we allow him / her freely choose Christ.”

(Emerging Insights and Perspectives during these Study Days)

Questions for Discussion and Sharing:

- 1) In what way could St. Francis de Sales’ Heart speaks to heart approach be an important Salesian approach to initial proclamation among young people in your context?
- 2) “Do all through love, nothing through constraint” advised St. Francis de Sales. Blessed John Paul II underlined in *Redemptoris Missio* 39 that “the Church proposes, imposes nothing.” What do these statements imply in your effort to foster initial proclamation?

- 3) Fr. Chavez points out that “our (youth) apostolate is still not very missionary, that is to say, it pays little attention to the need for a first proclamation or a renewed proclamation of the Gospel” (*Salesian Youth Ministry*, AGC 407, p. 23). What does this statement imply in your ministry to young people?

Concluding Prayer:

Great and merciful God,
you have raised up in the Church Saint Francis de Sales
as a zealous shepherd and gracious tutor:
grant that we too may work diligently in our mission to the young
with the same apostolic spirit.
We ask you this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sharing the Gift of Jesus

Introduction:

“The heart of the Church in Asia will be restless until the whole of Asia finds its rest in the peace of Christ, the Risen Lord”. In Asia sharing the gift of Jesus can be carried out through interreligious and ecumenical dialogue and mission.

“The Church’s faith in Jesus is a gift received and a gift to be shared; it is the greatest gift which the Church can offer to Asia. Sharing the truth of Jesus Christ with others is the solemn duty of all who have received the gift of faith.”⁹⁹

There is a close-knit relationship between interreligious harmony, mission and dialogue:

“Mission in Asia will also seek through *dialogue* to serve the cause of unity of the peoples of Asia marked by such a diversity of beliefs, cultures and sociopolitical structures. In an Asia marked by diversity and torn by conflicts, the Church must in a special way be a sacrament – a visible sign and instrument of unity and harmony.”¹⁰⁰

Ecumenical Dialogue

“Ecumenical dialogue is a challenge and a call to conversion for the whole Church, especially for the Church in Asia where people expect from Christians a clearer sign of unity. For all peoples to come together in the grace of God, communion needs to be restored among those who in faith have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord. Jesus himself prayed and does not

⁹⁹ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 10.

¹⁰⁰ FABC V, article 4.2.

cease to call for the visible unity of his disciples, so that the world may believe that the Father has sent him (cf. *Jn* 17:21).”¹⁰¹

Meet Jesus

Lk 4: 14-20 – The Spirit of the Lord is upon me

¹⁴ Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ¹⁵ He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. ¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”^[a]

²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹ He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy,^[a] drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give. Mt 10:8.

Discover:

“Interreligious dialogue flows from the nature of the Church, a community in pilgrimage journeying with peoples of other faiths towards the Kingdom that is to come.”¹⁰²

“For Christians in Asia, to proclaim Christ means above all to live like him, in the midst of our neighbours of other faiths and persuasions, and to

¹⁰¹ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 30.

¹⁰² BIRA IV/4, article 2.



do his deeds by the power of his grace. Proclamation through dialogue and deeds – this is the first call to the Churches in Asia.”¹⁰³

A Triple Dialogue with Asian Cultures, Religions and the Poor

“Mission will mean a dialogue with Asia’s poor, with its local cultures, and with other religious traditions”.¹⁰⁴

Questions to reflect upon

In your efforts to make interreligious dialogue a reality how can you make use of the modern technology to make Jesus known?

Mention two concrete expressions of the proclamation through dialogue and deeds that are alive in your community and mission.

What more can we done in your community to get an active and imaginative engagement of the media in order to “throw open the doors of social communications to Christ, so that his Good News may be heard from the housetops of the world¹⁰⁵”?



Share

Share your reflections aloud to enrich your community.

Celebrate

Hymn: Any appropriate one

Guide: “The future of mission depends to a great extent on contemplation. Unless the missionary is a contemplative he cannot proclaim Christ in a credible way.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ FABC V, art 4. 1

¹⁰⁴ FABC V, article 3.1.2.

¹⁰⁵ John Paul II, World Communication Day message 2001.

¹⁰⁶ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 23, cf. RM, 91.



Lord Jesus, help us to deepen our spirituality and make us contemplatives in action. **R.** Lord hear our prayer.

Guide 1: Lord Jesus, grant us the grace to work with peoples of other faiths and religions as partners. **R.**

Guide: Christ is God's gift to us and we have been given the mandate to share him with others. Guide us Lord, that we may be driven by an ardent desire to give Christ to everyone. **R.**

Guide 1: Help us Lord to be ever aware of the need to prepare the laity to collaborate with us in the proclamation of Jesus and through our systematic village/family visits to focus on initial proclamation. **R.**

Guide: Give us courage Lord to evaluate our existing ministries in our provinces to see that they are in the line of sharing the gift of Jesus with those whom we encounter.

Commit yourself

Cherishing the words of Pope Benedict XVI who underlined the need for the promoters of inter-religious dialogue "to be well formed in their own beliefs and well informed about those of others," as how "inter-religious collaboration provides opportunities to express the highest ideals of each religious tradition": what concrete steps you would take up to strengthen your own beliefs and to be informed of those of others?

Quote to remember:

"If love is the motivation behind inter-religious dialogue, Christians are able to propose but not impose, faith in Christ Who is 'the way, the truth, and the life'."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/truth_is_the_goal_of_interreligious_dialogue_pope_benedict_teaches/ (accessed on 8/3/2012).



Appendices





East Asia and the Challenges of Mission *ad Gentes*

(Hua Hin, Thailand July 30 – August 3, 2004)

Missionary Priorities

1. Deepen our Salesian missionary spirituality as individuals and as communities so that together we can radiate God's love to others.
2. To make our communities open to the neighborhood, cultures and religions so that we may see and address new forms of poverty in the locality
3. To strengthen the collaboration among the members of the Salesian Family in our work for mission *ad gentes*, *ad intra* and *ad extra*.



Uniqueness of Salvation in Jesus Christ and the Need of Primary Evangelization

(Hua Hin, Thailand, May 10 - 16, 1998)

Concluding Proposals

CHINA

1. Proposals for greater missionary Awareness of Primary Evangelization in the Province

- 1.1 Within the EPC actively present the faith as something to be shared (proposal for the entire Province).
- 1.21 Make our Christian Basic Communities more out-going and welcoming towards non-Christians (especially for Taiwan)

2. Concrete strategies for the proposals

(proposal # 1)

- 2.1 Formation of Catechists, MA animators, confreres, sisters. To this end we suggests to:
 - organize an "Echo Seminar" on First Evangelization for sisters, confreres, and
 - collaborators actively engaged in evangelization or pastoral work; organize regular formation seminars.
- 2.2 Renew the contents of our catechumenate to reflect abundantly of the idea of shared faith.
- 2.3 When we rewrite / revise our catechetical aids we will do so trying to reflect abundantly the idea of "shared faith".
- 2.4 Prepare a handbook on Primary Evangelization (sort of Catechism of shared faith).

(proposal #2)

- 2.5 Get each BCC to introduce 2 prospective catechumens a year and ask them to be responsible for their growth
- 2.6 Every year: one open-day at parish level
- 2.7 Organize youth activities: sports, outings, etc.

3. Initiatives

- 3.1 We already hold 2 joint formation seminars a year
We celebrate DOMISAL together.
A FMA sister sits on the SDB FMA team but not vice-versa.
We got both SDB boys and FMA girls to celebrate SYD and DOMISAL jointly, We suggest:
- 3.2 Every year to have a joint Mission Day celebration.

JAPAN

- 1 The annual meeting-seminar about the missionary animation and formation in Japan's FMA-SDB works. To get an echo of this encounter.

2. Strategies

- 2.1 To set up 2 days for the Seminar at provincial level.
- 2.2 To set up a joint commission (FMA-SDB):
 - To study proposals
 - To propose studies
- 2.3 To sensitize our communities (and especially those in responsibility) about the duties and responsibilities of missionary or primary evangelization.
- 2.4 To get reports of:
 - The different activities
 - The different communities about their concrete missionary initiatives and activities
 - To get a common slogan and a common application of the proposals made.
- 3. To have a joint celebration of the missionary day, but in the respective regions (Tokyo, Kyushu, *etc.* ...)
 - “Don't wait for others to move ... Move others”
 - “Don't worry to disturb those who sleep” (Gospel's friend asking for bread in the night).

KOREA

1. Our creres must have a better scholarly formation in Scripture. Their lives and mentality must be more explicitly based on the gospels.

If one looks at the books at confrere has on his bookshelf there are books about Korea or Korean Buddhism, or basic Catholic Catechism or dogma - moral books. But there is very little scholarly enthusiasm for Scriptures.

In our houses although we may have weekly sharing of the Gospel, the content is personal revelation and application rather scholarship.

To animate to awareness of Primary Evangelization we propose a better basic grasp of Scripture and to what it implies.

2. **Strategies**

- 2.1 Those in formation should have a better grounding in Scripture.

- 2.2 On-going formation of the confreres should take into account this scripture-based formation.

3. **Mission Animation between *FMA* and *SDB***

- 3.1 Together: Have a seminar on mission animation.

- 3.2 We have a common mission in China. This also can unite us together: common missionary newsletter, common display at *Sale-sian* Mission Sunday, common subsidy or Mission mass for benefactors.

OCEANIA

(note in fact this group consisted of PNG, Australia/Samoa, Timor and Vietnam).

Proposal 1 (Special)

The countries of Oceania with present or future Salesian presence, viz., PNG, Solomons, Fiji, Samoa, Australia, request the Department for Missions for a special assembly in either 1999 or 2000 to consider the challenges and possibilities for evangelization in Oceania given the new and growing Salesian presence there.

Proposal 2

An improved awareness of culture and language in each country where this is applicable (especially PNG, Timor, Vietnam and the Pacific Islands).

Strategies

1. Study of culture and comparative religion from early formation.
2. Use of the Melanesian Institute for Cultural Awareness, especially by PNG, Solomons and Fiji.
3. Learning of the relevant languages of the Pacific by Salesian missionaries.
4. Involvement in the development of Pacific Theology (Melanesian, Polynesian) through contact with local Seminary.

Proposal 3

The understanding and application of the RCIA as renewed and presented in the Universal Church after Vatican II.

Strategies

1. Awareness of the RCIA as a first evangelization process from early formation onwards.
2. The sharing of experiences of application of the RCIA within communities.
3. The provision at community level of published resources on the RCIA (available certainly in English).

Comment On *SDB/FMA Shared Animation*

There should be missionary animation discussion at the very least at the level of combined SDB/FMA Provincial Council meetings. Then, perhaps, some sharing between the respective Missionary Delegates.

PHILIPPINES

1. To enhance missionary awareness on Primary Evangelization through:

2. Strategies:

- 2.1 Echo Seminar to be given to the SDB and FMA.
- 2.2 Create community animators for the follow-up awareness by making the good day talk, good night talk and community prayer as venue for the missionary animation.
- 2.3 Exposure program for the SDB and FMA and for people in formation.

2.4 “Twining” between communities in the mission.

3. Joint Initiatives: Prayer for the missions every month.

THAILAND

1. Sensitise native vocations to missionary spirit as a community and at the initial formation.

1.2 Make our planning of our works places of Primary Evangelization.

2. STRATEGIES

2.1 Create conditions to make missionary experience: to know the religion, the local culture, above all in relationship with the actual mentality of the young.

2.2 Exchange of missionary experience through; meetings, courses etc.

2.3 Make known to the young the poverty, the suffering, the misery, the war etc. in which other young and people are involved.

2.4 Propose Jesus courageously through personal contacts.

2.5 Ensure in our scholastic activity the proclamation of salvation.

3. Animation among sdb & fma in the same province

3.1 Study together the problems common to the young.

3.2 Propose formative journeys.

3.3 For an evangelizing educative action study the situation of our works at the level of the provincial council, team, local communities involving the members of the Salesian Family.



Evangelization and Interreligious Dialogue

(Batulao, Philippines, March 12 - 18, 1994)

Conclusions and Practical orientations

GROUP 1

Topic: Inter-Religious Dialogue

A. Working criteria:

1. Evangelization urges us to engage in true dialogue in order to reach the fullness of truth and unity.
2. Dialogue is actualized by:
 - openness and docility to the Holy Spirit in an atmosphere of prayer and deep faith
 - collaboration with the Local Church particularly in forming and involving the laity
 - seeking what is good, putting aside all prejudices and superiority complex
 - appreciation and respect for other religions
 - seeking common grounds and points of convergence

B. Concrete proposals

1. Study of Church Documents
2. Periodic evaluation of our witnessing task on Provincial and local levels
3. Collaboration between the FMA's and SDB's
4. Organizing an echo seminar of this encounter in our respective Provinces with FMA's and SDB's together
5. Collaboration with Local Church and with other Religious Institutes

GROUP 2

Topic: Tribal Religions And Popular Religiosity

A. Working Criteria

1. Value and love both culture and Salesian values
2. Believe that the Spirit precedes us
3. Update on approaches and methodology of evangelization

B. Concrete Proposals (workable within 5-6 years)

- 1.1 Let the missionary undergo stages of preparation before being sent to the missions.
- 1.2 Let the missionary community be in continuous dialogue with culture
- 2.1 Let on-going seminars on missionary spirituality focus on discernment and dialogue.
- 2.2 Let formators be prepared to answer the needs for missionary preparations.
- 3.1 Let further studies be done on models of Evangelization.

GROUP 3

Topic: Secularization

A. Working Criterion

1. We must promote an “Asian” understanding of the term secularization.
2. We must have the habit of discernment in front of the phenomenon of secularization in one’s own missionary territory
3. We must have a positive attitude towards secularization without being passive in front of it.
4. This process or phenomenon is a challenge for all of us and a chance for our own purification.
5. Secularization is a sign of the times must be read and understood as such.
6. Using a holistic approach could be a criterion in the face of this phenomenon.
7. Secularization is a natural process in any technological society and should be taken as something good.



B. Concrete Proposals (workable within 5-6 years)

1. We must have an adequate formation for both FMA's and SDB's in this area.
2. We must make a study on the new languages of social communications.
3. We must start revising our Pastoral Plans keeping in mind the idea of secularization.
4. Establish a Commission to make an in depth study on the phenomenon of Secularization in the Far East.





Christian Witness in a Multireligious World Recommendations for Conduct

Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue
World Council of Churches
World Evangelical Alliance

Preamble

Mission belongs to the very being of the church. Proclaiming the word of God and witnessing to the world is essential for every Christian. At the same time, it is necessary to do so according to gospel principles, with full respect and love for all human beings.

Aware of the tensions between people and communities of different religious convictions and the varied interpretations of Christian witness, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), the World Council of Churches (WCC) and, at the invitation of the WCC, the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), met during a period of 5 years to reflect and produce this document to serve as a set of recommendations for conduct on Christian witness around the world. This document does not intend to be a theological statement on mission but to address practical issues associated with Christian witness in a multi-religious world.

The purpose of this document is to encourage churches, church councils and mission agencies to reflect on their current practices and to use the recommendations in this document to prepare, where appropriate, their own guidelines for their witness and mission among those of different religions and among those who do not profess any particular religion. It is hoped that Christians across the world will study this document in the light of their own practices in witnessing to their faith in Christ, both by word and deed.

A basis for Christian witness

1. For Christians it is a privilege and joy to give an accounting for the hope that is within them and to do so with gentleness and respect (cf. 1 Peter 3:15).
2. Jesus Christ is the supreme witness (cf. John 18:37). Christian witness is always a sharing in his witness, which takes the form of proclamation of the kingdom, service to neighbour and the total gift of self even if that act of giving leads to the cross. Just as the Father sent the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit, so believers are sent in mission to witness in word and action to the love of the triune God.
3. The example and teaching of Jesus Christ and of the early church must be the guides for Christian mission. For two millennia Christians have sought to follow Christ's way by sharing the good news of God's kingdom (cf. Luke 4:16-20).
4. Christian witness in a pluralistic world includes engaging in dialogue with people of different religions and cultures (cf. Acts 17:22-28).
5. In some contexts, living and proclaiming the gospel is difficult, hindered or even prohibited, yet Christians are commissioned by Christ to continue faithfully in solidarity with one another in their witness to him (cf. Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:44-48; John 20:21; Acts 1:8).
6. If Christians engage in inappropriate methods of exercising mission by resorting to deception and coercive means, they betray the gospel and may cause suffering to others. Such departures call for repentance and remind us of our need for God's continuing grace (cf. Romans 3:23).
7. Christians affirm that while it is their responsibility to witness to Christ, conversion is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 16:7-9; Acts 10:44-47). They recognise that the Spirit blows where the Spirit wills in ways over which no human being has control (cf. John 3:8).

Principles

Christians are called to adhere to the following principles as they seek to fulfil Christ's commission in an appropriate manner, particularly within interreligious contexts.



1. **Acting in God's love.** Christians believe that God is the source of all love and, accordingly, in their witness they are called to live lives of love and to love their neighbour as themselves (cf. Matthew 22:34-40; John 14:15).
2. **Imitating Jesus Christ.** In all aspects of life, and especially in their witness, Christians are called to follow the example and teachings of Jesus Christ, sharing his love, giving glory and honour to God the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 20:21-23).
3. **Christian virtues.** Christians are called to conduct themselves with integrity, charity, compassion and humility, and to overcome all arrogance, condescension and disparagement (cf. Galatians 5:22).
4. **Acts of service and justice.** Christians are called to act justly and to love tenderly (cf. Micah 6:8). They are further called to serve others and in so doing to recognise Christ in the least of their sisters and brothers (cf. Matthew 25:45). Acts of service, such as providing education, health care, relief services and acts of justice and advocacy are an integral part of witnessing to the gospel. The exploitation of situations of poverty and need has no place in Christian outreach. Christians should denounce and refrain from offering all forms of allurements, including financial incentives and rewards, in their acts of service.
5. **Discernment in ministries of healing.** As an integral part of their witness to the gospel, Christians exercise ministries of healing. They are called to exercise discernment as they carry out these ministries, fully respecting human dignity and ensuring that the vulnerability of people and their need for healing are not exploited.
6. **Rejection of violence.** Christians are called to reject all forms of violence, even psychological or social, including the abuse of power in their witness. They also reject violence, unjust discrimination or repression by any religious or secular authority, including the violation or destruction of places of worship, sacred symbols or texts.
7. **Freedom of religion and belief.** Religious freedom including the right to publicly profess, practice, propagate and change one's religion flows from the very dignity of the human person which is grounded in the creation of all human beings in the image and likeness of God (cf. Genesis 1:26). Thus, all human beings have equal rights and responsi-



- bilities. Where any religion is instrumentalised for political ends, or where religious persecution occurs, Christians are called to engage in a prophetic witness denouncing such actions.
8. **Mutual respect and solidarity.** Christians are called to commit themselves to work with all people in mutual respect, promoting together justice, peace and the common good. Interreligious cooperation is an essential dimension of such commitment.
 9. **Respect for all people.** Christians recognise that the gospel both challenges and enriches cultures. Even when the gospel challenges certain aspects of cultures, Christians are called to respect all people. Christians are also called to discern elements in their own cultures that are challenged by the gospel.
 10. **Renouncing false witness.** Christians are to speak sincerely and respectfully; they are to listen in order to learn about and understand others' beliefs and practices, and are encouraged to acknowledge and appreciate what is true and good in them. Any comment or critical approach should be made in a spirit of mutual respect, making sure not to bear false witness concerning other religions.
 11. **Ensuring personal discernment.** Christians are to acknowledge that changing one's religion is a decisive step that must be accompanied by sufficient time for adequate reflection and preparation, through a process ensuring full personal freedom.
 12. **Building interreligious relationships.** Christians should continue to build relationships of respect and trust with people of different religions so as to facilitate deeper mutual understanding, reconciliation and cooperation for the common good.

Recommendations

The Third Consultation organised by the World Council of Churches and the PCID of the Holy See in collaboration with World Evangelical Alliance with participation from the largest Christian families of faith (Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Evangelical and Pentecostal), having acted in a spirit of ecumenical cooperation to prepare this document for consideration by churches, national and regional confessional bodies and mission organisations, and especially those working in interreligious contexts, recommends that these bodies:

1. **Study** the issues set out in this document and where appropriate formulate guidelines for conduct regarding Christian witness applicable to their particular contexts. Where possible this should be done ecumenically, and in consultation with representatives of other religions.
2. **Build** relationships of respect and trust with people of all religions, in particular at institutional levels between churches and other religious communities, engaging in on-going interreligious dialogue as part of their Christian commitment. In certain contexts, where years of tension and conflict have created deep suspicions and breaches of trust between and among communities, interreligious dialogue can provide new opportunities for resolving conflicts, restoring justice, healing of memories, reconciliation and peace-building.
3. **Encourage** Christians to strengthen their own religious identity and faith while deepening their knowledge and understanding of different religions, and to do so also taking into account the perspectives of the adherents of those religions. Christians should avoid misrepresenting the beliefs and practices of people of different religions.
4. **Cooperate** with other religious communities engaging in interreligious advocacy towards justice and the common good and, wherever possible, standing together in solidarity with people who are in situations of conflict.
5. **Call** on their governments to ensure that freedom of religion is properly and comprehensively respected, recognising that in many countries religious institutions and persons are inhibited from exercising their mission. *pray* for their neighbours and their well-being, recognising that prayer is integral to who we are and what we do, as well as to Christ's mission.
6. **Pray** for their neighbours and their well-being, recognising that prayer is integral to who we are and what we do, as well as to Christ's mission.

Appendix: Background to the document

1. In today's world there is increasing collaboration among Christians and between Christians and followers of different religions. The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) of the Holy See and the World Council of Churches' Programme on Interreligious Dia-

logue and Co-operation (WCCIRDC) have a history of such collaboration. Examples of themes on which the PCID/WCC-IRDC have collaborated in the past are: Interreligious Marriage (1994-1997), Interreligious Prayer (1997-1998) and African Religiosity (2000-2004). This document is a result of their work together.

2. There are increasing interreligious tensions in the world today, including violence and the loss of human life. Politics, economics and other factors play a role in these tensions. Christians too are sometimes involved in these conflicts, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, either as those who are persecuted or as those participating in violence. In response to this the PCID and WCC-IRDC decided to address the issues involved in a joint process towards producing shared recommendations for conduct on Christian witness. The WCC-IRDC invited the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) to participate in this process, and they have gladly done so.
3. Initially two consultations were held: the first, in Lariano, Italy, in May 2006, was entitled “Assessing the Reality” where representatives of different religions shared their views and experiences on the question of conversion. A statement from the consultation reads in part: “We affirm that, while everyone has a right to invite others to an understanding of their faith, it should not be exercised by violating others’ rights and religious sensibilities. Freedom of religion enjoins upon all of us the equally non-negotiable responsibility to respect faiths other than our own, and never to denigrate, vilify or misrepresent them for the purpose of affirming superiority of our faith.”
4. The second, an inter-Christian consultation, was held in Toulouse, France, in August 2007, to reflect on these same issues. Questions on Family and Community, Respect for Others, Economy, Marketing and Competition, and Violence and Politics were thoroughly discussed. The pastoral and missionary issues around these topics became the background for theological reflection and for the principles developed in this document. Each issue is important in its own right and deserves more attention that can be given in these recommendations.
5. The participants of the third (inter-Christian) consultation met in Bangkok, Thailand, from 25-28, January, 2011 and finalised this document.

The Evangelizing Mission of the Church Contemporary Asia

Excerpts from the Final Statement of the FABC,
Fifth Plenary Assembly (1990)

The vastness of the Asian continent, the number, complexity and tenacity of its problems could cause in Christians a paralyzing discouragement. But seen with the eyes of faith, these difficulties, together with the signs of hope that accompany them, are as so many challenges to mission. God speaks to us from the travails and the progress of our countries, and bids us from the contemporary challenges of our world to renew our sense of mission.

A Renewal of the Sense of Mission

1) A renewal of our sense of mission means, first of all, renewal of our faith that God so loved the world that he sent his Son to be the savior of all. This Son, through whom all things were made (Jn 1:3; Heb 1:2), became like us in all things, sin alone excepted (Heb 4,15). He went about doing good and healing all who were in the power of evil (Acts 10,38). Filled with the Spirit, he preached the Good News of the Kingdom of God, and commanded his disciples to do the same. Lifted up from the earth, he draws all peoples to himself through his Church, and through other ways unknown to us. He is the light that enlightens every human being (Jn 1:9). He has imprinted traces of his revelation in the world which exists in him (Col 1,16), and in the “seeds of the Word” found in cultures and in other religious traditions. The Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, and ever-present and active in the Church, in the world and in the human heart, leads all to their unity and fulfillment.

From this perspective, mission, being a continuation in the Spirit of the mission of Christ, involves a being with the people, as was Jesus: The

Word became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn 1,14). Therefore, mission includes: being with the people, responding to their needs, with sensitivity to the presence of God in cultures and other religious traditions, and witnessing to the values of God's Kingdom through presence, solidarity, sharing and word. Mission will mean a dialogue with Asia's poor, with its local cultures, and with other religious traditions (FABC1).

2) Renewal of a sense of mission will also require a renewal of our motivations for mission. There has been perceived in some a weakening of these motivations so necessary to persevere in this demanding task. Why indeed, should we evangelize?

a) We evangelize, first of all, from a deep sense of gratitude to God, the Father "who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing" (Eph 1,3), and sent the Spirit into our hearts so that we may share in God's own life. Mission is above all else an overflow of this life from grateful hearts transformed by the grace of God.

That is why it is so important for us Christian to have a deep faith-experience of the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom 8,39), that love which has been poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom 5:5). Without a personal experience of this love received as gift and mercy, no sense of mission can flourish.

b) Our mission is also a mandate. We evangelize because we are sent into the whole world to make disciples of all nations. The one who sends us is Jesus, who has been sent by the Father, and to whom has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt 28:18). He sends us on a mission which is part of the epiphany of God's plan to bring all things together under Christ as head (Eph 1:9-10). We cannot fulfill this mission apart from him (Jn 15,4-5). But he assures us that he will remain with us all days till the end of time (Mt 28,20), and he has sent us his Spirit so that we may be his witnesses to the end of the earth (Acts 1,8).

c) We evangelize also because we believe in the Lord Jesus. We have received the gift of faith. We have become Christians. "The Christian vocation is by its very nature a vocation to the apostolate (Vat-

ican Council II, *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, 2). That is why Pope Paul VI emphatically states: “It is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the Kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn” (*Evangelization in the Modern World*, 24).

Unfortunately for many Catholics, faith is only something to be received and celebrated. They do not feel it is something to be shared. The missionary nature of the gift of faith must be inculcated in all Christians. All must be helped to realize that God has called us to be Christians not only so that we may be saved but that we may collaborate in the work of the world’s salvation, and invite those whom God draws to the Church to share in our faith.

- d) We evangelize also because we have been incorporated by baptism into the Church, which is missionary by its very nature because it is the result of the mission of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Vatican Council II, *Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity*, 2). The Church exists in order to evangelize (*Evangelization in the Modern World*, 14), and each member, by virtue of the sacraments of baptism and confirmation has received the right and duty to the apostolate from the Lord himself (Vatican Council II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, 33).
- e) And finally, we evangelize because the Gospel is leaven for liberation and for the transformation of society. Our Asian world needs the values of the Kingdom and of Christ in order to bring about the human development, justice, peace and harmony with God, among peoples and with all creation that the peoples of Asia long for.

Yes, for Asia and its teeming millions also we must affirm: “The Lord is the goal of human history, the focal point of the desires of history and civilization, the center of humankind, the joy of all hearts, and the fulfillment of all aspirations” (Vatican Council II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 45).

We look forward to the day when daughters and sons of the Church, imbued with these motivations, will see in their evangelizing mission not

only a duty that they must fulfill but a privilege they can be thankful for, and a right they will faithfully safeguard. Christians formed in a missionary spirituality will be joyful witnesses of the values of the Kingdom, and of Christ whose disciples they are.

- 3) The renewal of our sense of mission will mean, thirdly, that the acting subject of mission is the local church living and acting in communion with the universal Church. It is the local churches and communities which can discern and work out (in dialogue with each other and with other persons of goodwill) the way the Gospel is best proclaimed, the Church set up, the values of God's Kingdom realized in their own place and time. In fact, it is by responding to and serving the needs of the peoples of Asia that the different Christian communities become truly local churches.

This local church, which is the acting subject of mission, is the people of God in a given milieu, the whole Christian community - laity, Religious and clergy. It is the whole diocese, the parish, the Basic Ecclesial Community and other groups. Their time has come for Asia.

Hence, we can see from the point of view of mission how vital is the formation of fully participatory Christian communities where people experience that they "belong" and that together they are the Church. On the other hand, such communities become fully Church only when they accept their share in the Church's mission.

The Mode of Mission in Asia

Mission may find its greatest urgency in Asia; it also finds in our continent a distinctive mode. We affirm, together with others, that "the proclamation of Jesus Christ is the center and primary element of evangelization" (Statement of the PABC All-Asia Conference on Evangelization.; Suwon, South Korea, August 24-31,1988). But the proclamation of Jesus Christ in Asia means, first of all, the witness of Christians and of Christian communities to the values of the Kingdom of God, a proclamation through Christ like deeds. For Christians in Asia, to proclaim Christ means above all to live like him, in the midst of our neighbors of other



faiths and persuasions, and to do his deeds by the power of his grace. Proclamation through dialogue and deeds — this is the first call to the Churches in Asia.

Mission in Asia will also seek through dialogue to serve the cause of unity of the peoples of Asia marked by such a diversity of beliefs, cultures and socio-political structures. In an Asia marked by diversity and torn by conflicts, the Church must in a special way be a sacrament - a visible sign and instrument of unity and harmony.

But we shall not be timid when God opens the door for us to proclaim explicitly the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior and the answer to the fundamental questions of human existence. We shall proclaim the Gospel in the manner of the Lord Jesus, who expressed his mission in these terms:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set the liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Lk 4,18-19).

Despite the goodwill and sometimes heroic efforts of evangelizers, our deeds have often proven inadequate. What was lacking?

It seems to us now that in confrontation with Asian realities we have preached about values which ought to be pursued, but have often failed to follow through with effective actions that would help dismantle structures of sin oppressive of our peoples. We now recognize the need to plan and do appropriate deeds consequent upon dialogue and prayerful discernment.

Our minority status should not deter us from patiently working out in collaboration with Christians of other Churches and peoples of other religions and persuasions the steps needed to liberate our people from the bondage of sin and its societal manifestations, and to inscribe the values of the Kingdom in Asian society. For the Lord assures us: “Fear not, little flock, for it has pleased the Father to give you the Kingdom” (Lk 12,32).





Initial Proclamation In Catholic Educational Institutions

(Secrétariat Général de l'Enseignement Catholique, France)

Pierre Robitaille

Introduction

In November 2005 the Bishops Conference of France adopted the *Texte National pour l'Orientation de la Catéchèse en France et Principes d'Organisation* (National Document for the Orientation of Catechesis in France and Organisational Principles)¹⁰⁶.

The document *Principes d'Organisation* explains the organisation of catechesis at the diocesan level in four “catechetical proposals”:

- catechesis oriented to all stages of life,
- by areas and by clusters,
- articulated with the liturgical year,
- in response to sacramental requests.

Catholic educational institutions are challenged directly and named explicitly in the catechetical activity of the second proposal “*an organisation of catechesis by areas and by clusters*”. They are invited, as part of their mission in the Church, to participate in the “initial proclamation” as are families and ecclesial movements.

*“We call each of these areas and clusters to develop even more the concern that already animates them towards faith in agreeing to support this form the ministry of the word called “initial proclamation”.*¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Bishops' Conference of France, *Texte National pour l'Orientation de la Catéchèse en France et Principes d'Organisation* (Bayard/Cerf/Fleurus-Mame: Paris, Novembre 2006). Henceforth this is referred to as TNOCF.

¹⁰⁷ TNOCF, p.81

I – Understand “Initial Proclamation”

Since the publication of the National Document, the term “initial proclamation” is used with different meanings, sometimes even in contradiction within the document itself. It is important, therefore, to redefine what it is, and its specificity compared to other approaches.

I-1. Characteristics of Initial Proclamation

By studying closely the National Document - even if it barely developed initial proclamation - it underlines a set of five useful features to identify, articulate and deepen the reflection and practice of initial proclamation.

- ***Logic of circumstance, of ordinary daily life***

Confined mainly in the context of daily life, initial proclamation is at the heart of ordinary daily life. It follows, therefore, the logic of the moment, of the circumstance. There may be many starting points: pedagogical and educational activities, happy or painful events, reading, surfing the internet or television programs,...

“An act of initial proclamation is always on the spot, motivated by an event, a moment, a circumstance or all other needs which demand that we to take the initiative.”

Therefore, one does not organise “activities of initial proclamation,” nor a “celebration of initial proclamation,” ... Nevertheless it is true that certain activities foster more than others fundamental questions and the possibilities of initial proclamation.

- ***A logic of resonance***

Initial proclamation lies at the heart of people’s lives and their search for meaning in their lives. It does not correspond to a conventional discourse.

It responds to statements or to spontaneous or encouraged questions fostered either by educational activities, by a way of being and acting that raises questions and fosters a search for meaning.



Initial proclamation takes therefore in the context of relationship with children, youth and adults of the educative community, relationship in which existential questions may expressed, heard and allow dialogue in truth.

“It takes place in the context of an encounter, “according to the same pedagogy of Christ who constantly approaches, meets, seeks relationship, calls to conversion and to faith”¹⁰⁸

• ***A logic of witness***

In an initial proclamation, someone reacts to a situation and dares to speak about the name of the person and life of Jesus who gives life. This is a personal testimony, backed by the faith of the Church.

“Initial proclamation is oriented to listen what keeps believers alive.”¹⁰⁹

“In an initial proclamation, someone reacts to a situation by presenting oneself as a believer.”¹¹⁰

If any witness has as its basis a personal character, in a Catholic institution, it is part of the collective mission of the educative community.

• ***A logic of making explicit***

A proclamation is a declaration, which is why the term “implicit proclamation” is inherently contradictory and “explicit proclamation” a tautology.¹¹¹

An initial proclamation states what keeps believers alive. It is coming out of the implicit to say our reasons to believe and hope.

The importance of this passage to the explicit is even greater now that with the advent of secularisation, the implicit ... is hardly heard.

¹⁰⁸ TNOCF, p.81

¹⁰⁹ *idem*

¹¹⁰ *idem*

¹¹¹ A tautology may be voluntary to reinforce an idea. The emphasis on explicit dimension must not cause the use of the term “implied proclamation.”



“As indicated by the word “proclamation”, we mean any effort to formulate that is structured, rational, explicit and adapted by the faith.”¹¹²

• ***A logic from the threshold***

If catechesis is a free initiative, initial proclamation does not expect a response of adhesion from the listener. It is above all words, words which by its quality, may be an invitation to take the path towards Christ, to enter into a relationship with Christ.

“These are specific proposals, which do not already presuppose a voluntary act on the part of those to whom they are addressed.”¹¹³

“Whoever receives the proclamation is free to listen, to accept or reject it, to let oneself be questioned.”¹¹⁴

I-2. Requirements related to these characteristics

On this basis four consequences may be drawn out:

• ***The necessity to listen***

If one wishes that “initial proclamation takes place at the heart of people’s lives and their search for meaning of life,” as noted above, this requires real attention and listening to others and their situation in life.

• ***The necessity to total coherence***

Initial proclamation requires an atmosphere that stirs up interest to go further, through a real attention to the person, through the permanent concern for the quality of relationships. This witness of life makes explicit proclamation credible and motivates embarking on a journey. It builds on what one sees in the whole educative community

• ***The necessity to returning to the source***

To bear witness requires that this word may be a word in truth: it is not a matter of reciting an article of the catechism, but in speaking

¹¹² TNOCF, p.81

¹¹³ TNOCF, p.29

¹¹⁴ TNOCF, p.81



about in what way Jesus Christ and his gospel enables us to live. Hence the importance of returning the source that nourishes our faith.

- ***The necessity of formation***

The shift to make explicit requires that the word be clear, audible to the listener, centred on the basics, which means having the words to express one's faith and build one's own witness on the faith of the Church. Hence, the importance of the time of formation to help structure one's own faith.

- ***The necessity of adaptation and creativity***

Although initial proclamation itself is neither planned, nor organised, however, some activities increase the likelihood of an initial proclamation more than others. The proposals are numerous, but it is important that they be adapted or conceived closely in line with the mission of the school and the needs of people.

I-3. *The essence of initial proclamation: Kerygma*

The term "initial proclamation" is often associated with the word *kerygma*. *Kerygma* is etymologically "proclamation aloud." In the New Testament it refers to the contents of this proclamation, namely, the first statement of the Christian faith, the profession of faith of the first Christians, the core of the apostolic preaching.

It often includes three key statements:

- Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the son of God;
- Crucified, he is risen, and the one who speaks personally testifies to this;
- Proclamation of forgiveness and call to conversion.

The early *kerygma*¹¹⁵, gradually integrated dogmatic statements against the various heresies, would develop to become the professions of faith known as "Apostles' Creed" and "Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed."

¹¹⁵ There are many examples in the Acts of the Apostles and in Paul's epistles, for example: "God has made Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Ac 2,36). The shortest *kerygma* « Jesus is Lord" (1 Co 12,3).



This term clarifies that initial proclamation:

- is focused on the core of what keeps us alive as believers: the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus;
- it calls to conversion, in the sense of a change of heart and a greater faith;
- it is the logic of witness who speaks about one's own encounter with the Risen Christ, and not the transmission of information.
- personal witness is rooted on the faith of the Church.

Moreover, to say that initial proclamation is linked to context of life, means that if it bears witness to this *kerygma* it does so not only by expressing the essence of the faith, but also - and perhaps especially - by bearing witness to the presence of the Risen Christ in our lives today.

I-4. The term "Initial"

The initial term has several meanings. If for some an initial proclamation could mean a initial contact with the Gospel, in the expression "initial proclamation" this term is not centred on the chronology but on the fundamental aspect and on the path to conversion. There are as many initial proclamations as there are possible invitations to return to the essence of the life of faith and the call to convert our hearts.

"This proclamation is called "initial" because it calls to believe and leads to the threshold where conversion may be possible. It aims at stirring up the desire, invites to a path of faith, generates interest for it" ¹¹⁶

I-5. Distinctions between initial proclamation and catechesis

In initial proclamation, the setting is centred on the proclamation therefore on the messenger, "first born in the faith" who cannot keep for himself the good news which is at the centre of his life. So it is word of the witness "which does not already presuppose a voluntary act on the part of those to whom it is addressed"¹¹⁷

Catechesis, "is what the Christian community offers to those who freely wish to participate in the experience and knowledge of the

¹¹⁶ TNOCF, p.29

¹¹⁷ *idem*



faith.”¹¹⁸. It is not possible other than through a request of a person who is therefore the actor. “One joins the catechetical journey by deciding for oneself to take the move or to accept the invitation to join.”¹¹⁹

Initial Proclamation and pre-catechesis

The two terms are not synonymous. Footnote 187 of the General Catechetical Directory¹²⁰ states: “In the present directory it is supposed that those to whom *kerygmatic catechesis* or *pre-catechesis* is addressed will be interested in the Gospel. In situations where they have no such interest then primary proclamation is called for.”

We find here the importance of knowing whether there is a need of accompaniment or not.

II. Facilitate initial proclamation in the Catholic educational institution

II-1. A prerequisite: redefine the mission of the Catholic institution

The mission of a Catholic educational institution is an educative mission. The documents of the Church regularly recall this: the School fulfils its mission of evangelisation by being a school.

Thus no. 16 of the document *The Catholic School* of the Congregation for Catholic Education of 1977 states:

“In the light of her mission of salvation, the Church considers that the Catholic school provides a privileged environment for the complete formation of her members, and that it also provides a highly important service to mankind. Nevertheless, she is aware of the many problems that exist and objections that are made against Catholic schools sometimes regarding the very validity of their existence and their functions. The issue is really part of a much wider problem which faces all institutions as such in a society as the present, characterised by rapid and profound change.”

¹¹⁸ TNOCF, p.27

¹¹⁹ TNOCF, p.46

¹²⁰ General Directory for Catechesis. 1997



Or in another document *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*¹²¹ of 1997:

“The ecclesial nature of the school lies at the heart of its identity as an educational institution. It is a real ecclesial subject Church because of its educational activity where ‘faith, culture and life merge harmoniously”

Hence, the emphasis is also on the quality of education provided there. So we can read in no. 17 of the most recent document¹²²:

“21. One of the fundamental requirements for an educator in a Catholic school is his or her possession of a solid professional formation...

22. The professional formation of the educator implies a vast range of cultural, psychological and pedagogical skills, characterised by autonomy, planning and evaluation capacity, creativity, openness to innovation, aptitude for updating, research and experimentation. It also demands the ability to synthesise professional skills with educational motivations, giving particular attention to the relational situation required today by the increasingly collegial exercise of the teaching profession.”

Therefore, it is central to its educational mission, neither on the periphery nor parallel to it, that the Catholic institution can fulfil its mission of being Church, while complying with the contract that binds it to the State and with respect for all who are members of the educative community.

II-2. To be an “audiovisual” of the Gospel in the institution

Through initial proclamation there is another vision of the institution which unfolds with an invitation to express the proclamation of the Gospel through the lives of each and everyone.

It is a constant invitation to be a Gospel “audio-visual”¹²³ by linking the educational experience with religious practices, with a witness to

¹²¹ Congregation for Catholic Education.

¹²² Congregation For Catholic Education, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools. A Shared Mission between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful* (2007).

¹²³ A successful audiovisual associates closely a complementary image and sound, avoiding the juxtaposition of the two components into a single product.

what is experienced, with what – or for whom - keeps us alive and strong in faith, both individually as well as a community.

• **Made to be seen**

An educational institution is a “school sign of life” each time that

- the daily experience of the institution is “Good News”.
- the school activity allows students to grow: by content, pedagogy and educational relationship
- the time for reflection on fundamental issues, on religions, on Catholicism ... are organised.
- educational activities help develop attitudes of being attentive to others and the environment, of sharing, of mutual aid and of solidarity, of commitment.
- visible signs make sense to its members.

To understand the meaning of what is seen or desired

This is for example the case when:

- there is an explicit link between educative plan with the Gospel and the teachings of the Church.
- This link is present in the remarks of the Principal at the enrolment interview, at the parents’ meetings, at the welcome given to new teachers and staff
- members of the educational community succeed in witnessing their faith in various meetings when fundamental questions are asked
- during moments of reflection whether it is offered institutionally or not: Governing Board, days of educative communities, volunteer groups ...

II-3. Education and initial proclamation¹²⁴

For this reflection, three levels were identified for education to happen: content, pedagogy and educational attitude. These points can constitute a way of living the Gospel and condition which makes the proclamation of the Good News in the institution credible.

¹²⁴ This section was written Commission for National Pastoral Animation in 2007. It is extracted from the 2007.11 CNAC sheet: *Pédagogie en Pastorale & Pastorale en Pédagogie*. Site : <http://ec-ressources.fr/> item: Commissions nationales >CNAP

1. The educational content

• *Report about the programs*

Although the programs are defined, the implementation is none the less different from one teacher to another,

- because their formulation is at a general level;
- because they deliberately leave the choice up to the teacher;
- because everyone interprets them accordingly.

This indicates, therefore, the latitude that an educator has in his or her class and it shows that, even by just reading the program, neutrality does not exist. This is the case regarding issues such as: What conception of the person and of society do these programs reveal? Is the program consistent to its own concept? How consistent is it with the educational plan of the school?

• *The textbooks*

One must be equally vigilant about how textbooks integrate the programs: their content, the choices made, anthropology, and even the underlying ideology ...

2. The pedagogy

To attain the goals of Catholic education, it is important that education contributes to the integral formation of the person.

Some paths:

• *Foster a pedagogy of success*

- through confidence building
- through progressive learning and a pedagogy that provides the time
- through formative evaluation
- through pedagogy of contract

• *Exercise the pedagogy of proximity*

- through the knowledge of the student, of his or her family and sociological context
- through the introduction of time to listen, to share, to regulate

- ***Practice a pedagogy of inquiry***
 - which develops critical thinking
 - which opens to existential questioning through extracurricular activities, witnesses ...
 - which promotes learning from one's curiosity, critical thinking
 - which makes the content as objects of reflection and judgment and not just of memorisation...

- ***Develop interiority and sensitivity***
 - by providing moments of silence
 - by fostering sensitivity to beauty, through works of art and of music
 - by expanding opportunities for autonomy
 - by introducing time for reflection regarding one's experiences

- ***Educating for life in society***
 - through openness to the realities of the city and the world
 - through learning how to work as a team, the democratic functioning, life in an association
 - through the development of the sense of morality and of gratuity

- ***Take into account the physical development and affective maturity***
 - cultivating the desire to excel through sport
 - putting in place a genuine affective and sexual education

3. The educational attitude

The educational attitude represents a third level of analysis and of action in education. There are four paths:

- ***Faith in the educational potential of students***

Whatever his capacity, or the marks of the child or youth, it is a matter of believing in his or her possibilities to progress. This does not prevent one from realistically proposing relevant stages

- ***Capacity to listen, dialogue, mental availability***

This corresponds to the ability to decentralise, to listen without trying to always want to give advice, to respond, to make the effort to momentarily forget one's own concerns.

- ***Being an adult before a child or youth***

This requires to be in authority not by statute but by virtue of one's expertise and one's person, which means to have personal exigencies, to be happy with oneself. This requires unity among the teaching staff, an ability to work as a team.

- ***Be clear about their educational options and those of the institution***

This requires reflection on one's concept of the teaching profession, a knowledge of the educational plan of the school and of Catholic Education, of the guidelines of the Diocesan Catholic Education Office and, where applicable, of the charism of the Congregation.

III. Situate initial proclamation in the pastoral context

III-1. Initial proclamation and pastoral animation

In order to situate initial proclamation in the context of the whole pastoral animation of the Catholic institution, it is appropriate to adopt the four axes of pastoral animation specified in the policy document on "School Pastoral Assistant" adopted by the CNEC in November 2007.

- *Axis 1. Make the school a place of education animated by the Gospel spirit*
- *Axis 2. Offer to each and everyone the opportunity to discover Christ*
- *Axis 3. Make available to all those who wish suitable ways to grow in faith*
- *Axis 4. Integrate the Catholic institution and its activities in the life of the Local Church*

Initial proclamation corresponds to the second axis, but relies on the first which gives it credibility to take up the above proposals.

These two lines do not exhaust all the religious and spiritual needs of young people. It is important that the institution make internal or external proposals for those who wish to go further. This is the meaning of axes 3 and 4.

III-2. Initial proclamation and catechesis in Catholic institution

• *Initial proclamation*

In the “National Document” Catholic educational institutions are explicitly invited, as part of their mission in the Church, to participate in the “initial proclamation” as are families and ecclesial movements.

“We call each of these places and clusters to develop even further the concern which already animates it with regard to faith, in accepting to assume this form of ministry of the word called “initial proclamation”¹²⁵.”

• *Catechesis*

Conversely catechesis implies guidelines and diocesan organisation

“Local characteristics, available resources or constraints of geographical location may also cause them to organise systematic catechesis by modules. The bishop will then specify the diocesan catechetical project how these clusters are organised with local Christian communities. The mission statement of the person responsible will mention this. A Catholic institution which welcomes children from numerous scattered parishes, a movement or a chaplaincy of public education may be led to organise catechesis in response to requests for baptism, first holy communion or confirmation. Ecclesial coherence of catechetical action requires again a diocesan agreement which specifies the conditions for such responsibility.”

Initial proclamation is, therefore, inherent in the mission of Catholic schools, catechesis is subject to the diocesan plan, to human and material capacity of the institution to organise it, as well as to requests addressed to it.

In conclusion

The documents of the Church remind us that the Catholic institution fulfils its mission as Church by being a school with classes which are rigorous and of high standards. Its mission is essentially a mission of service

¹²⁵ TNOCF, p.81

(*diakonia*) of education. It is at the heart of this mission in society that it should proclaim what keeps us living as believers.

If catechesis is part of a global organisation at the diocesan level and may not be compulsory to persons as it is based on a free adhesion, it is equally clear that initial proclamation is an integral part the mission of the Catholic institution. It participates in a specific manner in the mission of the Church which is to evangelise, that takes into account its particular mission – the mission of education - which is somehow its “own character” in the Church.

Initial proclamation will bear fruit if an overall climate makes it credible and relevant. It will bear fruit if it bears witness to truth invigorating oneself through a personal and collective return to the sources. It will bear fruit if there is an effort to form in order to foster a “structured, rational, explicit and adapted formulation of the faith.”¹²⁶

¹²⁶ TNOCF, p.81

Religion and Young People in Our Secular Age

In his *A Secular Age*, which won the 2007 Templeton prize for progress toward research or discoveries about spiritual realities, the philosopher Charles Taylor suggests that a society may be defined as “secular” when it is 1) one in which one “can engage fully in politics without ever encountering God, that is, coming to a point where the crucial importance of the God of Abraham for this whole enterprise is brought home forcefully and unmistakably,”¹²⁷ 2) one in which there is a “falling off of religious belief and practice, in people turning away from God, and no longer going to Church,”¹²⁸ and 3) one in which belief in God “is understood to be one option among many” which clearly implies that “at least in certain milieu, it may be hard to sustain one’s faith.”¹²⁹

In our region, *Ecclesia in Asia* no. 39 points out that “while acknowledging its many positive effects (of globalization) [...] there is also the aspect of a *cultural* globalization, made possible by the modern communications media, which is quickly drawing Asian societies into a global consumer culture that is both secularist and materialistic. The result is an eroding of traditional family and social values which until now had sustained peoples and societies.” It is in the light of the above situation that the VIII Plenary Assembly of the FABC (2004) decried the effects of globalization and its consequent secularism:

“Economic globalization is also bringing cultural globalization in its wake. Since the middle of the 20th century Western secularism has been strongly influencing Asian societies. But at no time has the secularizing process, now with a significant post-modern spirit of individ-

¹²⁷ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

ualistic sense of freedom, been more rapid and effective in reshaping the value systems of Asian families than in the last two decades of the 20th century. The bearers of this change are economics, as we have seen, and the on-going revolution in mass global communication that has truly made the world a global village.

The technological revolution has, indeed, many positive features. It is bringing into Asia a deeper awareness of individual dignity, autonomy, and human rights so characteristic of the West, it creates and promotes global solidarity almost instantaneously in times of great disaster. It has made knowledge of the world and of the human person to grow by leaps and bounds. The application and sharing of that knowledge has generally and significantly improved human life

But there is terrible downside to this process of cultural globalization. [...] Its spirit, informed by neo-liberalism, secularism, materialism, hedonism and consumerism, is alien to the religious-oriented cultures of Asia. Relational, interconnected and interdependent lifestyles of Asian peoples are also undermined. Many values of the technological culture run counter to Asian family values [...]

Since families are both the repositories and channels of culture, the impact of the emerging secular culture in Asian families is, indeed, very disturbing. Frequently it is the elite of Asian families that are the first receivers of such secular culture, for it is among them that the tools of social communication are most available. But the emerging culture also reaches down to the grassroots since local TV, radio, and cinema ape the media programs served by the West whose values and portrayal of family and life gradually become normative for viewers and listeners...”¹³⁰

This affirmation is better explained by Charles Taylor’s analysis that many young people in secular societies today are not only “looking for a more direct experience of the sacred, for greater immediacy, spontaneity, and spiritual depth,”¹³¹ but they also long for “a kind of unity and wholeness of the self, a reclaiming of the place of feeling, against the one-sided

¹³⁰ FABC VIII, I, 5, in *FAPA* IV, 8-9.

¹³¹ Taylor, 506.



pre-eminence of reason, and a reclaiming of the body and its pleasures from the inferior and often guilt-ridden place it has been allowed in the disciplined, instrumental identity.”¹³²

He further clarifies that “this kind of search is often called by its practitioners ‘spirituality’, and is opposed to ‘religion’. This contrast reflects the rejection of ‘institutional religion’, that is, the authority claims made by churches which see it as their mandate to pre-empt the search, or to maintain it within certain definite limits, and above all to dictate a certain code or behaviour.”¹³³ They prefer “a kind of autonomous exploration, which is opposed to a simple surrender to authority; and people who engage in this kind of spiritual path are indeed, put off by the moralism and code-fetishism which they find in the churches.”¹³⁴ Although this ‘spirituality’ is often indiscriminately lumped together under the label of “New Age,” they are in reality “mere extensions of the human potential movement, hence totally focussed on the immanent, and/or being a variety of invitations to self-absorption, without any concern for anything beyond the agent, whether the surrounding society, or the transcendent,”¹³⁵ hence, they are reputed for “its subjectivism, its focus on the self and its wholeness, its emphasis on feeling.”¹³⁶

Charles Taylor outlines the characteristics of this new spiritual panorama, positively, as bringing about the breaking down of barriers and divisions between different religious groups. Inversely, today there is “a rise in the number of those who state themselves to be atheists, agnostics, or to have no religion, in many countries, including Britain, France, the U.S., and Australia. But beyond this, the gamut of intermediate positions greatly widens: many people drop out of active practice while still declaring themselves as belonging to some confession, or believing in God. On another dimension, the gamut of beliefs in something beyond widens,

¹³² Ibid., 508.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 509.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 508.

¹³⁶ Ibid.



fewer declaring belief in a personal God, while more hold to something like an impersonal force; in other words a wider range of people express religious beliefs which move outside Christian orthodoxy.”¹³⁷

Thus, people today, says Taylor, declare “some faith in God, and identifying with a Church, without actually attending its services.”¹³⁸ They take “a distance from their ancestral churches without altogether breaking off. They retain some of the beliefs of Christianity, for instance, and/or they retain some nominal tie with the church, still identify in some way with it: they will reply, say, to a poll by saying that they are Anglican, or Catholic.”¹³⁹ Hence, more and more people “consider themselves Catholic while not accepting many crucial dogmas, or they combine Christianity with Buddhism, or they pray while not being certain they believe.”¹⁴⁰

Sociologists try to come to grips with this new phenomenon by inventing new terms like “believing without belonging”, or “diffusive Christianity.”¹⁴¹ Quoting John Wolfe, Taylor describes “diffusive Christianity” as

“a vague non-doctrinal kind of belief: God exists; Christ was a good man and an example to be followed; people should lead decent lives on charitable terms with their neighbours, and those who do so will go to Heaven when they die. Those who suffer in this world will receive compensation in the next. The churches were regarded with apathy rather than hostility: their social activities made some contribution to the community. Sunday School was felt to provide a necessary part of the upbringing of children, and the rites of passage required formal religious sanction. Association was maintained by attendance at certain annual and seasonal festivals, but weekly participation in worship was felt to be unnecessary and excessive. Women and children were more likely than men to be regularly involved, but this did

¹³⁷ Ibid., 513.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 514.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 518.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 513.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 518.



not imply that adult males were hostile; merely-it can be surmised-that they tended to see themselves as the main breadwinners and felt that women should therefore represent the family's interests in the religious arena. The emphasis was on the practical and the communal rather than on the theological and the individual."¹⁴²

But in this context the desire to a deeper practice of religion for one's spiritual life remains. This need, claims Taylor, is answered through involvement through some form of meditation, charitable work like the volunteer movement, a pilgrimage or some other form of prayer or religious celebration. In their search for meaning in to a secular society "the traditional figure of the pilgrim can be given a new sense today, as young people travel in search of faith or meaning in their lives. The pilgrimage is also a quest."¹⁴³ Thus, it is no surprise that "people are drawn to a pilgrimage, or a World Youth Day, or a meditation group, or a prayer circle."¹⁴⁴ Young people feel the need to give "the continuing importance of the festive. People still seek those moments of fusion, which wrench us out of the everyday, and put us in contact with something beyond ourselves." We see this in pilgrimages, mass assemblies like World Youth Days, in one-off gatherings of people moved by some highly resonating event."¹⁴⁵

Although Taizé is not totally festive it draws young, claims Taylor, people because there they feel welcomed as searchers and feel free to explore Christianity without any obligation to believe nor to an expected outcome. In Taizé "there certainly is the departure from the everyday, and the contact with something greater, a sense of universal brotherhood, even if not always its source in the fatherhood of God; but the sense of fusion is not always prominent. It is not, however, totally absent; a central part of the Taizé experience is singing together, chants especially designed by the community, each in his/her own language, a model and

¹⁴² Ibid., 519. Taylor quotes John Wolfe, *God and Greater Britain* (London: Routeledge, 1994) 92-93.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 517.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 516.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 516-517.



foretaste of the reconciliation sought between peoples and cultures. It is not surprising that Taizé should provide the template from which World Youth Days were developed; a form of Christian pilgrimage/assembly for the Age of Authenticity.”¹⁴⁶

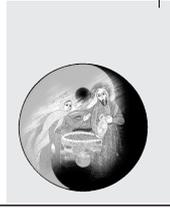
This phenomenon, claims Taylor, also explains “the growth of non-Christian religions, particularly those originating in the Orient, and the proliferation of New Age modes of practice, of views which bridge the humanist/spiritual boundary, of practices which link spirituality and therapy.”¹⁴⁷

In the light of the above analysis, Taylor underlines that in our secular age, although we experience falling off or alienation from the Church or institution, those who are committed to secularism are, in reality a relatively small minority. In fact, “in terms of belief, nominalism rather than secularism is the residual category”!¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 517.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 513.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 520.



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