

Acts of the  
**Study Days**  
on  
**The Salesian Mission  
and the Initial Proclamation  
of Christ in Oceania**  
in the Context of Traditional  
Religions and Cultures,  
and Cultures in the Process  
of Secularisation

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## Introduction







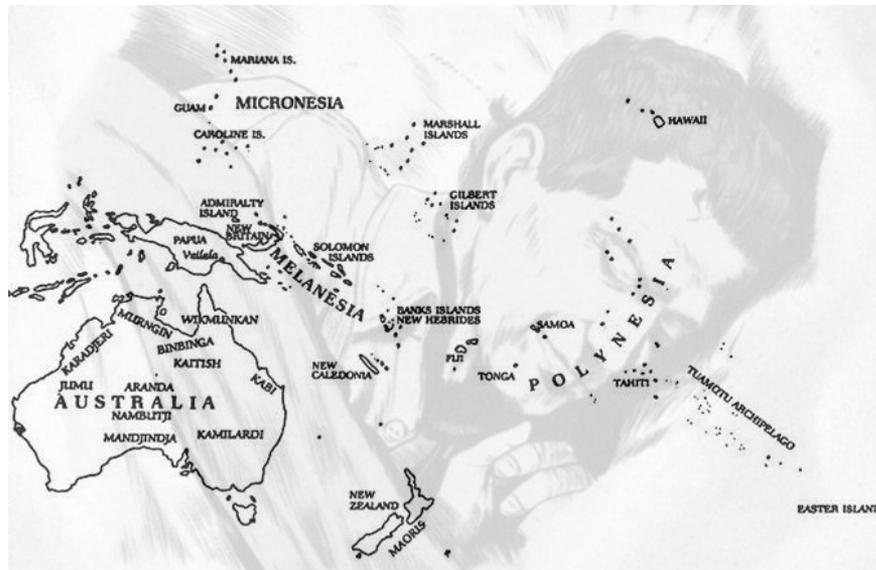
## Don Bosco Come to Oceania!

*(Excerpts from the 4<sup>th</sup> missionary dream narrated  
by Don Bosco on July 2, 1885)*

... Finally, I thought I was in Australia. Here too there was an Angel, but he had no name. He shepherded and marched, urging the people to march toward the south.

Australia was not a continent, but a number of islands grouped together, whose inhabitants were varied in temperament and appearance. There was a big crowd of children living there who tried to come towards us, but could not because of the distance and the waters that separated them from us. Nevertheless, they held out their hands towards Don Bosco and the Salesians, saying:

*“Come and help us! Why do you not fulfil what your fathers have begun”?* Many held back, but others made every possible effort to push



their way through the wild animals to reach the Salesians, who were unknown to me, and they began to sing "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord*".

I little distance away I could see groups of many islands, but could not distinguish any details. I felt that all this indicated that Divine Providence was offering part of this evangelical field to the Salesians, but for some future period. Their efforts will bear fruit, for the hand of God will be constantly outstretched over them, unless they become unworthy of His graces...

*(Biographical Memoirs, XVII, 595)*



## The Study Days

The Study Days are a development of the *Seminar for Missionary Animation and Formation* organised 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 Oceania** 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 Challenges of the Mission “Ad gentes” in Oceania*** (2004).

**But is the topic on initial proclamation relevant in Oceania where a great majority are baptised Christians?** It is important to recall that at baptism the child received the *habitus* of the faith (the capacity to believe), but not the personal act of faith (the firm commitment to orient one's own life according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ). However, in the context of Oceania's traditional societies and secularised cultures today, the initial proclamation a child receives in the family is often not adequate to become the foundation of a robust faith. Without this initial conversion and initial personal faith, catechesis risks becoming sterile. In this light, even Oceania's Catholics who frequent our parishes and Religious Education classes in our schools as well as other Christians who frequent our youth centres all need initial proclamation of the Gospel in view of developing their faith and personal adhesion to Christ.

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. Anna Maria Gervasone FMA and Fr. Alfred Maravilla SDB as moderators of the Study Days, Sr. Pamela Vecina FMA and Fr. John Cabrido 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 Oceania.

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 Oceania of the new perspectives and insights emerging from these Study Days.





## Rediscover the Dynamics of the Initial Proclamation

Fr. Václav Klement SDB  
General Councillor for the Missions

Good morning and welcome to everyone!

Before my coming to East Asia and Oceania I was in Taizé for three days praying with 5000 young people from all around the world. Then I attended in France for 5 days a meeting of 70 Salesians from Western Europe to discuss the 'Project Europe' together with the Rector Major, Fr. Pascual Chávez. I bring his warm greetings and blessing to all of you!

After many months of preparation, we are together here in the Emmaus Haus at Boroko East, Port Moresby: Salesians of Don Bosco, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Caritas Sisters of Jesus, Salesian Cooperators and Don Bosco Past Pupils from different countries of Oceania. This is already our **second meeting in Oceania**. Indeed, since 1989 and every 6 years thereafter, the Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians shared together a formation opportunity on themes on the level of East Asian part of EAO region: *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 Oceania"(2004, Port Moresby). Starting 2004 the event was opened to all groups of the Salesian Family as well distinct meetings were held in East Asia and in Oceania. After the GC26 of the SDB (2008) this gathering was transformed to 'Study Days' regarding the Salesian mission. Now the focus is not so much on the formation of many missionaries, but on the occasion to study and reflect deeply on some specific themes regarding the mission of evangelisation.

We have chosen '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 here in



Oceania; next year 2012 will be for Africa and the last 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 SDB Delegation of Papua New Guinea – Solomon Islands, especially to the Delegate Fr. Rafael Galve, the Rector of this house, Fr. John Cabrido, respective Superiors of all Salesian Family groups in Oceania and all who contributed to prepare and make these Oceania Study Days a reality.

During these days we are called to **re-discover the dynamics of the initial proclamation of the Gospel**, starting from our daily experiences. The choice of initial proclamation of Jesus Christ as the theme of our study and reflection these days implies that we, members of the Salesian Family, are challenged to reflect on the missionary action of the Church as well as examine that of the Salesian Family. 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 nature<sup>1</sup> 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 often we lack time to reflect about our own actions, convictions and motivations. *Redemptoris Missio* (n.44) insists that initial proclamation "is the permanent priority of mission." It "has a central and irreplaceable role" in the mission of the Church because "all forms of missionary activity are directed to this proclamation". Guided by the Magisterium of the Church we recognise that in every continent there is a need of evangelisation and the 'initial proclamation of Christ' is the cutting edge on this never ending path. The incoming XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops about '*New evangelisation for the transmission of the Christian faith*' for 2012, dedicates a special attention to the initial proclamation in the *Lineamenta* (n.19).

These Study Days give us a chance to reflect together more deeply on

<sup>1</sup> «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).



our evangelising mission. We hope to offer fruits of our reflection to many brothers and sisters of the Salesian Family living in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Samoa, American Samoa, Fiji, New Zealand and Australia. At the start of these Study Days **I invite you to consider** these four important points:

- 1 All of us are in touch daily with many of young people in our schools, parishes and other mission fields, who have the right to meet Jesus personally. It's about our personal and communitarian conversion in our life and mission to put initial proclamation a due attention. Hence **we are challenged to discover the opportunities and dynamics** of initial proclamation of Jesus in our daily life;
- 2 We are **called to clarify some of our open questions, doubts or prejudices** about the relationship between our witness and proclamation (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 22);
- 3 The presence of lay members of Salesian Family is for all of us a strong invitation to **affirm the importance of the family** as a privileged place for the initial proclamation of the Gospel.
- 4 We are also invited to keep in mind possible ways of **forming youth and lay mission partners as agents of initial proclamation of Christ**;
- 5 We are **invited to share our own experience of God with others**. In this effort we can be helped by the storytelling dynamics of the 2005 PNG Church Assembly 'We Are Church Alive in Christ' or by 2006 Chiang Mai 'First Asian Missionary Congress'. For the SDB 'storytelling' is also a theme for the 2012 Salesian Mission Day in all provinces.

I entrust these Study Days to Mary our Mother and Model, Star of the Sea, and Help of Christians. May she continue to walk with us on our journey of faith as God's people in Oceania.







## What Do We “Say” about Jesus to the Peoples of Oceania?

Sr. Alaïde 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 Oceania (Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, American Samoa and the rest of the islands of Micronesia and Polynesia); and what do they “say” about Jesus of Nazareth.

The God of Jesus and his Kingdom can play a significant role in the evolution of the peoples of Oceania, with more than 700 languages and traditional religions, with the processes of secularisation, urbanisation, consumerism, the growing cultural influence of Asian immigrants the high incidence and age 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, 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 these days we can give a face, to highlight the situation of life of our peoples, socio / economic / cultural and religious of contemporary Oceania.

‘Starting from’ *Ecclesia in Oceania*, from the inculturated path of the Churches all over this sea, we want to study and propose the **initial proclamation of Jesus**. The approach, 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, AG<sup>2</sup>; RM 1, 4, 7, 22, 23, 32; EO n.10)***<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *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.

<sup>3</sup> “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,

\* ***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 tradition<sup>4</sup> and by faith we know that God, through His 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. *GS* n.22, *RM* 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, postmodern 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.*

During these days, the centre, 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. Proclamation cannot disregard the commitment to create inculturated Christian communities, the action, in Jesus’ name, for justice, peace, relationship between cultures, 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.

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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

<sup>4</sup> 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.

Furthermore, we know that *witnessing and the proclamation of Jesus are inseparable*. The first means of evangelisation, 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, centre and summit of Evangelisation.

Here, too, we look to Jesus: his mission was characterised 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 emphasise 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 colonisation and exploitation, the Gospel had to include a clear stand on the dignity of every human being and every people. In the epoch of globalisation, the Gospel has to recognise 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**.

Here I quote the proverb comes from life in the forests in Australia, which has been reported in the Synod:

"If you stay closely united, you are like a tree standing in the middle of a bush-fire sweeping through the timber: the leaves are scorched, the tough bark is scarred and burned, but inside the tree the sap still flows, and under the ground the roots are still strong. Like that tree you have survived the flames, and you have still the power to be born. The time for rebirth is now"<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 28

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.

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 Oceania today will be significant and faithful, **even if it is a minority. It will truly be “salt and light.”**

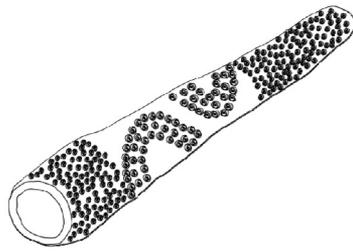
At the same time, we are convinced that to carry out in a new way the testimony and proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth in the educational practice or in the occasions of daily life, in our prophetic interaction with the life situations of young people and adults, is to contribute to translate the Preventive System in Asia, making it always rich in proposals and relevant in a globalised 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 churches<sup>6</sup>, 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 missions<sup>7</sup>, **seeking to listen to “what the Spirit is telling the Churches”** (Ap 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

<sup>6</sup> 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 evangeliser and missionary of the Father, who became incarnate as an Asian: the Savior of the world was born in Asia (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 1).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Uniqueness of Salvation in Jesus Christ and need of primary evangelisation, Missionari praxis and primary evangelisation*, FMA-SDB. East Asia and Oceania, Hua Hin (Thailand), 10-16 May, 1998; *Missionary praxis and primary Evangelisation*, FMA-SDB, 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.

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 Oceania.  
Thank you!





## An Overview on the Topic of the Study Days: from Prague to Port Moresby

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."<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup>

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 evangelisation, pre-evangelisation, missionary preaching,*

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\* He was a missionary in Papua New Guinea (1985-2006) where he was involved in the school apostolate. He was also a lecturer at the Catholic Theological Institute as well as Director of the Liturgical Catechetical Institute (2002-2006) of the Bishops' Conference. 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.

<sup>8</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, 44.

<sup>9</sup> "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 evangelisation*) 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.<sup>10</sup> Since then these recipients of initial proclamation have been kept in mind in the subsequent Study Days.

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) and on ***The Salesian Mission and the Initial Proclamation of Christ in the Three-fold Context of East Asia*** (Sampran, August 14 – 18, 2011) discussions led to deeper reflection on the need to see initial proclamation in the light of Asia's three-fold context: rich cultures, ancient religions and oppressive poverty (FABC 1, *Evangelisation in Asia Today*). In a context where the majority of young people in our educative settings are followers of other religions and are poorer, dialogue life, human promotion and development through outreach programs and work for youth at risk become important opportunities of initial proclamation. This is seen as the beginning of the process of integral evangelisation. In East Asia the need to better understand traditional religions, major East Asia religions like Buddhism and Confucianism as well as a variety of cultures was discussed. In this context storytelling was considered as a way of introducing people step-by step to the mystery of Christ (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 20) which is at the same time respectful of their freedom of conscience.

<sup>10</sup> 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.

**Is initial proclamation relevant in Oceania where countries are predominantly Christian? Should we not reflect on new evangelisation instead?** Indeed, it is not surprising if one would think that in Oceania where there is an abandonment of the faith or where it is lived in a routine manner what is really needed is new evangelisation and not initial proclamation. A careful rereading and unpacking of the Postsynodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Oceania* provide us important indications to formulate a pondered response to this legitimate question.

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 many of the young people who frequent our RE classes and parishes have neither consciously opted to be Christians nor do they all live committed Christian lives. It is a fact that in traditional societies of the Pacific islands many Christians continue to keep superstitious beliefs and practice traditional religions side by side with their Christian faith. While in societies which have become “Western in its cultural patterns and social structure”<sup>11</sup> and “marked by increasing secularisation, individualism and consumerism,”<sup>12</sup> Christianity, and any religion for that matter, “is moved to the margin and tends to be regarded as a strictly private matter for the individual with little relevance to public life.”<sup>13</sup> Many postmodern youth have also a “practical indifference to religious truths and values”<sup>14</sup> while there are those who practice a subjective ‘spirituality,’ often lumped together under the term ‘New Age,’ which focuses on self and wholeness with an emphasis on feeling while rejecting the Church as ‘institutional religion’.<sup>15</sup>

It is precisely because the faith of Christians is not deeply rooted that traditional practices contrary to the Gospel continue to thrive, or that there is “a gradual lessening of the natural religious sense which has led to dis-

<sup>11</sup> *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 6.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 508.

orientation in people's moral life and conscience."<sup>16</sup> In technologically advanced societies there is faith fatigue among Christians – which, unfortunately, is also reflected in religious life -which could be noticed in the joylessness, weariness of spirit and despair and an inner sadness in living their faith, which ultimately lead to its abandonment.<sup>17</sup> In both the contexts of traditional cultures and cultures in the process of secularisation, the initial proclamation that one receives in the family is often not adequate to become the foundation of a robust faith.

*It is in this light that the General Directory for Catechesis* insists that Christians who have abandoned the practice of their faith as well as those who live their faith out of habit all need initial proclamation of the Gospel in view of fostering their personal option and adhesion to Christ.<sup>18</sup> Without this initial personal option for Christ and initial conversion catechesis becomes sterile. How much time, effort and resources we invest in catechesis, yet how little we bother to ensure that those who are catechised have actually previously made a personal faith option to know and follow Christ.<sup>19</sup> Today, Jesus is calling anew the peoples of Oceania “to a still deeper faith and a still richer life in him,”<sup>20</sup> so that the Gospel “be heard, believed and lived more deeply.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, **initial proclamation is the first and necessary step towards a new evangelisation of Oceania!**<sup>22</sup>

While *Kerygma* is the proclamation of the core of the Christian faith: the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus, instead, initial proclamation focuses on fostering an environment, on creating quality relationships which stir up people to ask fundamental questions in life and an interest in knowing the person of Jesus Christ who is seen as the response to such existential questions, one who “brings hope to the many who suffer misery, injustice or poverty,” and “new life for all who are in need or in pain.”<sup>23</sup> Initial proclamation is neither a method nor an activity nor a celebration. It is neither planned nor organised. It happens on the spot in the midst of ordi-

<sup>16</sup> *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 7.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 18, 20.

<sup>18</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis*, 61.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Gevaert, *Prima Evangelizzazione* (Leumann, Turin: LDC, 1990), 68-71, 80-84.

<sup>20</sup> *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

nary daily life. There are as many ways of fostering initial proclamation as there are forms of making an invitation. In traditional cultures, storytelling, preaching, praying in word, song and dance could become a form of initial proclamation.<sup>24</sup> However, any form used ought to be inculturated, contextualised, and needs to be respectful of the local rhythm of life so as to stir up interest in the person of Jesus Christ among those to whom it is directed.

While *kerygma* focuses on the content of the Christian faith, initial proclamation focuses primarily on the witness of individual Christians, of the religious community and of the whole Christian community which becomes a personal invitation to faith. Through the action of the Holy Spirit Christian witness creates the necessary conditions which “opens the eyes of the mind”<sup>25</sup> and links it to the Gospel and further develops it into a desire to know Jesus Christ, and have faith in Him.<sup>26</sup> 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), with Nicodemus (Jn 2,23-3,36) or with the royal official (Jn 4,43-54).

*Ecclesia in Oceania’s* invitation to look beyond our own immediate concerns and reach out to others in the family, in the workplace, in the schools, in the world in which we live in, and beyond the bounds of the Catholic community, has brought about a new realisation of the presence in Oceania of followers of other religions, particularly Buddhists, Hindus, Jews and Muslims due to greater travel opportunities and easier migration. Some of them frequent our youth centres and some parents have enrolled their children in Catholic schools.<sup>27</sup> Besides, in all Pacific cultures there are many people who are searching for life’s meaning.<sup>28</sup>

The rediscovery of initial proclamation makes us consciously aware that it is our credible Christian witness that could freely stir up in them an interest to know Jesus Christ and, hopefully, have faith in Him. Initial proclamation, then, is a proclamation of Jesus Christ that is respectful of their freedom of conscience. However, we should not be timid when the

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.,15.

<sup>25</sup> *Dei Verbum*, 5

<sup>26</sup> *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 20.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.,7, 13, 25.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.,8.

Holy Spirit opens the door of opportunity, to make explicit what is implicit in witness, that is, a brief and rational formulation of our own faith in Jesus Christ. This is especially necessary in cultures in the process of secularisation where the religiously implicit is barely heard or understood.<sup>29</sup> This **initial proclamation**, however, cannot be seen in isolation but **is necessarily linked and oriented** to the next stage in the process of evangelisation which is the **catechumenate** and its Rites of Christian Initiation for Adults (*RCIA*).

Our gathering here ought to be seen as a continuation and deepening of the themes discussed at the *Salesian Family Missionary Seminar* in 2005. During these days we shall reflect on *The Salesian Mission and the Initial Proclamation of Christ in Oceania in the Context of Traditional Religions and Cultures and Cultures in the Process of Secularisation* as well as the challenge of new evangelisation in the context of traditional religions and cultures, and the modern process of secularisation taking place in Australia and New Zealand which is also transmitted to other countries by the media.

The long preparations for these Study Days have made us realise the urgency of the call of *Ecclesia in Oceania* of the need for us SDBs and FMAs “to study more thoroughly the traditional religions of the indigenous populations”<sup>30</sup> as well as of the necessity to prepare “experts in philosophy, anthropology, comparative religions, the social sciences and, above all, theology”<sup>31</sup> if the Church is to fulfil her mission to “tell the truth of Jesus Christ”<sup>32</sup> “with all the peoples of Oceania, whatever their situation.”<sup>33</sup> I quote these here to bring it to the attention of our Provincials and their Councils. Our commitment to “rejuvenate the Church, the Mother of our faith”<sup>34</sup> impels us to **discern our Salesian contribution to the growth and development of the Church in Oceania.**

<sup>29</sup> Pierre Robitaille, “La Première Annonce en Établissement Catholique D’Enseignement”. Dossier. Enseignement Catholique Secrétariat Générale, France (March 24, 2009), 4-5.

<sup>30</sup> *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 25.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>34</sup> Pascual Chávez, “Rejuvenate the Face of the Church, the Mother of our Faith”, Acts of the General Council, no. 388 (2005).

Hopefully our discussions these days will help our communities in Oceania to rediscovery of the relevance and importance of initial proclamation. A greater awareness that my personal life as a consecrated person, our community life as religious, our activities as educative-pastoral community or as a parish community, in fact, are, and ought to be an initial proclamation of the Gospel will certainly renew “the passion for the salvation of others, by the joy of sharing the experience of the fullness of life of Jesus”<sup>35</sup> of individual SDB, FMA and every member of the Salesian Family and, consequently, foster in every member of the local and Province community “an ardent sense of mission.”<sup>36</sup> From this joy springs the energies to share our Christian faith and live radically our Salesian religious life.

Due to various factors we have a limited number of participants. I would like to invite all of us, however, not to think only of our own settings in our discussions. **Let us make an effort to ‘think Oceania,’ to reflect and discuss for all the members of the Salesian Family working in American Samoa, Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and Solomon Islands.** I dare dream that our discussions these days will be that spark that would trigger a “renewal of mind” (*Rom 12:2*)<sup>37</sup> in every SDB, FMA, and member of the Salesian Family and, consequently, “an inner renewal”<sup>38</sup> in every community and Province, less we give in to **faith fatigue** and slide back comfortably to the **joyless and ardourless “maintenance mode” of Salesian presence in Oceania.** What I have outlined above certainly “poses great challenges, but it also opens new horizons, full of hope and even a sense of adventure.”<sup>39</sup> Indeed, enthusiastic Salesian sisters, brothers and priests attract young people to the Salesian life!

<sup>35</sup> Pascual Chávez, “Address at the Closing of the General Chapter 26”, GC XXVI, p. 137.

<sup>36</sup> *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 8.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 13,





Part I  
**Analysis of the Situation**







## Initial Proclamation of Christ in Melanesia: A Situationer

Fr. John A. Cabrido SDB \*

Pope Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) defines evangelisation in terms of “of proclaiming Christ to those who do not know Him, of preaching, of catechesis, of conferring Baptism and the other sacraments” (§ 17).

This paper makes no pretensions. While the intent of the Study Days is to reflect on the realities of Oceania, the provenance and missionary situation of all the participants - except one - is Melanesian, whether from Papua New Guinea or the Solomon Islands. The paper is a simple, decidedly incomplete, synthesis of the responses submitted by some participants<sup>38</sup> and two focus groups<sup>39</sup> to the questionnaire provided by the seminar organisers. The questionnaire and, consequently, this paper aim “to contextualise these study days”.

### **Question 1: In the place where you live and work: What is your experience regarding the *initial proclamation* of Jesus to young people and adults?**

- 1.1 Initial proclamation is an on-going process of conversion and adherence to Christ which the Church has promoted in varied ways — education, religious instruction, liturgy and sacramental life, preaching and storytelling, posters, crusades, religious broadcasts, the formation of catechists and Church leaders, and many more.

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<sup>39</sup> *Catechesi Tradendae*, 20.



- 1.2 Most young people—and people in general—are receptive to the proclamation of the Gospel. They seek to learn more about the Faith and live it honestly. They appreciate youth gatherings and give importance to the Word of God. Their devotion to the Virgin Mother Mary leads them to faithful discipleship and promotion of the dignity of women. Open to the Word, they seek fuller sacramental life.
- 1.3 However, for some, initial proclamation is - at best - superficial. Family members belong to various churches and denominations. Couples simply live together devoid of sacramental blessings. Too busy with life's affairs and unsettled by rapid social changes, young people and adults forgo deepening in the Faith and are attracted, instead, to the pursuit of pleasure and fun. Consequently, this has led to a loss of Catholic identity.
- 1.4 Some evidences point to a failure in initial proclamation. Enthusiasm quickly vanishes and knowledge is cerebral and non-transformative. People cling to traditional customs even when these are contrary to Christian belief. The reception of the sacraments is perfunctory, i.e. carried out with minimum of effort or reflection. Some actually engage in evil practices.

**Question 2: In Oceania what questions emerge, what challenges are there and what opportunities are presented for the initial proclamation in your particular context?**

*2.1 Emerging Questions.*

- 2.1.1 How does one integrate faith and culture thereby promoting inculturation?
- 2.1.2 How do young people deepen their knowledge of the Faith?
- 2.1.3 How do young people witness to faith and life?
- 2.1.4 How can young people transcend “self” and value the “common good”?

*2.2 Challenges.*

- 2.2.1 The most pressing challenge is that of inculturation as a dialogue between cultures and as a purification of the local culture

by Gospel values. The missionary is challenged to appreciate local culture, to see in it the seed of the Gospel while remaining steadfast in the truth.

- 2.2.2 Just as important is the challenge toward integral human development as essential to building the “City of God”.
- 2.2.3 The challenge to witness to the Gospel is lived out by promoting truth, justice, love and peace.
- 2.2.4 Missionaries are challenged to empower the local people in decision making and administration, beginning with the promotion of vocations and their formation.
- 2.2.5 Churches are challenged to greater respect, closer collaboration and understanding.
- 2.2.6 Other important challenges

### 2.3 *Opportunities.*

- 2.3.1 Schools, Boarding Houses and parishes as preeminent settings of evangelisation.
- 2.3.2 Other factors which give rise to hope in evangelisation:

**Question 3: Within the contexts of *traditional religions and cultures* or in contexts where *the modern process of secularisation* is evident: What contribution can religious awareness and sensitivity make? (Keep in mind traditional and new forms of religious experiences). What attitudes do you encounter among the more marginalised people (because of culture, economic means, moral life)?**

### 3.1 On The Contribution of Religious Awareness and Sensitivity

- 3.1.1 A commitment to live a life of faith and love.
- 3.1.2 Development of an objective moral sense
- 3.1.3 An appreciation of the value of the person and human relationships.
- 3.1.4 Healthy appreciation of local culture and the correct promotion of inculturation

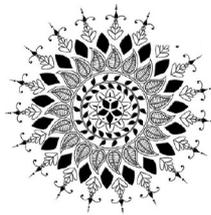
- 3.1.5 Strengthening of the family apostolate
- 3.1.6 A critical use of the media
- 3.1.7 Other advantages

### 3.2 On Attitudes Encountered among the Marginalised People

- 3.2.1 The marginalise seldom experience love and care, and are generally difficult to deal with. Still they are to be treated acknowledging their inherent dignity, for which we are ready to serve.
- 3.2.2 Other difficult attitudes of the marginalised

**Question 4. Collect experiences and reflections emerging from your own context regarding the initial proclamation of Jesus, which led to “the Good News being heard, believed and lived more deeply (*Ecclesia in Oceania*, 10).**

- 4.1 Time is an indispensable requirement in initial proclamation
- 4.2 The first proclamation was accomplished by the pioneering missionaries. The task now is to make this proclamation effective.
- 4.3 Young people need faith experiences to adhere to Christ.
- 4.4 Liturgy and the celebration of the sacraments are a preeminent *locus* for initial proclamation
- 4.5 Young people - and the populace in general - find it difficult to let go of customary practices.
- 4.6 The people need model witnesses.
- 4.7 The boarding house is a privileged setting for education.
- 4.8 Other observations





## Towards a Common Understanding of Initial Proclamation in Oceania according to Church Documents and in *Ecclesia in Oceania*



Sr. Pamela Vecina FMA\*

### Initial proclamation

In this moment we are going to come up with the common understanding of what is initial proclamation.

According to *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 24 evangelisation is a complex process that includes various elements:

1. the renewal of humanity
2. witness
3. explicit proclamation
4. inner adherence
5. entry into the community
6. acceptance of signs
7. apostolic initiative

It is identified with the very mission of the Church. *Redemptoris Missio* points out that evangelisation is the permanent priority of the mission. And such contain as the foundation, the centre and at the same time the summit of its dynamism – a clear proclamation that in Jesus Christ, salvation is offered to all peoples as a gift of God's graciousness and mercy.

**Initial proclamation, then, is the central and irreplaceable role since it introduces the person “into the mystery of the love of God, who invites him to enter into a personal relationship with himself in Christ that opens the way to conversion.”<sup>40</sup>**

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<sup>40</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, 44



In the whole process of evangelisation, the complex process of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ, INITIAL PROCLAMATION is considered the beginning of the whole complex process and reality.

It is the first stage in the whole journey of evangelisation and re-evangelisation.

Then proceeding from this initial acceptance of Christ and his message, is the maturing of such faith, the decisive personal acceptance and commitment to the person of Christ, called **catechesis**.

It is the endeavour to help persons know Christ better, the Kingdom of God proclaimed by him, the requirements and promises in his gospel message and the paths he has laid down for anyone who wishes to follow him.<sup>41</sup>

### **Initial Proclamation and the Need for New Forms of Discourse on God**

Today's world oftentimes poses another challenge in the work of evaluating the programme of initiating people in the faith, namely, the increasing difficulty of men and women today to listen to others speaking about God and to encounter places and experiences which open them to the subject of God. The Church has been dealing with this question for some time by not only pointing out the difficulty but also providing various ways of responding. In fact, Pope Paul VI, taking this challenge into account, urgently proposed that the Church search for new ways to present the Christian faith.

This gave rise to the idea of "INITIAL PROCLAMATION", understood to be an explicit statement, or more precisely, a proclamation of the fundamental content of our faith.

At the time, the expression "initial proclamation" was taken over and utilised in restructuring the process of introduction to the faith. Intended to be addressed to non-believers, namely, those who are indifferent to religion, initial proclamation has, generally speaking, the function of both

<sup>41</sup> *Catechesi Tradendae*, 20



proclaiming the Gospel and calling to conversion those who until now do not know Jesus Christ.

Catechesis, distinct from the initial proclamation of the Gospel, promotes growth in this initial conversion and provides instruction in the faith to those who have converted, thus incorporating them into the Christian community.

The relation between these two forms of the ministry of the Word is not, however, always easy to discover; nor is it easily done; nor should it necessarily be stated emphatically.

Instead, the relation can be perceived as a two-fold action which is found united in the same pastoral activity. In fact, frequently people who come for catechesis need to live more truly converted lives. Therefore, the programmes of catechesis and introduction in the faith might benefit from putting greater emphasis on the proclamation of the Gospel, which is a call to this conversion and which fosters and sustains it. In this way, the new evangelisation can reinvigorate the present programmes of instruction in the faith by accentuating the kerygmatic character of proclamation.

An initial response to this challenge, then, has already been done. However, in addition to this response, the discernment which we are undertaking requires a deeper understanding of the reasons why a discourse on God in our culture is so foreign.

The question might initially call for seeing how much this concerns Christian communities themselves, who need to devise the forms and means for speaking about God, which can then equip them to respond to the anxieties and expectations of people today, showing them how the newness of Christ is the gift which all of us await and for which each of us yearns as the unexpressed desire in our search for meaning and our thirst for the truth. Consequently, the absence of this discourse on God provides an occasion for missionary proclamation.

The task of the “new evangelisation” is to lead both practicing Christians as well as those who have questions about God and are in search of him, to perceive his personal call in their conscience.

The new evangelisation is an invitation to Christian communities to place greater trust in the Spirit who guides them in the course of history. In this way, they can overcome the temptation to fear and more clearly



see the places and programmes where the question of God can be raised amidst people's lives today.

### **Initial Conversion to Christ**

Wherever God opens a door of speech for proclaiming the mystery of Christ (cf. Col. 4:3), there is announced to all men (cf. Mark 16,15; 1 Cor. 9,15; Rom. 10,14) with confidence and constancy (cf. Acts 4,13, 29, 31; 9,27, 28; 13,46; 14,3; 19,8; 26,26; 28,31; 1 Thess. 2:2; 2 Cor. 3,12; 7,4; Phil. 1,20; Eph. 3,12; 6:19, 20) the living God, and He Whom He has sent for the salvation of all, Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Thess. 1,9-10; 1 Cor. 1,18-21; Gal. 1,31; Acts 14,15-17, 17,22-31), in order that non - Christians, when the Holy Spirit opens their heart (cf. Acts 16,14), may believe and be freely converted to the Lord, that they may cleave sincerely to Him Who, being the "way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14,6), fulfils all their spiritual expectations, and even infinitely surpasses them.

This conversion must be taken as an initial one, yet sufficient to make a man realise that he has been snatched away from sin and led into the mystery of God's love, who called him to enter into a personal relationship with Him in Christ.<sup>42</sup>

We shall look into the state of proclamation of Jesus Christ in Oceania according to

*Ecclesia in Oceania*, the summary of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Oceania, which was held from November - December 1998.

### **Initial Proclamation and Catechesis**

Initial proclamation is addressed to non-believers and those living in religious indifference. Its functions are to proclaim the Gospel and to call to conversion. Catechesis, "distinct from the primary proclamation of the

<sup>42</sup> *Ad Gentes*, 13.

Gospel”, promotes and matures initial conversion, educates the convert in the faith and incorporates him into the Christian community.

The relationship between these two forms of the ministry of the word is, therefore, a relationship of complementary distinction.

**Initial proclamation**, which every Christian is called to foster, is part of that “*Go*” which Jesus imposes on his disciples: it implies, therefore, a going-out, a haste, a message. Catechesis, however, starts with the condition indicated by Jesus himself: “whosoever believes”, whosoever converts, whosoever decides. Both activities are essential and mutually complementary: go and welcome, proclaim and educate, call and incorporate.<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless in pastoral practice it is not always easy to define the boundaries of these activities. Frequently, many who present themselves for catechesis truly require genuine conversion. Because of this the Church usually desires that the first stage in the catechetical process be dedicated to ensuring conversion. In the “*missio ad gentes*”, this task is normally accomplished during the ‘pre-catechumenate’.

## Initial Proclamation in Ecclesia in Oceania

The Church faces a twofold challenge in seeking to proclaim the Gospel in Oceania: on the one hand, the traditional religions and cultures, and on the other, the modern process of secularisation.

In each case, ***“the first and most urgent task is the proclamation of the Risen Christ by way of a personal encounter which would bring the listener to conversion of heart and the request for Baptism”***.

Whether faced with traditional religion or refined philosophy, the Church preaches by word and deed that “the truth is in Jesus Christ” (*Eph* 4:21; cf. *Col* 1:15-20). In the light of that truth, she makes her contribution to discussion about the values and ethical principles which make for happiness in human life and peace in society. The faith must always be presented in a rationally coherent way, so as to favour its capacity to pen-

<sup>43</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis*, 61.

erate into ever wider fields of human experience. Faith in fact has the force to shape culture itself by penetrating it to its very core. Alert to both Christian tradition and contemporary cultural shifts, the word of faith and reason must go hand in hand with the witness of life if evangelisation is to bear fruit.

Above all, however, what is needed is a fearless proclamation of Christ, “a *parrhesia* of faith”.<sup>44</sup>

***Communio, inculturation and a renewed proclamation of the Gospel in ways appropriate for the peoples of Oceania today - these were the key themes and insights which emerged from the Synod of Bishops in Oceania.***

## Conclusion

To end, I wish to highlight this important quotes and points:

“A new evangelisation is the first priority for the Church in Oceania. In one sense, her mission is simple and clear: to promote once again to the human society the entire Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ.”<sup>45</sup>

“... May all the peoples of Oceania discover the love of Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life, so that they will experience and build together the civilisation of love and peace for which the world of the Pacific has always longed.”<sup>46</sup>



<sup>44</sup> *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 20.

<sup>45</sup> *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 18.

<sup>46</sup> *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 17.



**Part II**  
**Study & Reflection**







## Initial Proclamation of Christ in the Context of Traditional Cultures and Religions in Melanesia

Fr. Franco Zocca SVD \*

### Introduction

The following article is based on my theological and anthropological studies as well as on my twenty year experience in Papua New Guinea, which is one of the nations in Southwest Pacific usually called Melanesia; the others being: the Indonesian Province of Papua, and the archipelagos of Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, and Fiji.

The topic assigned to me should have included also Polynesia but, unfortunately, my knowledge of the Polynesian cultures is very limited. However, the theological principles which I apply to the initial proclamation of Christ in the context of the Melanesian cultures can easily be applied also in the context of Polynesian and other cultures.

I am a Catholic pastor with a Master in Theology (Gregorian University, Rome, 1969) and a Doctorate in Sociology (Trento University, 1978). After spending 13 years in Indonesia (Flores 1974-87) and a few years in Italy and England (1987-1993), I was assigned to the Ecumenical Melanesian Institute of Goroka<sup>47</sup>, in which I have been working since 1994.

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<sup>47</sup> The Melanesian Institute of Goroka, founded in January 1970, is presently run by the four Mainline Churches in Papua New Guinea: Anglican, Catholic, Lutheran and United Church.



The article is limited to the 'content' of the initial proclamation of Christ although the author is aware that other factors should also be taken into consideration for a successful initial approach, such as relying on prayer and God's providence, having a humble attitude, achieving the trust of the targeted population, knowing the language and culture of the society, etc. These factors are very important and cannot be neglected.<sup>48</sup>

## 1. Ideological Assumptions

In regard to the content of the initial proclamation my most important theological assumption as far as the relationship between Gospel and peoples' cultures and religions is concerned, is that of the so called 'theory or model of fulfilment'. According to this theory Christianity brings to completion what God has already sown in the peoples' cultures and religions while at the same time purifying them from sinful elements. This theory is built on the approach used by Jesus and the early Christians in proclaiming the Good news. In the Gospels the incarnation and mission of Jesus Christ is described as the coming into the Jewish culture of God's Word in flesh, who was "the real light which enlightens everyone" (Jn 1, 9) and which "shines in the darkness and the darkness could not overpower it" (John 1, 5). Jesus came into the Jewish culture not to "abolish the Law and Prophets but to complete (greek: *ekpleroso*) them" (Mt 5, 17).<sup>49</sup> In other words, Jesus came to earth, born to a specific people at a specific time and in a specific place. He learned how to behave in that culture, learned how to speak in that language, and ministered to the real needs of the people in the context of their historical and political situation. He did not destroy, though he did confront the Jewish culture and religion and correct its deviations (cf. Mt 5, 20-48).

<sup>48</sup> Various are the books on the Communication of the Christian faith. See for instance the groundbreaking work of Eugene A. Nida, *Message and Mission – The Communication of the Christian Faith*, 1960.

<sup>49</sup> Some translations have 'fulfill' instead of 'complete'. "Fulfill": this word cannot refer to the simple literal observance; the following six examples negate such a facile interpretation. "Fulfill" means to bring the Law to perfection. Jesus affirms indirectly that the Law is imperfect, unfinished; he will perfect and finish it" (*The Jerome Biblical Commentary* 43: 34).

The early Christians made use of the religious beliefs and institutions of both the Jewish and pagan people in their first proclamation of Christ. In relation to the Jews, Christ's life and preaching were seen as fulfilling prophecies, figures, and institutions of the First Testament. The proclamation of the Gospel was done in the familiar context of traditional terminology, beliefs and practices. Look for instance at the titles given to Jesus: Messiah, Lamb of God, Second Adam, High Priest, Word and Wisdom of God, Son of Man, Redeemer, Paschal Lamb, Rabbi, etc. They must have sounded very familiar to the Jews.

The "completion" brought about by Jesus did not only regard the Jewish legislation but also its religious institutions and symbols. Jesus is the "second Adam" (cf. Rm 5, 14), the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1, 29), the "Supreme high Priest" (Heb 4:14), "the Mediator of a better Covenant" (cf. Heb 8, 6-7), "the new temple" (cf. Jn 1, 19), etc. Jewish festivals too came to assume Christian forms and meanings, like the Passover meal, Easter festival, Pentecost, the baptism ritual, etc.

Also in relation to the pagans – the non-Jews – the initial proclamation of Christ strived to build on their beliefs and traditions. Christian missionaries avoided to impose the Jewish Law on the non Jews (cf. Acts 15), Paul and Barnabas addressed the pagans of Iconium in a way accessible to them (Acts 14) and the same happened in the Paul's speech before the Greek council of the Areopagus (cf. Acts 17). The Gospel of John borrowed the notion of *Logos* from the Greek philosophers and the early Church continued to build on the beliefs and customs of the people she intended to evangelise. John Newman sums up the whole process of 'indigenisation' in the following lines:

The use of temples, and these dedicated to particular saints, and ornaments on occasions with branches of trees; holy water; holydays and seasons, use of calendars, processions, blessings on the fields; sacerdotal vestments, the tonsure, the ring in marriage, turning to the East, images at a later date, perhaps the ecclesiastical chant, are all of pagan origin, and sanctified by their adoption into the Church<sup>50</sup>.

<sup>50</sup> Newman, *The Development of Christian Doctrine*, p. 373.

The fulfilment theory is in line with what Pope Pius XII already wrote in 1951:

The Church from the beginning down to our time has always followed this wise practice; let not the Gospel, on being introduced into a new land, destroy or extinguish whatever its people possess that is naturally good, just and beautiful. For the Church, when she calls people to a higher culture and a better way of life under the inspiration of the Christian religion, does not act like one who recklessly cuts down and uproots a thriving forest. No, she grafts a good scion upon the wild stock that it may bear a crop of more delicious fruit. (*Evangelii Precones* – Heralds of the Gospel, 52)

To the above statement the Second Vatican Council added some solid theological foundations<sup>51</sup>, which could be summarised by the following quotation:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these [non-Christian] religions. With sincere respect she looks in those ways of conduct and life, these precepts and teachings which, though differing in many points from what she herself holds and teaches, yet not rarely reflect the ray of that Truth which enlightens all human beings. But she proclaims and must ever proclaim, “the way, the truth and the life (Jn 14, 6), in whom human finds the fullness of religious life and in whom God has reconciled all things to himself [cf 2 Cor 5, 18f]. (*Nostra Aetate*, 2)

On his part, Pope John Paul II supported the statements of the Council in his Encyclicals<sup>52</sup> and in other documents issued by the Vatican during his term of office<sup>53</sup>. He even implicitly referred to the “fulfilment theory” in some documents. The following are two quotations among many:

<sup>51</sup> *Lumen Gentium* 2, 16, 22; *Nostra Aetate* 2; *Ad Gentes* 4, 9; etc.

<sup>52</sup> *Redemptor Hominis* 4; *Dominus et Vivificantem* 53; *Redemptoris Missio* 10, 18, 20, 28, 29; etc.

<sup>53</sup> *Dialogue and Proclamation* 19, 31, 50; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 70, 71, 689; etc.

God's Spirit presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions. It is the Spirit who sows the "seeds of the Word" present in various customs and cultures, preparing them for the full maturity in Christ". (*Redemptoris Missio*, 29)

The incarnate Word is the fulfilment of the yearning present in all the religions of humankind: this fulfilment is brought about by God himself and transcends all human expectations. Christ is the fulfilment of the yearning of all the world's religions and, as such, he is their sole and definitive completion. (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 6)

The theory of fulfilment, while holding a positive attitude towards human cultures does certainly not deny the presence of sin in all of them. All cultures –including those in so called Christian countries – wear the stains and bear the shame of human sinfulness<sup>54</sup>. They may even contain and perpetuate corrupting elements. This fact does not generally mean that they are completely depraved but rather in need of purification and redemption.

For sin has been at work in the world, and so religious traditions, notwithstanding their positive values, reflect the limitations of the human spirit, sometimes inclined to choose evil. An open and positive approach to other religious traditions cannot overlook the contradictions which may exist between them and Christian revelation" (*Lumen Gentium*, 10).

One major presupposition of the fulfilment theory is that, in similarity with Jesus' and the early Christians' approach, carriers of the initial Gospel proclamation are to be well acquainted with the cultural and religious beliefs and practices, and more in general with the so called "epistemology" of the targeted population. Such deep knowledge will make the "proclaimers" not only aware of what God has already sown in the culture of the people but also of the possible misunderstandings of the gospel's message, since it will be received within the people's already es-

<sup>54</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* 13, 37; *Dialogue and Proclamation* 31; etc.

established frame of mind. This deep cultural knowledge is particularly important in Melanesia, since its cultures are very different from those of other continents' populations.

And so the Church has this exhortation for her children: prudently and lovingly, through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, and in witness to the Christian faith and life, acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral good, as well as the socio-cultural values found among them. (*Nostra Aetate*, 2)

Finally, I also assume that the recipients of the 'initial proclamation of Christ' are not only the non baptised but also the baptised whose knowledge of Christ is not adequate or even false, which is often the case among the baptised in Melanesia nowadays. Besides, I assume that the proclamation is not only made by words but also by deeds and examples. Having stated that, let us start with a summary of the main characteristics of Melanesian traditional cultures and religions.

## 2. Traditional Cultures of Melanesia<sup>55</sup>

I have to start by emphasising the extreme variety of systems of life (i.e., cultures) to be found among the Melanesians, due to very old causes. At the same time, however, we must hurry on to the claim that there are also many general similarities. The highest values in the various Melanesian cultures almost always involve the achieving of an abundance of material and spiritual goods here on this earth. They include women, children, animals, health, beauty, prestige, power and objects considered locally to be of value. Since those good were, and partly still are, only achievable within the descent group (lineages and clans), the well-being of the latter over-rides all other priorities. The descent group is made up of relationships, which are created, maintained and mended through ex-

<sup>55</sup> In describing the Melanesian cultures and religion I quote largely from my book *Melanesia and its Churches*, published by Melanesian Institute in 2007. I refer to that book also for the bibliography.



changes, seen as reciprocal giving and receiving. The whole social organisation was and is harnessed towards these ends.

New Guinea villages were often notable for having a single very large building for the use of adult males, while women and children were housed separately and far more simply, often together with the pigs. This practice could also be found in other parts of Melanesia. Men lived and slept together for various reasons, one being the need for instant mobilisation of fighters in the case of the expected attacks by enemy clans. These “men’s houses” also allowed for male activities, ritual, political and so on to be kept secret from women and from uninitiated male children. Such a house made very central values more concrete. It was often the store house for magical objects and the location for magic rites and initiation ceremonies. Access was usually forbidden to women. In some places unmarried male youths also lived apart, in a house of their own.

There must have been many social structures, but exogamous clans seem to have been common, most of them small, usually subdivided into sub-clans and lineages. Clans and sub-clans had their heads. There could be more than one clan in the same village, and in that case one of the heads gained higher authority. There is a mixture of patrilineal clans and matrilineal clans today, with inheritance through the male line predominating in continental Melanesia, and inheritance through the female line being typical of island Melanesia. In matrilineal societies women tend to have more authority and value, but this is not automatic. Clans were strongly linked to their territories, their land, which was the main inheritable asset.

There could be higher level groupings of clans, coalitions formed for tribal fighting, but in general these were unstable and temporary. In island Melanesia it was common to divide the society into two major subgroups formed of associations of clans. These are called *moiety*s in English. Only Fiji had stable coalitions of many clans, which we could call “tribes”.<sup>56</sup> And this was influenced by Polynesian custom. Linguistic groups could include

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<sup>56</sup> Most Melanesian social groupings and political units are too small to be referred to as tribes. The use of the term ‘tribe’ to refer to social groupings and political units in Melanesia was the creation of government anthropologists who served the colonial mechanism of the colonial era. Many worked as anthropologists in Africa, thus they transferred some of these terms and appropriately and/or inappropriately applied them to Melanesian situations.



hundreds of clans, but did not correspond with political units. A clan's enemies were often its closest neighbours.

The leaders were often called *big men*, and this position was typically not inherited. Heredity could at most have had some influence on a man's achieving the highest status. The proven qualities of a man were far more important, ability in battle, ability to acquire wealth and to distribute it, speaking ability and perceived wisdom. Heads were considered to be knowledgeable about magical formulas and rites, and were consequently feared for non-physical reasons. Clans were permanently unstable because the "top job" was open to all capable comers, and any leader would have the new aspirants snapping at his heels. Some coastal clans and many eastern clans did have hereditary leaders and even a "grand chief" at the highest, tribal, level. This is typically Fijian, and anthropologists have characterised Fijians as "Polynesians in Melanesian skins". In general, the minority of societies in which leadership was inherited were far more stable than the majority, the *big man* sort.

Clans were based on totems, more commonly in the coastal areas of the large islands and in the archipelagos to the East. Totems were almost all animals, birds and some large fish, not plants, and were considered as the remote ancestors of the clan, or at least as having some special bond with that clan, and as a general rule clan members could not hunt, much less eat their totem animal. But for a few clans totems were mere symbols by which (rather than with which) its members identified themselves.

As in many Asian countries, political decisions in most of Melanesia were made by consensus. A council of elders, usually the heads of the various clans and sub-clans, would discuss problems to exhaustion, and eventually arrived at a formal consensus. Every clan and lineage would be represented. Of course, the prominence and the oratorical powers of some of the heads would have played a larger than average part in the final decision. But it was important that no one felt unhappy with the eventual decision, or was left still holding on to a minority view, and this sort of intense negotiating culture is clearly highly political, through and through. The political systems respected the general structure of the societies, which did not recognise majority rights over minorities, and were strongly egalitarian. Even in those Melanesian societies more influenced by the very hierarchical Polynesian cultures, the leaders based their power on consensus, not on force.



In the most general sense, the clan owned the land, and defended its boundaries ferociously. The identification of the people with their territory was so close that anthropologists have suggested that the people belonged to the land, rather than the other way round. In fact, land was conceptualised as a gift from the ancestors to the current generation, who had to preserve it for their descendants in the future. Belonging to a territory was culturally more important than belonging to a line of inheritance, a “blood line”, or even a line of fictive, ascribed parentage. This facilitated the common practice of adoption (even of abduction) so as to add new members of, rather than to the territory. Effectively then, the real members of the clan were those who cultivated a particular piece of land and who defended it in battle.

The clan was so all-important that its well-being was the highest imperative of morality. So, “good” was anything which contributed to the welfare of one’s own clan, and “bad” was everything which could cause it any harm or disadvantage. All the social institutions, particularly those of the family and of tribal politics, had to contribute to the well-being and prestige of the clan. At a very deep level, individual consciences were formed around this fundamental principle of morality, which has effects that we still can be surprised by today.

Traditional society, like many others, was most strongly divided across the gender boundary. Melanesians have had some of the most extreme distinctions between male and female in the anthropological record, not just a 100% division of tasks or even fear of menstrual blood, but separate buildings, limited physical contact, separate personal taboos, and often violent, ritualised antagonism. Work was strongly divided according to sex, but this has been a common practice in many cultures. Almost all the clans and cultures had an extreme fear of menstrual blood, and of eating food cooked, or even touched, by a menstruating woman. The damage to men is not just illness or bad luck, but a halting of their natural growth and a reduction of their strength. This belief gave rise to a whole host of taboos and regulations concerning sharing a building and sharing food. It was quite common for tribes to have a woman’s hut in which women isolated themselves during menstruation or childbirth, being attended only by other women. And in the Highlands of PNG at least, a polygamous male would house each wife separately with their



own pigs and garden, and visit them on a kind of circuit. We have also mentioned the separation brought about by the men's house, or "lodge", the *haus man*. This was not primarily meant for bachelors.

In the highlands of New Guinea the old ritual conflict between husband and wife was particularly severe. This was because the exogamous woman was an intruder to her husband's clan. In addition, she was often from an enemy clan, as wives were commonly exchanged with enemy clans in periods of reconciliation between tribal fights, in an attempt to make the peace binding, but "peace" was usually no more than a temporary truce. These things exacerbated the universal male fear of woman's blood and her ability to "poison" food, and, no doubt, of a general awe at the generative, reproductive powers of women, when the contribution of men to a pregnancy was often regarded as being little or nothing. All these attitudes led to a lack of displays of emotion between husbands and wives, except of course, anger, to restricting visits to wives and their houses to a very short period, to the use of protective amulets and magical formulas, and to many elements of the different rites of initiation. One example of this is the reason often given in today's PNG for renewed, non-traditional practices of circumcision, either young male on young male, or by a young male on himself. It is "to void the *mama* blood". While witchcraft has been feminised in many cultures, there are particular reasons for such accusations predominantly targeting women in Melanesia.

This grim picture needs to be modified in various ways, especially by noting that when a wife has accepted the restrictions of "being a Melanesian woman", and has produced children, marital relations can soften. But "the war of the sexes" remains a disturbing aspect of various Melanesian societies, including the westernised and educated elite, and where a succession of "girl friends" or worse, a second, third, or sixteenth wife comes in; there can be a war of the women, or on the women by their different supporting clans.

Polygamy was widespread but not common—which means that it could be found in many places, but was not a practice indulged in by every member, or even the majority of them. It was most common among the leaders and prominent males. Their wives increased tribal wealth by producing children, by gardening, and by caring for the pigs, often in the

same living space. All this directly raised the prestige of the leader and the whole clan. Women mostly had a subordinate position in public affairs and social organisation, though this inferiority could be reduced in matrilineal cultures. However, what women did was much valued in all social systems, and this tribal fact threw a fainter reflection on the woman herself—a clan which was agreeing to one of its women marrying out (the normal custom) would demand collective compensation for the loss of this woman's potential as child bearer, gardener and one who takes care of the pigs. And this debt remained for the whole life of the woman. Patrilineal cultures had the same general system, but with some differences. Even after marriage the woman, and her children, were regarded as being entirely the property of her husband's clan. When this husband died the women and children had no easy return to the clan of her youth, which would have been the normal path for a widow to take in matrilineal cultures. Various tensions and conflicts could arise, and in some islands of Vanuatu and Fiji there is hard evidence of a widow, or of widows, being forced to die and share the tomb with their husband. The excavated tombs can also contain the bodies of servants, and clearly not all the deceased died peacefully. Some seem to have been buried alive.

One of the most notable aspects of social life in Melanesia has been the complexity of the network of exchanges which can leave everyone so indebted to everyone else that no escape from debt is possible, for almost everyone. Exchanges can be of goods, or, as we have seen with marriage, of persons. Slavery properly so-called was almost unknown. Exchanges could be between individuals, or between clans, entire communities. Goods seen as being of value include pigs and other, lesser animals (especially cassowaries and large pythons), shells, the feathers of some birds, dog's teeth, boar's tusks, and stones variously shaped, particularly those bored through the centre. Some exchange goods were of use and others purely for display, and of course, some could have both sets of functions. To give things or people away provided a person, or a collectivity, with great prestige. As in other such systems, there could be a devastating competition in gift giving. The whole society was deeply bound together by bonds of all sorts of reciprocity, and Melanesians are naturally suspicious and even contemptuous of those who don't or won't give. Unfortunately for the chances of a modern, civil society in their new States, many

groups regard reciprocity as something that only applies between people inside the clan and with their traditional neighbours. While a “relationship” itself is non-material, Melanesians conceptualise it by the exchange or gift which initiates a personal or commercial or political relationship, the succession of exchanges which periodically reinforce it when it seems to be weakening, those which make up for both deliberate and unintentional wrongs, those which merely demonstrate gratitude, and those which re-establish the equilibrium between persons and between clans.

Exchanges have been conducted over long distances. They are evidenced between the coasts and the interior of the large islands, and between different islands. The most famous is the *kula ring* described by Malinowski, conducted around the islands of S.E. New Guinea. Coastal people and those on small offshore islands had, as a rule, far greater connections with each other (by exchange) than Highlanders did, or any other groups living in the interior. As has become a cliché, the sea connected more than it divided. But this was true for almost all of human history before the railways. Seas, rivers and canals united, but land divided. Once again, it is the recognition and analysis of the pottery called *Lapita* and of finds of obsidian that most clearly show the extent of travelling and exchange, even in quite ancient times.

Melanesians were not the favourites of the early explorers. While other groups could be every bit as aggressive and exploitive, the Melanesians were quickly regarded as being typically unwelcoming, thieving and unpleasant in every way. While not universal, cannibalism was widespread and head hunting was practised. Whatever the form it took, a state of permanent warfare was the normal situation among the clans, and the losers in an important battle could be driven off their land, which became the property of the victors. Ownership by conquest was an accepted reality. Fighting was mostly hand to hand, though arsenal such as bows and arrows, spears, and in minor disagreement, hails of stones could be used at a moderate distance from the enemy. Painted shields, often of a large format, were common. Clubs and axes also. It was not uncommon for raiding parties to descend on enemy villages and for children and women to be abducted. Some tribes depended on abductions to keep up their numbers. Fighting was a major custom provided for excitement and risk taking in a fairly monotonous daily life, it could satisfy very deep reli-

gious needs, guarantee the renewal of their culture and livelihoods, and consolidate the power of the conquerors over the conquered. But the state of fear, which arose from the very insecure situation (and from fear of bush spirits and of human sorcery), was a dark cloud throwing a shadow over daily life and making it difficult, and unusual, for any individual to move far outside the territory of their little clan or of their allies. Physical aggression was also the norm in many families, husband and wife (and this was not all one way!), and parents to children. It is not clear if the “trials and tests” which many young boys endured during initiation contributed to the high level of physical aggression to be found in many of the societies. Physical aggression, through a display of fighting prowess was a survival mechanism; for a passive community was always an easy victim of invading clans.

Excitement was also provided by the great feasts, during which Melanesians painted their bodies in different colours and adorned themselves with the plumage of birds. Coloured clays could make the face into a mask for different purposes; common clay was a sign of grief and mourning. The meaning of the decoration could differ from being a sign of impending aggression, or high rage, or being on a war footing. Masks and total body coverings of various kinds had deep symbolic meanings, often being the personification of spirits, or of ancestors. Skilled carvers of wood were widely employed to make different types of drum, to which the men (and sometimes, the women) danced. Dances were often an enactment of some myth, or they could be the recreation of some sad or joyous event. Along with the drums there could be the blowing of large shells, of bamboo flutes, and of different types of whistles. Dances and songs could be sung by outsiders who did not know the language, and there was a kind of “copyright” on them. “Payment” (some kind of exchange or compensation) was required for outsiders to use these ceremonial creations legitimately.

Melanesian society has become mainly agricultural, and so many rites and myths were based on the agricultural cycle, as well as on the hunting cycle, for land game or for fish. There were ceremonies before planting and others after the harvest. Likewise, for the beginning and end for periods of hunting and fishing. It was common for all hunting or fishing to be banned for considerable periods of time, apparently to allow for the

stocks of the forest and the sea to grow back again, but there is clear evidence that not all the peoples of Melanesia, particularly of Island Melanesia, were ecologically sensitive or even sensible.

The greatest ceremonies were often those which accompanied the death of a head man or some other important member of the clan. Where carving was a tradition, statues could be sculpted in his honour, lines of pigs killed and cooked, and extraordinary types of exchange could be activated between families and clans. The funeral celebrations could go on for some months, running through various stages. Typically, the spirits of recently deceased clan members were deeply feared, and various offerings were made to satisfy, propitiate them. Depending on local cultures, all sorts of sickness and misfortune could be laid at the door of recently deceased people, and were viewed as punishment for any kind of insult or disobedience to them, whether from the lifetime of the person, or after his or her death.

### 3. Traditional Religions of Melanesia

In primal cultures it is difficult or impossible to separate religion from culture in general, if by “religion” we mean beliefs and practices directed at beings not to be found in mankind’s common experience. In fact traditional Melanesian religions permeated the whole life of the community. People would not engage in hunting or fishing, or go out fighting without first calling on supernatural help through religious rituals. Activities connected with gardening cycle or initiation were also accompanied by magic-religious practices.

Melanesian epistemology is essentially religious. That is, Melanesians rely primarily on religious knowledge as their basis for knowing and understanding the world in which they live. (Whiteman in Mantovani 1984: 88)

Melanesians also had no writing system and no elaborate tradition of specialists in oral culture, so the way they formulated their religious attitudes and beliefs was not direct, clear, and conceptual, but discursive and symbolic. Religion was carried by myths, dances and other ceremonies,



and expressed in practices. Melanesian religions were also very different, but they can be seen as sharing a core of beliefs and practices. No doubt they would be comparable with the religions of distant peoples at the same level of culture.

Another aspect of traditional Melanesian religions is its secrecy. Mythical stories, beliefs, practices, etc., were and are kept secret and eventually revealed to clan members within initiation rites. Non members, especially foreigners, do not have easy access to those kinds of knowledge.

Most anthropologists separate “cosmic” or “bio-cosmic” religions from the “theistic” ones. Melanesia is seen as having “cosmic” religions, and in these human beings are considered part of nature, and not their lords and masters. What we may call “life” is shared by man and the animals, but also by plants, by spirits, and the souls of the dead, by totems and by less personalised occult forces. Somewhere in all this we could also put individual stones, and large natural features of the landscape. The world is perceived in its totality and life holistically, without any separation between the natural realm and the supernatural realm, between empirical reality and some non-empirical reality. Natural phenomena and processes like rain, sickness, death and disasters could easily be attributed to what we would call supernatural or meta-empirical causes. These tended to be semi-personalised “agencies” without being made into gods: the spirits of nature, the souls of the deceased, the “force” of magical incantations and the power of witches and of their magical procedures.

Thus the Melanesians believed in what we would class as miracles, in things they saw in dreams, in visions seen while awake, in magic, in witchcraft, in good and bad spirits. The “enchanted vision of the world” had by Melanesians was total and unchallenged by learned critical attitudes. Their native critical attitudes were directed to whether their practices were effective or not, and they were more ready than most cultures of their type to try new things when old ones did not work. Their world was full of mysteries, full of spirits and “divinities”. Dreams were not (and still are not) a trick of the brain, but products of the wandering of a man’s spirit outside the body, or the invasion of his body by another’s spirit to pass on messages from beyond the empirical realm. Custodial spirits infested the woods and the springs. Many birds could bring mes-



sages from the “ones above” and spirits of the ancestors watched over their sons and nephews. In some places contact with the spirit world and the world of ghosts was facilitated by stimulating drinks, like kava.

Magical minded people postulate a personal cause behind every event and cannot accept the notion of “accident”, especially when facing negative events. Whereas a scientific minded person would ask what series of circumstances has provoked those events, most Melanesians would enquire about the “who”, that is the personal entity (human or spirit) who has caused them. Inquests into the human causes of death still occupy a great deal of the time and energy of Melanesians leading to sorcery accusations and punishments.

Belief in some kind of high or supreme spirit, or god, could be present in the culture, but was not central to it. Especially in the Highlands of New Guinea, heavenly bodies could be considered as divine: the sun, the moon and the stars.

Creation from nothing was not a serious question for traditional Melanesians, nor was transcendence or monotheism. Creation deities, who gave the world its familiar form, are not transcendent, totally other beings. They do not preside over other deities and spirits and had generally withdrawn from active involvement in the life of the community. (Whiteman, in Mantovani 1984: 107).

Most of the myths collected in Melanesia are concerned with the foundation of a clan. The distant ancestors were not only the originators of the clan or some higher grouping, but also were the source of its traditions and customs. Anthropologists call these figures “cultural heroes”. In Melanesia, such origin figures were often a pair of brothers who founded the clan, but then for whatever reason fell out with each other. This then resulted in one of them (often the “good” brother) going away.<sup>57</sup> These myths were of course orally transmitted, and they had many variations to their common themes, always being open to additions and new interpreta-

<sup>57</sup> The ‘two-brother’ story is widespread throughout most Melanesian regions. For instance Manub and Kilibob story of Northeast New Guinea and To Purgo and To Kabinana found among the Tolai of the Gazelle Peninsula on the island of New Britain. There are two known myths of origins in Melanesia versus 22 stories about the activities of two brothers (see Rufus Pech 1991:10).

tions according to changing circumstances. Many myths left open the possibility, if not the promise, of a return of the founding ancestor, bringing a pile of goods for his descendants. “Cultural heroes” are present in many myths, but they were rarely invoked or venerated with offerings or gifts.

Throughout Melanesia there is a group of mythical ancestors known collectively as “dema” deities<sup>58</sup>.

A *dema* is an ancestor who because of some difficulty or other is either killed violently or chooses to die. But its body is hardly in the ground when something miraculous happens. From the body of the dead ancestor grows a coconut tree, a yam, sweet potatoes or taro, or pigs come from the grave, or some other plant or animal essential for the livelihood of the community appears. (Whiteman in Mantovani 1984: 106)

The spirits of the natural world were far closer to the people. Forests, springs, rivers, mountains and striking natural features had such presences. They were considered to be ambivalent in nature, that is, they were capable of either good or evil. So there was a definite need to work towards getting their favour and not annoying them, to earn protection rather than punishment. A complicating factor was another belief, namely that spirits and ghosts could take human or animal form and thus come into close and unexpected contact with mortals.

The forefathers were also considered to need placating, because they watched over the clan to check that their traditions were being followed and respected. In Island Melanesia the more distant ancestors tended to be thought of as kind and protective, while the more recently deceased clan members tended to be feared. The greater part of the cult and the offerings went to the most feared spirit beings, precisely to placate them. Anthropologists have often noticed that the offerings made to the ancestors, of animals and food, were not so much “sacrifices” as an extension of the exchanges that clan members made among each other as a normal part of daily life.

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<sup>58</sup> The word ‘dema’ comes from the Marind-Amin people of West Papua. The religious significance of the dema was introduced to the world through the works of Adolf Jensen and Jan Van Baal.

Another common belief was that humans were also constituted of a spiritual principle, which could be described as a shadow, breathing, or spirit, and that this could sometimes leave the body and take on other forms. After someone's death this power to survive transformations allowed for people to become living ancestors after their death, and to continue to be active in the area where their clan members lived and moved. In some cultures the spirits of the dead remained close to the settlement for a limited time, and then went away and lived in a variety of remote places such as islands, highland lakes or caves. But they were not totally out of reach even there, and could be called upon in special circumstances. Their help, which is readily available, is elicited by clan members.

These classes of spirits have something of the personal about them, but Melanesians also believed in the presence of occult powers somehow separable from personality, like the ancient "numen". Souls and spirits had such powers, but so did places and things, which were never considered to have personal qualities. "Magic stones" were widely revered throughout Melanesia. The Polynesian term "mana" has been modified to express this mysterious force, by anthropologists at least. People and things can both have "mana". Persons could inherit it or obtain it by acquiring the appropriate magical formulae. Any unusual success in hunting, fishing or fighting was put down to "mana", and those who possessed it were thought to have powers far less common than that: most often controlling the rain and stopping storms, diverting a cyclone, causing droughts or food shortages, multi-location, and so on. Such impressive men (women usually did not have this force) were specially venerated after their death. In fact, death was a good career move, in the sense that they were more open to being invoked and gained more prestige. Their names were specifically invoked on special occasions, and were given to many children to perpetuate their memory.

This "magical" view of the world ensured that daily life was an inextricable tangle of the natural and the supernatural, of the empirical and the meta-empirical. People planted their yams with care, but also invoked the primordial spirits who gave them the yam. People set off on voyages and trips with the proper precautions and provisions, but also gave offerings to the spirits of the land through which they had to pass. The taboos designed for moments of crisis were many. These occasions included men-

stration, pregnancy, tribal fights, initiation times, and the death of a relative. When misfortune or disaster struck, the first thing to do was to clarify who (or what) had caused it. The searchers usually looked at the meta-empirical world. Thus there was a rite of divination, practised by experts in the art of uncovering secret causes. These people would closely scrutinise the human relations and the behaviour of the victims, and of suspects, to see how the ancestors or spirits might have been offended, or how the powers of sorcerers or witches might have been drawn down on them. And there would be a decision. Then the task was to see if they could reconcile the offended spirits, ancestors, or living people, or, in the case of sorcery or witchcraft, if they could kill the sorcerer or witch. More often than not, a witch was female.

Melanesian religions were deeply pragmatic. There was no interest in the “truth” but every interest in what was useful, in what “worked”. If a Melanesian rite did not produce the desired effect it would be changed. A divinity was considered to be true if it demonstrated its power, otherwise it would be a false one. If a spirit turned out to be powerless, it was abandoned for another one.

Rituals served to control cosmic events: rain, divert a hurricane, cure some illness, hold back the lava of a volcano, make a woman fertile, make children thrive, help the growth of animals and plants, ensure a successful hunt or catch of fish, make someone love you, cause the recovery, or the death of another, and so on. Some anthropologists have described the various religions of the Melanesians as being more a set of techniques for obtaining a result than instruments of spiritual salvation.

There were many rituals, many of them privately performed, but there were great public occasions too, sometimes yearly, and sometimes in a loose cycle of several years or more. In these a huge number of pigs and enormous amounts of fish and tubers were consumed. These were rites of “cosmic renewal”. They renewed the life of the cosmos and of all its inhabitants. Thus they were authentic celebrations of “Life,” in which symbols of fecundity were enacted (and not just symbols), and in which the myths of the founder ancestors were renewed in story and in dance. Friendly clans could also be invited, and at such unusual gatherings alliances were firmed up, marriages projected, and the prestige of the clan was enhanced.

Most Melanesian societies did not build temples or establish special places of religious cult. Magic rites were conducted in the men's house, in gardens, in any places considered sacred in themselves, and in graveyards. Some societies however had great halls reserved for the cult of the spirits of the ancestors, like the *haus tambaran* to be seen along the Sepik River, in northern New Guinea. Here they keep their magical objects: masks, sacred flutes, magic stones, skulls and bones of the ancestors. Some groups kept their sacred objects in the house of their chief.

Melanesian societies were rich in rites of initiation, especially for young males. Other "rites of passage" were those, which accompanied birth, childhood, puberty, adulthood, and death. The most important were those associated with puberty, which required a time of segregation during which the initiates were subjected to physical trials and punishment and were introduced to the secrets of the clan. The end of this process was often marked by circumcision and/or scarification of the skin. These were truly religious rites, and they preserved the continuity between the spirits of the ancestors and the living, between the totem and the clan members. This was where the foundation myths were revealed, and this contributed to a sense of belonging and of loyalty among the young products of the process of initiation.

Other rites were associated with the induction of a new chief in some parts of Melanesia, or entry to some secret society. Especially in Island Melanesia, men rose in the social scale by means of rites which followed on various prestations (offerings, donations) by the candidate. In general these were made in the form of items of value. Secret societies, seemingly almost all male, excluded the non-initiates and all women. Despite the lack of hard evidence, it seems that sorcerers had secret societies running across clan boundaries.

Secrecy was a particularly strong value in Melanesian religions. A clan's foundation myths, rites, initiation ceremonies, taboos and so on were all kept very secret and revealed only to initiates. It was a common belief that myths and rites lost their magic force as soon as they were known to outsiders. In the hands of enemies they could even be turned against their original owners.

It is clear from what we have tried to say that despite some strong common features, Melanesian religions were highly specific to each clan.

There were different founders, different myths, different rites, ancestors, nature spirits, sacred objects and formulae, beliefs, and so on. You could imagine “the” religion” of the Melanesians as a large collection of similarly formatted pigeon holes, holes which were filled with very different contents, according to the tribe or clan that each represented.

#### 4. Brief Excursus on the Evangelisation of Melanesia

The first attempts in the evangelisation of Melanesia were sporadic. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries the Spanish and Portuguese ships that plied a regular trans-Pacific route from South and Central Americas to the Moluccas and return, usually had religious personnel on board. From time to time, local islanders would be taken on board and transported to places like the Spanish Americas to be christianised there, and to return as evangelisers of their own people. But these Catholic efforts were without fruit in Melanesia.

It wasn't until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century that Christian missionaries began a serious evangelisation effort in Polynesia, which reached Melanesia a few decades later. With the exception of the Indonesian Province of Papua – which was first evangelised by missionaries coming from Java- the Pacific evangelisation spread from east to the west. Protestant missionaries, sent by mission agencies mostly located in Europe and Australia, arrived first and made use of indigenous Christians in spreading the Good News in other islands. They reached Fiji in 1830, New Caledonia and Vanuatu in 1840, the Solomon Islands in 1845, and Eastern New Guinea (the present Papua New Guinea) in 1871. Western New Guinea (the present Indonesian province of Papua) was reached by protestant missionaries already in 1855. The founding Protestant Denominations were Methodist, Congregationalist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Calvinist, Anglican, and Adventist.

On the part of the Catholic Church, the evangelisation of Oceania was first entrusted by the Vatican to religious orders of recent formation, such as the French *Society of Mary*, the Italian *Pontifical Institute of Mission Overseas* (PIME), the French *Missionaries of the Sacred Heart*, the French *Missionaries of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary*, and the German *Society of the Divine Word*. Catholic missionaries arrived in New Caledonia

in 1843, in Fiji in 1844, in the Solomon Islands in 1845, in Eastern New Guinea in 1847, in Vanuatu in 1848, in Western New Guinea in 1912.

The evangelisation of Melanesia was accompanied by enormous difficulties and heavy loss of personnel. Mission stations were often to be abandoned due to the hostility of the local populations or to infections and epidemics. Many foreign missionaries suffered from violent or earlier death. The evangelisation of Melanesia did not happen as smoothly as that of Polynesia and suffered also severe setbacks during the First and Second World Wars. In spite of all that, by the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century most Melanesians had been “converted” to Christianity. Starting from the 1960s onwards many Protestant missions became autonomous churches while the previous Catholic Apostolic Vicariates became autonomous Dioceses.

After the Second World War many new Protestant denominations entered the Melanesian region as well as male and female Catholic Religious Orders. The pioneering churches found their ranks being thinned by the success of the newly arrived and the scene of the religious affiliation was changed significantly. It is estimated that in Melanesia during the last 50 years a good quarter of the faithful of the pioneering churches had transferred their allegiance to recently arrived churches. Percentages differ according to the country but the overall tendency is clear and seems destined to increase. From the data collected by the Melanesian Institute Research Team in 2003, the following was the situation of Melanesian as a whole in the matter of religious affiliation at the turn of the second into the third millennium.

Table 1: Religious Affiliation in Melanesia (2003)

\*\* Not available, not offered

CHURCH/ RELIGION	Indonesian Papua	Papua New Guinea	Solomon Islands	Vanuatu	New Caledo- nia	Fiji	TOTAL
Catholic	450 000 <i>18.4%</i>	1 500 000 <i>27.3%</i>	85 000 <i>17.3%</i>	28 000 <i>13.3%</i>	112 000 <i>50.9%</i>	70 000 <i>8.2%</i>	<b>2 245 000</b> <b>26.2%</b>
Calvinist (1)	79 000 <i>32.2%</i>	***	***	64 000 <i>30.5%</i>	47 700 <i>21.7%</i>	500 <i>0.06%</i>	<b>902 200</b> <b>9.3%</b>
Methodist (2)	***	630 000 <i>11.5%</i>	49 000 <i>11.5%</i>	***	***	300 000 <i>25.7%</i>	<b>979 000</b> <b>10.1%</b>
Lutheran (3)	***	920 000 <i>16.7%</i>	***	***	***	***	<b>920 000</b> <b>9.5%</b>
Anglican	***	175 000 <i>3.2%</i>	155 000 <i>28.2%</i>	28 800 <i>13.7%</i>	***	7 000 <i>0.8%</i>	<b>365 800</b> <b>3.8%</b>
Baptist (4)	90 000 <i>3.7%</i>	135 000 <i>2.5%</i>	2 500 <i>0.5%</i>	***	***	2 000 <i>0.2%</i>	<b>229 500</b> <b>2.4%</b>

Evangelical (5)	345 000 14.1%	350 000 6.4%	85 000 17.3%	8 900 4.2%	***	20 000 2.4%	<b>808 900</b> <b>8.3%</b>
Adventist (6)	12 000 0.5%	600 000 11.0%	55 000 12.2%	28 000 13.3%	460 0.2%	22 000 3.2%	<b>717 460</b> <b>7.4%</b>
Apostolic (7)	***	120 000 2.2%	2 000 0.4%	3 900 0.9%	100 0.05%	3 000 0.4%	<b>129 000</b> <b>1.3%</b>
Pentecostal (8)	27 000 1.1%	500 000 9.1%	10 000 2.0%	22 600 10.8%	3 100 1.4%	35 000 4.8%	<b>597 700</b> <b>6.2%</b>
Mormons (9)	***	23 000 0.4%	250 0.05%	2 100 1.0%	1 900 0.9%	4 000 0.5%	<b>31 250</b> <b>0.3%</b>
Jehovah's Witnesses	***	24 000 0.4%	9 000 1.8%	400 0.2%	1 660 0.8%	7 000 0.8%	<b>42 060</b> <b>0.4%</b>
Other Christian (10)	127 500 5.2%	407 000 7.4%	22 250 4.5%	15 000 7.1%	***	16 500 2.0%	<b>588 650</b> <b>6.1%</b>
<b>Total Christian</b>	<b>1 841 500</b> <b>75.2%</b>	<b>5 384 400</b> <b>97.9%</b>	<b>475 000</b> <b>96.9%</b>	<b>201 700</b> <b>96.0%</b>	<b>166 920</b> <b>75.8%</b>	<b>487 000</b> <b>58.0%</b>	<b>8 556 530</b> <b>88.1%</b>
Baha'i	***	18 000 0.3%	3 000 0.7%	2 000 1.0%	800 0.4%	1 000 0.1%	<b>24 800</b> <b>0.2%</b>
Muslim	600 000 24.5%	1 000 0.02%	***	100 0.05%	5500 2.5%	64 000 7.6%	<b>670 600</b> <b>6.9%</b>
Hindu	4 000 0.2%	600 0.01%	***	120 0.05%	***	275 000 32.7%	<b>279 720</b> <b>2.9%</b>
Buddhist	2 000 0.1%	1 000 0.02%	***	***	200 0.1%	***	<b>3 200</b> <b>0.03%</b>
Other religions (11)	***	15 000 0.3%	5 000 1.0%	***	***	5 000 0.6%	<b>25 000</b> <b>0.3%</b>
Traditional Religions (12)	***	50 000 0.9%	2 000 0.4%	5 500 2.6%	***	***	<b>57 500</b> <b>0.6%</b>
other non-Christian (13)	2 500 0.1%	30 000 0.5%	5 000 1.0%	1 680 0.8%	46 580 21.3%	8 000 1.0%	<b>92 860</b> <b>1.0%</b>
<b>TOTAL NON-CHRISTIAN</b>	<b>608 500</b> <b>24.8%</b>	<b>115 600</b> <b>2.1%</b>	<b>15 000</b> <b>3.1%</b>	<b>8 300</b> <b>4.0%</b>	<b>53 080</b> <b>24.4%</b>	<b>353 000</b> <b>42.0%</b>	<b>1 153 680</b> <b>11.9%</b>
<b>TOTAL POPULATION</b>	<b>2 450 000</b> <b>100.0%</b>	<b>5 500 000</b> <b>100.0%</b>	<b>490 000</b> <b>100.0%</b>	<b>210 000</b> <b>100.0%</b>	<b>220 000</b> <b>100.0%</b>	<b>840 000</b> <b>100.0%</b>	<b>9 710 000</b> <b>100.0%</b>

- (1) *Calvinists*: Presbyterians, Christian Evangelical Church in Indonesia, Union of Reformed Churches, Evangelical Church of New Caledonia, Free Evangelical Church of New Caledonia, Protestant Church of Indonesia in Papua, etc.
- (2) *Methodists*: Methodist Church, United Church of PNG, United Church of Solomon Islands, Wesleyan Methodist Church, etc.
- (3) *Lutherans*: Evangelical Lutheran Church of PNG, Gutnius Lutheran Church, Protestant Church in Indonesia, Church of the Protestant Community in Papua.
- (4) *Baptists*: Baptist Bible Fellowship, Maranatha Baptist Church, Baptist Unions, Sovereign Grace Baptist Union, Tabernacle Church, Independent Baptist Church, etc.
- (5) *Evangelicals*: Evangelical Church in Indonesia, Evangelical Church of the Tabernacle, Christian Community of the Bible, Church of Christ, South Sea Evangelical Church, etc.
- (6) *Adventists*: Seventh Day Adventist Church, Reformed Adventist Church.
- (7) *Apostolic*: Apostolic Church, New Apostolic Church.

- (8) *Pentecostals*: Assemblies of God, Pentecostal Church of Bethel, United Pentecostal Church, Four Square Gospel Church, etc.
- (9) *Mormons*: Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, Reformed Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints.
- (10) *Other Christian churches*: Independent indigenous churches, Eastern Orthodox, smaller Churches not federated or affiliated, &c.
- (11) *Other religions*: Confucianism, Sikhs, modern orientalising sects, &c.
- (12) *Traditional religions*: both the really traditional ones, and the more modern, usually messianic versions.
- (13) *Other non-Christian*: Atheists, agnostics, not members of any institutionalised church

Source: Zocca: 2007: 197-198

## 5. The Initial Proclamation of Christ by the Pioneer Missionaries

The following paragraphs are based on my readings of books on the evangelisation of Oceania, on diaries and memoirs written by early missionaries, on catechetical manuals and catechisms, on religious instruction books for schools, on collections of sermons and hymns, and on communications with elderly missionaries who pioneered the evangelisation of the Highlands populations of Papua New Guinea in the '50s and 60's.

From the early accounts of explorers and traders, the missionaries knew before arriving that Melanesian peoples were culturally different from the Polynesians or Indonesians. They were more socially fragmented, more independent as small groups and individuals, and more aggressive. Thus, before landing, missionaries had to come up with new strategies of making contact and new ways of communicating and negotiating with these peoples.

Before starting to proclaim the Good News to Melanesians the pioneer Christian missionaries had to overcome the natural distrust, or even hostility, on the part of the native population. The strategy used was that of exchanging goods particularly valuable to the locals, such as tobacco, axes, knives, fish hooks, and medicines. They specialised in exchanges done through the heads of the clans (chiefs or big-men), and thus entered into 'friendly' politico-personal relations with them.

Another strategy used by the Protestant missionaries of European origins was that of entrusting the first proclamation to catechists and helpers



already evangelised in Polynesia, in other Melanesian islands, or in the near-Indonesia. Not only did these helpers come out of a culture far closer to the one they hoped to evangelise, but they had also interiorised the message of Christianity ‘in their own way’. They were able to be mediators between the cultural blinkered whites and the local people. These local helpers were often left to their own devices for long periods, so they were in fact the real proclaimers of the Gospel in word and deed.

In their very early contacts, missionaries generally worked through the traditional channels, that is, approached the people through their leaders, respecting the clannish structure of the society. It proved to be the most successful strategy too. The Anglicans, as well as other groups, took an opposite approach, to some extent, and disregarded the social structures and cultures. They took youngsters out of their culture to be educated in an European environment and then reinserted them into their home situation, baptised and educated. This led to so many failures and disappointments that it eventually had to be abandoned. When the chiefs and leaders accepted the missionaries, these had found the “key” which opened the way to evangelisation.

The most widely used strategy, in conjunction with any of the above, was to begin by starting a school. Catechists were typically also teachers and were made responsible for running the little schools set up by many missionaries as soon as they had some confidence about their acceptance by the local clan. The link between mission and school was so close to the local people that in early Pidgin the word “skul” also meant mission, or Christian denomination. When, as often happened, the local people had a choice between different and competing Christian denominations, they would ask themselves what the best “skul” would be, what “skul” would give them the best deal. And it was common for them to keep asking these questions after having made their decision, always on the lookout for something better.

Together with the “skul” the pioneer missionaries showed their concern for the well being of the people by introducing western medicine and simple technology. In so doing they acted very differently from previous white men who had come to exploit the material and human resources of the Melanesian islands. Their compassionate behaviour was already an impressive proclamation of the Gospel.



The study of the languages and the cultures of the natives was a priority to which the early Christian missionaries dedicated a lot of time. Witnesses of these are the diaries, books and dictionaries written by those pioneers. Those who had studied ethnology were certainly better prepared for the understanding of the Melanesian cultures but most of them, after the long years spent in the mission field, had a remarkable grasp of those cultures. However, missionaries varied in their evaluation of those cultures. Some showed some appreciation while many considered them as depraved and satanic.

In regard to the content of the first proclamation, as I have said, we can only guess from the books, diaries, catechisms, collection of sermons and hymns left behind by those early missionaries. The catechisms are not dissimilar from those they took along from the countries of origins. They begin with God's creation and the other Bible stories up to Jesus Christ and his redemptive sacrifice. Great emphasis was put on God's unicity, on the evil of sin, and the expiatory death of Jesus on the cross. The collections of sermons and hymns also emphasise the same topics with the exception of the Catholics, who include the devotions to our Lady and the saints, as well as the hierarchical and apostolic structure of the church.

As far as Christian ethics is concerned, Protestants were generally very critical of the traditional beliefs and customs, and tended to forbid them with great strength. Catholic missionaries tended to be more tolerant and respectful of traditional cultures. In the presentation of the Christian faith, however, the Christian catechisms show very little positive use of the traditional cultures and religions, either by simply ignoring them or by strongly condemning them.

A curious phenomenon which is often linked to the coming of white colonisers and Christian missionaries into Melanesia is the explosion of the so called "cargo cults", that is millenarian movements which, in their majority, had the peculiar feature of including the arrival of "cargo" (any sort of manufactured goods) as the signal and substance of the new world to come. Hundreds of "cargo cults" have appeared in Melanesia since their first description in mid 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>59</sup>

<sup>59</sup> For a bibliography on the "cargo cults" phenomenon I refer to my article 'Millenarianism in Melanesia', in *Catalyst* 1998, 28/1, 67-90.

The foreign missionaries were mostly of North European origin (Britain, North America, Germany and France) and children of the so called Illuminism with its stress on scientific and rational explanations. They were bearer of a type of Christianity which could be called “Modern Western Christianity”, whose characteristics are contrasted with those of the traditional Melanesian religions in the following chart:

Chart 1: Some major Characteristics of traditional Melanesian Religions and of Modern Western Christianity.

TRADITIONAL MELANESIAN RELIGIONS	MODERN WESTERN CHRISTIANITY
<b>Integrated worldview</b> No separation between the natural and supernatural realms: gods, spirits, ancestors, men and animals, all of which inhabit the same cosmos and interact with each other.	<b>Dualistic worldview</b> Separation of the natural and supernatural; only exceptionally does the supernatural interact with the natural world; scepticism concerning vision, dreams, miracles, etc.
<b>Pre-scientific attitudes</b> Natural phenomena are attributed to supernatural causes; importance of magical techniques to control natural phenomena. Belief in sorcery as explanation for sickness, death and disaster.	<b>Scientific attitudes</b> Natural phenomena are due to natural causes, which are discovered with the help of experiment; magical practices are not considered effective.
<b>Clannish dimension</b> Beliefs differ according to the clan, and so do rites, ancestors, spirits, taboos and moral codes.	<b>Universalistic dimension</b> Christianity promulgates doctrines, rites and a moral code applying to the whole human race.
<b>Communitarian</b> Relations with the supernatural world are community-centred; the moral code is based on the welfare of the community.	<b>Individualistic</b> Relations with the supernatural are individual and personal; the moral code is based on the salvation of each individual person.
<b>Holistic</b> Religious beliefs and rituals permeate the whole life. No activity is only secular.	<b>Compartmental</b> Clear division between secular activities and religious ones.
<b>Immanent</b> Creative deities are immanent but not involved in the life of humans. Nature and ancestors spirits are immanent and involved. Presence of ‘dema’ figures.	<b>Transcendent</b> Creator is one and transcendent, benevolent and provident. Spirits and ghosts are also transcendent. Only exceptionally they interfere with humans.
<b>Based on veneration of the spirits</b> Nature spirits and spirits of the ancestors (ghosts) are venerated and considered powerful.	<b>Limited veneration of spirits</b> Only the angelic spirits are venerated.
<b>Magical</b> It is believed that wealth and benefits, as well as sickness and disaster can be obtained by means of rites and spells, which have automatic effects when correctly used by magicians.	<b>Trusting on prayer</b> The divinity cannot be forced by magical rites and spells. It can only be asked in prayer, in the confidence of being heard.
<b>Pragmatic</b> Religion is all about attaining practical and immediate ends: hunting, fishing, healing, rain, fertility, sickness, death, etc. Rites are changed if they do not work. The highest aim is fullness of life here on earth.	<b>Non pragmatic</b> Religion is primarily concerned with the attainment of spiritual ends: pardon for sin, eternal life, strength to practice the commandments, etc. Rites are more stable.
<b>Ritualistic</b> There are all sorts of rites to obtain the desired result; great importance is placed on the exact execution of rites, and on their being done by experts.	<b>Non ritualistic</b> Rites, especially among protestants, are reduced to the minimum and considered more to be symbols of inner attitude than actions invested with their own power.
<b>Based on reciprocity</b> Relations with the non empirical world are of the same type of those between humans, based on systems of exchange. Punishment is seen as the consequence of a faulty or failed exchange. Vengeance and pay back as a moral obligation.	<b>Based on Grace</b> Relations with God are based on his free, gratuitous condescension. Redemption and eternal salvation are freely given. Forgiveness and reconciliation are stressed.

<p><b>Indigenous moral code</b> The highest principle of morality is the welfare of one's own clan, but there are countless rules to observe: taboos, dietary requirements, feat of menstrual blood, strict observance of rituals, etc.</p>	<p><b>Western-Christian moral code</b> Monogamy, free choice in marriage, gender equality, courts to resolve conflicts, individual rights, abolition of tribal fighting, universal brotherhood of mankind, cod of modesty, etc.</p>
<p><b>Emotional</b> Festivals, initiation rites, funerals, myths, etc. Are celebrated with great emotional intensity; ecstatic phenomena are keenly sought after.</p>	<p><b>Self-restraint</b> The participants in rituals should be calm and orderly; scepticism with regard to ecstatic phenomena.</p>
<p><b>Esoteric</b> Secrecy is essential about rites, myths, etc., if these are not to lose their effectiveness; only initiates are supposed to have the knowledge, or full knowledge of them.</p>	<p><b>Transparent</b> Everything will be spoken about and explained; religious knowledge is open to anyone; the content of faith and rituals are explained.</p>
<p><b>Oral</b> Religious knowledge is transmitted orally to the appropriate people. Myths are always open to adaptation to changing social and environmental circumstances.</p>	<p><b>Written</b> Tradition is written down and it is not subject to creeping or unnoticed change; especially in the case of Bible or other holy books.</p>
<p><b>Millenarian</b> Many Melanesian myths foresee the sudden irruption of a golden age, involving the return of the ancestors.</p>	<p><b>Non-millenarian</b> Many Christian denominations do not emphasise the Parousia, the second coming of Christ.</p>

## 6. Critical Evaluation of the Initial Proclamation in Melanesia

The initial proclamation of the pioneer missionaries, at least in his official and written form, seems to have bypassed the cultural and religious background of the Melanesian populations. Stress was put on creation, monotheism, idolatry and sin, which were topics of little interest and concern to Melanesians. What was clear to them was the fact that the white men had a lot of goods and in their mind it was attributed to a superior set of religious rituals.

Undoubtedly one of the effects of European contact was to lead Melanesians to believe that if they adopted European religious rituals, that is, Christian rituals, they would also obtain access to European life. (Whitman in Mantovani 1984: 95)

Another impression one gets from the reading of the catechisms produced by those pioneer missionaries is that they seem to ignore that a major characteristic of traditional Melanesian religion was its holistic dimension, it pervaded all human activities. Christianity did not provide enough religious rituals for all the traditional activities in gardening, hunting, fishing, initiation, marital life, sickness, death, etc. They were



considered “secular”, that is outside the scope of religion. Unwittingly the introduction of Christianity became a factor of secularisation, as it was still noticed in the 1980s.

European missionaries, as part of the Western influence, have often unwittingly been agents of secularisation in their efforts to proclaim the Gospel. Although one would hope that Christianity would become as deeply integrated into the whole of life as was the traditional religion, it seems that many Melanesian converts tend to live in a more compartmentalised world, and so Christian faith tends to become a Sunday-only ritual activity (Whiteman in Mantovani 1984: 88)

We may ask ourselves what would have been the right starting point in the proclamation of the Good news. A Solomon Islander once told Dr Whiteman: “If missionaries had started with the Incarnation or the Good Friday and Easter events then that would have been far more meaningful to Melanesians” To which sentence Whiteman added this comment:

It took me several years to begin to understand the theological significance of this Solomon Islander’s insight, but as I began to understand the dema myths then I could better understand why Creation would not be the best starting point or cultural bridge to introduce Christianity in a way that would have the maximum meaningful impact for Melanesian converts. (Whiteman in Mantovani: 1984: 106)

Personally I don’t think it would have been the best starting point since it was opened to misunderstandings. In fact cases were reported in which good Melanesian young men were sacrificed in the conviction that their deaths would have provided for the Melanesians all the material blessings the death of Jesus had brought to the white people<sup>60</sup>. Were the missionaries aware of this possible misunderstanding?

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<sup>60</sup> See Bishop Noser’s diary, kept at the Divine Word University, Madang.



## 7. Attempt of an Ideal Initial Proclamation of the Gospel in Melanesia

The following attempt is based on the already exposed ‘fulfilment theory’. The initial proclamation of Christ should be presented in the first instance as a ‘completion’ of beliefs and practices already present in the traditional Melanesian cultures and religions.

The following are some suggestions in that direction.

- Belief in Creator deities, sometimes in a supreme Spirit, was almost universally present. Monotheism and creationism could be adapted into that belief.
- The integrated vision of the world could facilitate the acceptance of a provident
- God-Father, who is close to his children and cares for their well being.
- Belief in good and bad spirits was also universally present. The doctrine of angels and demons could fit into it.
- Belief in the existence of souls and their permanence after the death of a person was held by all Melanesians. New would have been that the fate of the ancestors’ souls was now completely in God’s hands.
- The myths regarding the “dema” convey the principle that the death of one person brings life to the community. A profound insight which can be easily be applied to Jesus and his death.
- To the search for a fullness of life here on earth could be added the search for a fullness of life beyond the grave (cf. Jn 10: 10)
- The communitarian society, in which the well-being of all takes priority over the individual interest, could become a concrete image of an ideal “body of Christ”.
- Leaders who acquire their status because of the services provided to their people are also a good example of that leadership as service proclaimed in the Gospel.
- The need of rituals for the different activities and initiation should also have been recognised and taken into consideration in providing Christian rituals or adapting the old ones. Several sacraments, as initiation rituals, could easily fit into Melanesian cultures.

- The authority attributed to the mythological stories, handed down by the ancestors, could easily be transferred also to God's word in the Bible.
- Beliefs surrounding the veneration of the ancestors could be applied to the veneration of saints as well.
- The attitude of "awe" and taboo in regard to magic things and places could be transferred to Christian Holy Books, rituals, and places.

As already said, this kind of approach presupposes a deep knowledge of the Melanesian cultures on the part of the proclaimers. The same knowledge is also needed to oppose and correct beliefs and practices in clear contrast with the Christian message. To mention some:

- The blaming of sorcerers and witches for sickness death and disasters, followed by accusations and punishments.
- The pay back mentality which sees forgiveness as weakness.
- Easy harming and killing of supposed enemies.
- The low status of women who are easily abused.
- The prestigious status enjoyed in the society by polygynous men
- The fear of ancestral ghosts.
- Recurrence to tribal fights in order to resolve conflicts.

These bad habits too should be corrected beginning from their cultural roots. For instance, accusations and punishments of supposed sorcerers are rooted in the belief of the effectiveness of magical practices and in the non acceptance of natural causes as final explanations for natural phenomena. They could be corrected by education, exposure to modern medicine, and appropriate legislation<sup>61</sup>.

Nowadays the almost totality of the indigenous inhabitants of Melanesia call themselves Christian. It seems, therefore, that the phase of initial proclamation should be over, at least for the adult people. Unfortunately, this is not the case, since many important values proclaimed by

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<sup>61</sup> In Papua New Guinea there is a "Sorcery Act" which criminalizes the practice of malevolent sorcery. According to the author, this Act is rather re-enforcing the belief instead of taking it away.

Christ have not yet been internalised and made their own by Melanesians.

Besides, apart from the traditional customs not yet transformed by the Christian message there are many new customs which are strongly in contrast with Christian ethics, such as corruption, abuse of alcohol and drugs, prostitution, gambling, pornography, and other crimes of various type. Secularisation and agnosticism, especially among young educated Melanesians, is also affecting the modern population. We experience now a certain amount of no-churched youth and adults. Melanesian cultures and peoples are still in need of conversion, prompted by an ever deeper understanding and acceptance of the Gospel of Christ. The above list of suggestions for the initial proclamation of the Gospel might still be useful in the present context and in the transmission of the Christian faith to the young generation.

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## A Response to Franco Zocca

Fr. Peter Baquero SDB

I have enjoyed reading the presentation of Fr. Franco Zocca. It is not just an informative material but for a missionary it is thought-provoking. Personally, I have nothing to contend with his presentation as well as considering the limitation of its scope. However, I kept on asking myself as I read (and re-read) what could be an underlying question that can possibly trigger an attempt for a deeper reflection on the Melanesian or Polynesian culture. I started to synthesize by asking the question: “What is fullness of life for Melanesians?”... what is the meaning of life for a typical Melanesian or Polynesian? Or what could give the best meaning in life for a Melanesian or Polynesian? This question lingered on in me and I wish to suggest that it could serve as a trigger question in our reflections.

It would be good to reflect on the human aspect of a culture before introducing or building up our faith dimension (Christianity), to see the human side of the missionary work. I guess the early missionaries gave their share of going deep into the human relations with its struggles and pains.

For us missionaries (and religious), our fullness of life is in Christ. Though stated in few words, it gives meaning and purpose for our human existence. Meanwhile, for Melanesians, what or who can give fullness of life? What or who can give meaning and purpose for their human existence? I guess the presentation of Fr. Franco gives a lot of insights. But, what could be that one word or one principle that can define or express “fullness of life” for Melanesians?

For us missionaries, we have our own meaning and purpose in life (in Christ). Hopefully, it is personally clear and well-defined in each one of us. Definitely, Melanesians have their own meaning and purpose for their



existence. In our mission work, it becomes now an encounter between two meanings and two definitions of fullness of life. Hopefully it becomes an intersection (meaning AND meaning) not a comparison (meaning VERSUS meaning). I believe this is the reality in our missionary work and surely the context for any initial proclamation. From this perspective, we can truly reflect on our present missionary work and activity:

1. Melanesians surely have their own worldview. As missionaries encounter them with their own culture from our own cultural background. As a first stage of any mission work, observation is very vital. We get involved **WITH** them and participate **IN** their life with honesty and discrete attitude. We treat them as people not objects for study. All these because we mean to be **WITH THEM**. When we come as missionaries, do we really mean to stay (long) with them? Do we respect the “observation stage” of any missionary work? What strategies did we do in order to facilitate a purposeful “observation stage”? In our ministry (of education), how do we assist each other as co-missionaries in our realisations as results from our observations?
2. Melanesian culture is so diverse as evidenced by their numerous languages (dialects). This poses a big challenge. If we mean to stay with them, then we have to enter into their life. Learning the language is very crucial but not the end. It is an entry into their world where we can begin to appreciate and be interested in them. With this at hand, we can better enter into the MEANING(S) of their culture. Up to what extent have we entered into the meaning(s) of our people’s culture? Do we respect their meaning(s) in life? What steps do we take in order to show that we are serious in entering into the Melanesian world?
3. Culture is learned not inherited. At the same time, it is enriched by its traditional religions. All the formation takes place initially in a family (in a bigger sense, a clan). Our proclamation (mission work) must always be within the context of the family. Though or-



dinarily our mission work comes in the form of education (service) which is a very strategic way of being acceptable, it would be deepened if ministry with the family accompanies it. Within the family we can see more imminently the dynamics of a culture in a particular way. How far have we gone in family ministry as a complementary approach in our educative/pastoral work?

Initial proclamation entails a lot of interplay between culture, identity, traditions and worldview. It is an encounter of two “meanings” or “purposes” of life. This implies a lot of integration on the part of missionaries both in human and Christian values. Once taken seriously, Christian proclamation becomes tedious and may become detrimental to the disposition of the proclaimer. Inasmuch as our mission work is a process with undefined time framework, the missionary enters into this process also with undefined results (or even fulfilment). It is of high importance that the missionary must also be taken care of. On-going formation can truly satisfy and assist the missionaries involved in this process. In our own plan of missionary work, do we always consider the on-going formation of our missionaries as important as the results we want to achieve?







## Initial Proclamation in Societies in the Process of Secularisation

Fr. David Willis OP\*

### A. Introduction

I will first reflect on the process of secularisation, treating this rather large topic only insofar as is needed for the purposes of this paper. Secondly, I will make some observations about societies under-going this process. Next I will draw attention to developments in the theological understanding of secularisation. As with secularisation, this is a topic in its own right, and I will only address it in so far as it is relevant to our immediate concerns. Fourthly, I will briefly reflect on Initial Proclamation and, finally I will connect Initial Proclamation to societies undergoing secularisation.

### B. The Process of Secularisation

First we can clarify what secularisation is. Here I am drawing on the thought of John Sommerville.<sup>62</sup> Secularisation can be understood as a process of differentiation in society: In this process “the various aspects of society: economic, political, legal, and moral, become increasingly specialised and distinct from one another.” A further way of describing secularisation, going beyond the idea of ‘differentiation’, relates it to activities in society. It is then described as the “the transfer of activities from religious to secular institutions”. This transfer can be clearly seen in the area of social services when there is “a shift in provision of social services from churches to the government.” I have had minimal experience living on mis-

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<sup>62</sup> John Sommerville, “Secular Society Religious Population: Our Tacit Rules for Using the Term Secularization. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37 (2):249–53. (1998) as quoted in “Secularization” Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secularization>.



sion stations in Melanesia but from that experience and from listening to the stories of those who have, it is easy to see the process of secularisation, as described above, occurring on these stations. Initially, the priest, brothers and the sisters, often with dedicated lay missionaries, ran the school, the hospital, the local store and provided banking and postal services. The mission station was the sole provider of services outside the traditional culture. Gradually many of these services have been taken over by business people and the government, and the whole process has been accelerated by the arrival of national independence.

The following information pertaining to Papua New Guinea concerning the delivery of health and education services by the government and by the churches is drawn from data concerning the early years of the last decade, but it provides, I would think, a relatively accurate overview of services provided by the churches. The churches combined provide 50% of the educational facilities (grades 1-12), supply 45% of the teachers, and educate 45% of the students enrolled in schools across the country. Further, the churches contribute almost 50% of all the health facilities available for the people, and the more remote is the area, the more likely it is that one of the churches is the provider. Together the churches provides 24% of all health staff for the country.<sup>63</sup>

The place of religion in societies in the process of secularisation is complex. With the advance of secularisation there is the challenge for the individual to integrate religion with the recognised secular aspects of life. Being a police officer, a teacher, a carpenter, a politician, a solicitor and so on, are secular professions dealing with secular realities. There arises, then, discussions of relating faith to daily life. Alongside this challenge the process of secularisation involves the individual relating to people who have other religious beliefs besides their own, relating either to fellow Christians of other denominations or to Hindus, Buddhists or Muslims, agnostics or atheists.

One final comment on religion in societies in transition: I think it is safe to say, that the person living in a traditional society in transition is

<sup>63</sup> Michael A. Rynkiewick, *Land and Churches in Melanesia: Cases and Procedures*, Point no. 27, 2004, 29, 32).



living in various degrees in two religious worlds: living under the influence of traditional religion and under the influence of Christianity.

### **C. Some Observations about Societies Undergoing the Process of Secularisation**

Some points that can be made about societies undergoing secularisation:

First the greatest proportion of the population will be young. In a mature, secular society such as Japan the average age of the population will be much higher. Indeed, these societies are ageing societies. Papua New Guinea is a young country. The median age for PNG, namely “the age that divides a population into two numerically equal groups” is 21.8 years. The countries with the lowest median ages are Uganda and the Gaza Strip, with 15 years and the country with the highest median age is Japan with 44.8 years.<sup>64</sup>

Second, there is a movement of the population from remote places to urban centres, the latter being perceived as having more to offer than the village with its traditional way of life. Associated with this migration are all the problems generally connected with it elsewhere in the world: for instance, unemployment, the coming into existence of settlements and crime.

Third, the move towards equality of men and women in modern secular society that is not associated with their place in traditional society, has opened up new possibilities for girls and women in education and work. This will increasingly have an impact on society: rates of population growth will slow as girls will marry later and have a smaller number of children and educated mothers will pass on to their children these same values.

Fourth, in these societies the state and its institutions tend to be weak. Traditional society has been partly superseded but the new secular in-

<sup>64</sup> The World Fact Book, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2177.html>.



stitutions struggle to establish an identity and function at any-where near the level of the equivalent institutions in mature, secular societies with their long traditions of secular institutions. Thus in emerging secular societies traditional ways and secular ways of running society co-exist. I have been told, for instance, that one ought not venture into some settlements in Port Moresby without first contacting local leaders and arranging for a safe passage.

Fifth, in these societies there emerges an educated elite who are the leaders in the secular arena of society. These are the politicians, senior public servants, lawyers, tertiary educators, doctors and so on. In these societies there also emerges an entrepreneurial class. This highlights the changing economic values of such societies. The issue of 'land mobilisation' is a product of these changing economic values.

Sixth, in countries undergoing secularisation there is arguably an influential presence of international agencies such as the UN. These introduce sophisticated secular thought and values into the present and future running of the nation-in-transition.

Seventh, mass media, especially radio and TV, shape emerging secular societies, taking over in varying degrees from parents, religious educators and pastors the role of education in values.

Eighth, we can note that the process of secularisation itself is changing: There are the advances in technology: computers, email, mobile phones, i-phones and the world wide web. Just as the industrial revolution of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had a tremendous impact on economics and politics, so Internet Technology is profoundly changing secular society and societies that are becoming secular.

## **D. Theology and Secularisation**

Providentially theologians in the last century have reflected on the process of secularisation. Fruit of that theology can be found in the document of Vatican II. In particular, *Gaudium et Spes (The Church in the Modern World)* no. 39 profoundly relates the secular to the kingdom of

God. Human history is not understood as a means to the end, the Kingdom. On this means-end approach once the end is attained the means to it are no longer valued. Human history in *Gaudium et Spes* is significant beyond that of being a means since it makes a contribution to the Kingdom:

... For after we have obeyed the Lord, and in His Spirit nurtured on earth the values of human dignity, brotherhood and freedom, and indeed all the good fruits of our nature and enterprise, *we will find them again, but freed of stain, burnished and transfigured*, when Christ hands over to the Father: “a kingdom eternal and universal, a kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love and peace”. (Italics added.)

The fruits of human work somehow are to be part of the New Heaven and New Earth. The secular makes its contribution to the everlasting kingdom. It is not like a rocket that is left behind when it has done its job of launching a satellite into orbit.

In conjunction with the re-evaluation of the secular there has emerged a theology of the laity. As *Lumen Gentium* (the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*) says “They [the laity] are engaged in each and every work and business of the earth and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life, that, as it were, constitute their very existence. “ (LG, 31) It is their “special duty to imbue and perfect the order of temporal affairs [secular life and work] with the spirit of the Gospel” (CIC, 225.)

## E. Reflecting on Initial Proclamation

We can now turn to Initial Proclamation. I am relying on The Prague Blog of 2010 for my understanding of it.<sup>65</sup> The content of Initial Proclamation is a “the short, joyful and engaging account of the death of Jesus on the cross, his resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit”. Its aim is twofold: initially it is that of “arousing an interest in Jesus” and its ultimate aim is to invite “those who have already made a first commitment to Jesus to live a life of full discipleship.” First, there is interest in Jesus.

<sup>65</sup> The Blog is a report of a conference that was held in early November 2010 at Prague, Czech Republic. Its theme was “*The Salesian Mission in a Frontier Situation and the Initial Proclamation of Christ in Europe Today.*” <http://cgi.www.salesians.org.uk/cgi-bin/www.salesians.org.uk/newsitem.pl?item=item195>.

This can lead to faith and baptism, the beginning of the Christian's personal relationship with God. Finally, the attitude of the one making the proclamation is intrinsic to the proclamation itself. The witness to Jesus Christ is, ideally, a person who lives their faith with conviction – loves God wholeheartedly - and respects those to whom they witness.

One important characteristic of societies undergoing the process of secularisation, as we have already drawn attention to, is the transfer of services, initially delivered by the Church, to the government. This inevitably means a diminution of the Church's presence in society on an institutional level. More often than not, Christians will be employed by the government or secular NGOs and, in these circumstances, will not have the institutional witness supporting them. Initial proclamation in these circumstances either comes from the individual Christian or it does not come at all. Thus the importance of the awareness of how Christian proclamation is present through the individual Christian who is committed to Jesus and is respectful and open to their work colleagues.

Awareness of Initial Proclamation is also vitally important when one is working within a Christian institution. Without it the institution becomes indistinguishable from a government institution or any NGO. For instance, a Christian school, without committed Christians is, in reality, a non-government or private institution.

## **F. Initial Proclamation in Societies Undergoing Secularisation**

Most of my activities are focused on Catholic Theological Institute where I am both an administrator and a lecturer. I occasionally am involved with work outside CTI. That work relates mainly to committed Catholics or committed members of other Christian churches. I suspect when it comes to Initial Proclamation, I am, indeed, on the edge. But I am to be challenged by it and conscious of it as an ongoing aspect of the life of all Christians, mine included.

If I might venture to make some suggestions concerning where societies undergoing secularisation especially provide opportunities for Initial Proclamation I would refer back to what I have said in an earlier part of this paper. There I drew attention to some characteristics of societies undergoing secularisation. It is these areas that might especially call for Ini-



tial Proclamation: where the young gather; among those who have drifted to urban centres; in the mist of girls and women finding their place in the emerging society; supporting those endeavouring to function in newly emerging secular roles; offered to the elite in the secular world, in the environment of the media and internet technology.

In conclusion can we not say that Christians who find themselves living in a society undergoing secularisation can be confident that they, like their Christian forebears, are called to be, in the words of the Gospel of St Matthew, light and salt? Reflection on Initial Proclamation in societies in the process of secularisation is at the service of this calling.”







## A Response to David Willis

Sr. Margaret Bentley FMA

Thanks Fr David for the wonderful knowledge and reflection you have shared with us today. I think perhaps I have been asked to respond because as an Australian I come from perhaps the most 'secular' society in Oceania. Perhaps that fact also that makes my commitment to Christ more personal and deeper. I have already shared how humble Australians are!

You have set out before us a clear definition of 'secularization' as a process of separation or differentiation in society. For me this is clear and relevant definition. It would take us more than the time we have to reflect on the pros and cons of the secularized society and traditional society.

Your clear outline of the 8 aspects of the process of secularisation was also helpful to see where we are along the road. Each of us could perhaps use this guide to look not only at our own society but also my personal response to where I am on the road. My reflection also led me to the eternal question of where do I find and live close to Christ in the midst of the society in which I live.

My work takes me backwards and forwards between 4 countries and 4 cultures. Often in one month I can be in all 4 countries. There is a need to change languages, to change behaviour, as well as clothes and currency. If you will indulge me I will share a short reflection on each of these aspects. Obviously it is superficial and based only on my personal experience and understanding and should not be taken as definitive.

### **Age**

In Australia I deal with the challenges of ageing and the gaps that have arisen between generations, not only in beliefs and experience but



also in our understanding of technology. There is a wisdom and a gentleness in Australia that allows for individual differences and respects and invites to interdependence. There is a great challenge to plan a future in which we may well 'close down' rather than 'build up'.

In the Samoan Islands and the Solomon Islands I deal with the challenges of a 'young' society where energy is put into beginnings and planning a future that is changing each day as a traditional society continues to become more secularised.

### **Urban growth**

One of the most challenging aspects of life in Australia is the work and living with migrants. There is a daily discussion about refugees. Many religious take a firm stand to support refugees and those on the margins of society.

In Samoa there is a growing urban movement but it is still largely ideological; village life is still the main way of living. However the challenges for young people living village life with the other aspects of secularisation continue. As religious we live between the two.

In the Solomon Islands instead there is a big movement to the urban/city areas. Here we face daily the challenges of young women living in danger, away from their families, in need of safe accommodation and education to health and hygiene and living.

### **Equality of men and women**

In Australia – please don't believe that there is equality yet! However in comparison to the rest of Oceania you would see 'liberation'.

The downside of the perceived lack of equality in the Islands results in terrible abuse and domestic violence. There are also clearly defined roles for men and women that have not yet been challenged sufficiently. Equality is not only about wages and votes it is essentially about dignity. When we have a higher level of respect and dignity of all people we will begin to question the differences between genders.

### **The strength of Government**

In Australia there is a clear freedom of thought and little compulsion to vote according to family traditions – individualism is rife and has both

its good points and weak points – on the whole it leads to stable government. The response of the Australian government to the Global Economic Crisis has kept the nation not only afloat but in growth. The people in general trust their elected leaders and have the power of the vote.

In Samoa there is a stable Polynesian government – democratically elected and generally strong. Debate is vigorous. Growth is evident. What happens here I think is that without a ‘*wantok*’ system there is a general trust in the levels of government. Village life seems to have adjusted to a level of equal representation (Male and Female title holders).

In American Samoa – under the US government there is little opportunity for local decision making. All the standards to be met for education and government must adhere to US mainland laws and regulations; it is an experience of colonization rather than independence.

In the Solomon Islands there is not a very stable government and this impacts on ways of doing things – it also means that you can ‘get away with things’ but also that you sometimes have to use other means like persistence, persuasion etc to get things done. (Awareness of *wantok* system).

### **Educated elite**

Definitely present in Australia where education is the key to success. A growing awareness in the Pacific Islands as education reaches more people and the mobilisation of people for financial reasons means that young Samoans particularly are educated in Australia and New Zealand. Education is also the key to improved society and job attainment in the Solomon Islands. The Salesian work in the past has included a mission to those least educated with a ‘second chance’ at life through schooling.

### **Presence of NGOs**

Increasing evidence of this in all Pacific Islands – growing awareness of ecological issues – rising tides, sustainable crops, deforestation.

### **Technology**

Technology has a huge impact on the life of young people (and us!) in Australia. Growing impact in Samoa and American Samoa and Solomon Islands.

**Secular societies are also changing**

The impact of technology – renewed awareness of justice issues and environmental issues as well as the negatives of addiction, pornography and gang gatherings.

I return to my vote of thanks for Fr. David and particularly for the challenge he gives us to be conscious of our roles and where the concept of initial proclamation of the Gospel fits into our increasingly secular societies.



**Part III**  
**Formulating conclusions**







## Catechesis and Evangelisation from a Salesian Perspective

Fr. Elio Capra SDB \*

### 1. What are the content and the criteria for evangelisation and catechesis?

The *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997) makes a summary of several previous document on catechesis when it states:

“The model for all catechesis is the baptismal catechumenate when by specific formation, an adult converted to belief is brought to explicit profession of baptismal faith during the Paschal Vigil. [...] This catechumenal formation should inspire the other forms of catechesis in both their objectives and in their dynamism. ...Catechesis for adults, since it deals with persons capable of an adherence that is fully responsible, must be considered the chief form of catechesis. All other forms, which are indeed always necessary, are in some way oriented to it.”<sup>66</sup>

### 2. What are the criteria of a catechumenal formation?

It is not the same as catechism lessons. It is a process inviting all Christians into a journey of conversion and into a way of life based on Christ and the Gospel. Paul says: “We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.” (2Cor 4:10)

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<sup>66</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis*, 59.



### 3. What are the catechumenal criteria?

From the early Church onwards, all the way to Benedict XVI's Encyclical: *Deus caritas est*, (see no. 20-25), these have always been identified as the five criteria of Christian witness (*marturia*).

CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED TO BE VISIBLE AND CREDIBLE WITNESSES ( <i>marturia</i> ) TO THE LIFE, DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS	
<i>Kerygma</i>	Jesus Christ
<i>Evangelia</i>	The Gospel
<i>Koinonia</i>	The community
<i>Leitourgia</i>	The prayer life of the community
<i>Diakonia</i>	The mission of the community

The following table expands further the above diagram:

SIGNS OF CHRISTIAN WITNESS ( <i>marturia</i> )		
1.	<b>KERYGMA</b>	The followers of Christ must show signs that they have placed Jesus Christ at the very centre of their lives; they must show signs of a deep and ever growing relationship with Jesus Christ who through his life, death and resurrection has brought salvation, redemption and sanctification to each one of them and to every man and woman and to the whole creation.
2.	<b>EVANGELIA</b>	The followers of Christ must show signs that their relationship with Jesus Christ is based on the Gospel; they are growing in their knowledge and love of the Gospel and turn to the Gospel as a source of their nourishment and growth. They are willing to bear witness to the Gospel in their everyday life.
3.	<b>KOINONIA</b>	The followers of Christ have learned and experienced that their relationship with Jesus and their living of the Gospel can only take place within a community. They therefore shows signs of wanting to be a part of the life and activities of the community; they want to belong and begin to look on the Christian community as their family, sharing its life and tradition and beliefs.
4.	<b>LEITOURGIA</b>	The followers of Christ desire to join the community in living out their baptismal priesthood through personal prayer for the whole world and through participating in the public prayer of the whole Church through the celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

5.	<b>DIAKONIA</b>	<b>The followers of Christ must show signs and willingness to live their lives as a service of the community and they share in the privilege and responsibility of carrying out the mission entrusted by Christ to the Church; they accept and desire to use their talents and their charisms for the building up of the Church, the body of Christ.</b>
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**4. What does this mean in practice?**

If all catechesis must find inspiration in its objectives and its dynamism on the catechumenal model, we need to base and orient all our Salesian process of evangelisation and catechesis towards it.

The following diagram is an adaptation of the catechumenal model as applied to our Salesian context.

The objectives of evangelisation and catechesis in a Salesian context must be based on a lived experience of what it means being a Salesian.**6. What do these criteria say to us?**

SALESIAN WITNESS ( <i>marturia</i> )	
<i>Kerygma</i>	to know, to love, to make Christ the centre and the model of their life and of the way they live, as Don Bosco did.
<i>Evangelia</i>	to know the Gospel and to understand its meaning, to love the gospel and turn to it as a source of nourishment, and to bear witness to the Gospel in their lives as Don Bosco did.
<i>Koinonia</i>	to have a deep sense of the Church as the family of Christ; to have a sense of ownership and belonging to the Church; to own the Church's faith, customs and traditions, s Don Bosco did; to see our Salesian Congregation as a part of the Church and at the service of the Church with the specific task of caring for the young most in need. This is our way of living out the Gospel and our <i>sequela Christi</i> .
<i>Leitourgia</i>	to learn to pray both in their private life and with the community through a pattern of prayer which is simple and yet heartfelt; to believe that God's loving deeds become real in the liturgical and sacramental celebrations, especially the sacraments of reconciliation and Eucharist; to long for the Eucharist as the source and summit of the Church's identity and mission

(segue)

<i>Diakonia</i>	to desire to be a part of the mission of the Church in a way which is both Salesian and ecclesial; to give witness to a life which is lived with the young and for the young as a way of witnessing our ' <i>Da mihi animas, coetera tolle</i> '; to invite the young towards a vocational choice that challenges them to offer their lives for the building of the Kingdom of God.
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Our starting point must be Jesus Christ, the Gospels and the Church. I am sure Don Bosco would cringe if, in our effort to 'Return to Don Bosco', we displace Jesus Christ, the Gospels and the Church in order to put him at the centre.

The painting of Mary Help of Christians begins with the eye of God the Father, who sends the Holy Spirit towards Mary who brings forth Jesus Christ to the world. This Trinitarian image is surrounded by the four evangelists (Gospels) and by the 12 Apostles (the primary and first catechists and evangelisers) and further down the Church we have the paintings of another four great catechists and evangelisers: Augustine, Ambrose, Athanasius and John Chrysostom. Don Bosco must be seen, studied, loved and imitated within this context and not in isolation.

#### 7. What are some practical application of this process?

These five criteria gives a framework to the following areas:

- as mentioned earlier they are the framework of our **process of evangelisation and catechesis**. It is not just an intellectual exercise but a way of life. Dowe truly evangelise and catechise with the heart of Don Bosco who always guided the young towards Christ, the Gospels, the Church, towards a life of prayer and the sacraments and towards a life lived in service of others?
- These five criteria can also become the basis for the way we present **the lives and the witness of our Saints** to the young, to our collaborators and to our communities. How did Don Bosco, Dominic Savio, etc. show and live out their love of Christ, love of the Gospel, love of the Church, love of prayer and the sacraments, and their mission towards others?
- These are also the spiritual criteria of **each individual Salesian**. Are we true sons of Don Bosco ever deepening our love of Jesus Christ,

living faithfully according the evangelical counsels, as loyal and faithful members of the Church, as persons who pray and long for the sacraments, especially Reconciliation and Eucharist, as persons who live their '*Da mihi animas, coetera tolle*' with the same intensity and urgency in Don Bosco's heart.

- The same criteria could be used by the formators **during the process of formation** and for Rectors and Provincials as the criteria for **ongoing formation** when meeting with the individual confreres. Asking how the confrere is living out the five criteria.
- These criteria could be used to discern the Salesian witness of our Communities and our Provinces. How does our community and our Province give witness to Jesus Christ, to the Gospel, to the Church, to a life of prayer and sacraments, to an urgency for mission and service?
- These criteria could also be used to evaluate and discern **the Salesian charism of our works** (Youth clubs, parishes, schools, etc.). How does this Salesian work give witness to Jesus Christ, to the Gospel, to the Church, to a life of prayer and sacraments, to an urgency for mission and service?

#### 8. What is the role of the Eucharist in the Salesian process of evangelisation and catechesis?

Pope Benedict XVI answers this question in the following way.

**“If the Eucharist is truly the source and summit of the Church’s life and mission, it follows that the process of Christian initiation must constantly be directed to the reception of this sacrament.”**<sup>67</sup>

It follows therefore that the Eucharist is

1. **the summit** of our work of evangelisation and catechesis because it is
  - the ultimate experience of communion with Christ (*kerygma*);
  - the primary moment of commitment to the Gospel, because it is Christ himself who speaks to us when the Scriptures are proclaimed in Church (*SC 7*) (*evangelia*)

<sup>67</sup> Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 2007, no. 17.

- the most intense and intimate moment of communion with the Church as the communion of saints (*koinonia*)
  - it is the highest form of prayer and liturgy (*leitourgia*)
  - it is the sacrament that send us out to be living witnesses of the death and resurrection of Jesus (*diakonia*).
2. **the source** of what we are sent out to do.
- We are sent to invite others to share the wonderful and life-giving experience of Jesus Christ, the Gospels, the Church, the prayer and sacraments of the Church;

We are also sent to invite others not only to share these riches, but to also challenge them to become ‘missionaries’ to others as a response to Jesus Christ’s desire that “they all may have life and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10).





## A Response to Elio Capra

Sr. Alice Fulgencio FMA

I would like to thank Fr. Elio Capra for his comprehensive and focused presentation of the topic. The theme of the day is actually more general – initial proclamation and Christian initiation – but in his presentation Fr. Elio dealt with the topic already applying it in a Salesian context.

The presentation is concise, well-organised and it goes straight to the heart of the theme. Following the catechumenal criteria, it clearly spells out how the evangelisation and catechumenal process in the Salesian context should be firmly founded and rooted in the Christian and Church traditions. The practical application part gives very good indications on how the process can be more effective in any Salesian setting.

Let me limit myself to two particular observations.

To me, one thing that stands out in the presentation is Fr. Elio's attention to the centrality of Christ in the process of catechumenal formation and in its application to the Salesian setting. In fact, he points out that a return to Don Bosco should necessarily be the result of a return to Christ and his gospel first.

I think this is a very important point which is how we also formulated our working definition of initial proclamation as a witness and explicit presentation of Christ and his good news, which invites to conversion and a fundamental choice for him.

The content is very clear but I think we are trying to find an answer, in the light of the discussions of the past two days, also to the question: How could we present Jesus Christ and his gospel today to young people and adults who are so steeped in their traditional cultures, who may not have yet acquired a critical mind as regards the effects of secularisation particularly those brought about by the fast changing media culture and technology?



Another question is regarding our life as missionaries, our life of witness: How do we become visible and credible witnesses to Jesus? Here, we find a very good indication from the morning *lectio divina* by Sr. Maria Ko and I quote “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, the «were looked up to by everyone» (Ac 2,47; 4,33)”.

It would be good to have a serious look and honest evaluation on how we do evangelisation and catechesis at present in our existing works and settings. It is a big challenge to translate the five criteria of Christian witness as applied in a Salesian setting both for us missionaries and for the proclaimers.

Another point is the last in Fr. Elio’s presentation which is the role of the Eucharist in the Salesian process of evangelisation and catechesis. As one of Don Bosco’s great loves, the Eucharist holds a special place in the formation of young people. The religion component of the Preventive System encompasses this. Therefore the Eucharist is something that should never be lacking in a Salesian setting with proper preparation and motivation so that the young may truly profit from it by making it penetrate their own daily life.

In the end, it is the Spirit that works and blows where he wills. In the conversion of St. Paul, he was given precise directions on what to do, while in the case of Philip, he was told “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” (cf. *lectio divina* – Sr. Maria Ko). In the same way, we do our part and then allow the Spirit to work in us in ways that are always surprising and life-giving.



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

Sr. Pamela Vecina FMA & Fr. John Cabrido SDB

### An explanation of the logo

The logo has four significant items: the ocean, the bird of paradise, the boat with the lakatoi sail, and the Southern cross. The **ocean** represents Oceania, the area of concern of the Study Days. The four waves, in four different colours, symbolise the four geographical areas of Oceania: Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia and Australasia. The waters form the “ground” of the culture of Oceania, with the movement of the waves symbolising very well the fast changing or transitory state of the cultures of Oceania. The bird of paradise portrays the importance of **culture** among the peoples of Oceania. It too is shown in movement, arising from the water in flight towards the Southern cross. The outrigger boat with the “lakatoi” sail represents the **community**, composed both of agents, the missionary and the proclaimer, and the listener. The *lakatoi* is the sea vessel used by the Motu people and here signifies Port Moresby. The boat is a universally accepted biblical symbol for God’s people (cf. Gen 7,1; Matt 8,23). This boat’s colour (violet) is a combination of the colours of the SDB (blue) and FMA (red) logos and is meant to represent especially the **Salesian Family**, also indicated by Don Bosco’s face on the sail. The green (for “Bosco”/forest), triple outrigger poles which balances the boat signifies the Preventive System with its elements: reason, religion and determined, pastoral kindness. In Pacific Island culture, the



conch shell or *tavur* is used to call the community to gather. This adorns the boat's front and suggests the act of proclamation. Like the waves and the bird of paradise, the boat is also in motion on a journey towards the cross. The Southern cross represents **God, Jesus Christ and the Faith**. Instead of using the Calvary cross (with the crucified Jesus), the Southern cross embodies inculturation of the Faith. Unlike the other items, it alone is stable and marked on a level by itself. It is not merely the fourth item, but the goal and end of the other three. Context, community and culture find their climax only in the cross.

### Context

Like the waters which unite its shores, Oceania is a continent in constant transition. Its peoples—with their hundreds of languages and cultures - are in movement from traditional, village cultures to more complex modern, township and/or city lifestyles. In the more developed countries, the pace of societal fragmentation linked with secularisation is more keenly felt, even as this trend is already present and rapidly growing more daily. Oceania is marked by far distances. And even when villages may be relatively close, the lack of roads makes travel long, wearisome and hazardous. Digital, mobile technology presents great hope in the proclamation of the Faith.

### MISSIONARY

1. *From an indifference to mass media and technology in the work of initial proclamation... to interest in the mass media as an educative tool and to maximise the use of technology in initial proclamation.*
2. *From doing mission/ministry only within our walls or presences... to reaching out to the young where they are and establish our presence in new realities.*
3. *From a confused ideal between secularism and secularisation... to a positive and critical appreciation of secularisation.*

### LISTENER

1. *From functional, utilitarian motives... to a purification of motivations*

## Culture

Culture and the need of inculturating the Faith is the predominant concern of the participants of these Study Days. Oceania is a continent blessed with a myriad of vast, diverse cultures. There is the awareness to transcend the follies of ethnocentrism and, instead, after a healthy appreciation of one's own culture, to move from ignorance to a respectful, critical acceptance of the new culture one finds oneself in. The missionary understands and strives to discover the seeds of the Gospel already present in every culture, as well as identifying elements which need to be purified and can be expressed in Christian symbols. While inculturating the Faith is the mature fruit of a later evangelisation, achieved by a native clergy and faithful, its initial, faltering steps need to be started now in the openness to a dialogue of cultures and by the exemplary witness of lives.

## MISSIONARY

1. *From ignorance of culture... to taking time to observe peoples and their cultures.*
2. *From a negative, judgmental attitude regarding the people and culture... to accepting critically, respecting and appreciating the peoples and the richness of their cultures.*
3. *From resistance to local practices, even elimination of traditional customs... to respecting the listener's disposition and readiness to accept the Gospel and its purification of culture.*
4. *From being demanding and result-oriented... to being patient with the listeners and taking them from where they are.*
5. *From ignoring traditional cultures... to committing ourselves to understand and learn the local culture*
6. *From disregard, indifference and inattention to traditional cultures... to identifying elements of traditional culture which can be purified and expressed in Christian symbols.*
7. *From an attitude of superiority and arrogance... to giving an exemplary witness of life.*

## LISTENER

1. *From an ignorance of culture... to the listener reflects critically on his/her own culture and understand their practice.*

## Community

Like context and cultures before it, the communities of Oceania are in a state of flux. The community unites both the agents and the listeners. The expatriate missionary and the autochthonous, native proclaimer both need guidance in the discernment of their vocations, formation in ministry, and networking *and* support as they engage in proclamation. The listeners too are helped by growth in awareness of their own identity and needs. The community is both the attractive guide and support for the listeners as they journey to accepting the new faith, as well as the nurturing context in which the listeners can grow and mature. Together, missionaries, proclaimers and listeners - as one community - journey to one goal, Christ the Lord.

## MISSIONARY

- 1. From a neglect of reflection of experiences in initial proclamation... to promoting venues for the reflection and sharing of experiences.*
- 2. From a lack of preparation of new missionary candidates... to proper selection, guidance in discernment and preparation of missionary candidates.*
- 3. From neglect of the newly arrived missionary... to accompaniment of new missionaries.*
- 4. From a passive attitude in initiating neophytes in the catechumenate journey... to a more involved community in the catechumenate journey.*
- 5. From a lack of contact with the family of the neophytes... to more participation and linkage with their families.*
- 6. From doing the mission entirely by ourselves as missionaries... to giving formation and engaging lay mission partners as co-responsible in initial proclamation.*
- 7. From half-hearted proposals in presenting Christ... to being bold in proposing the Faith and challenging the young towards a fundamental choice for Christ.*

## PROCLAIMER

- 1. From the missionary remaining an "outsider" in a culture... to forming proclaimers with whom the listeners can identify.*

#### LISTENER

1. *From no formal venue for listeners to share their experience... to promoting venues for the reflecting and sharing of experiences.*
2. *From a neglect of the neophytes... strong accompaniment by the entire community of the neophytes.*
3. *From a haphazard vocational orientation of the listener... to a systematic accompaniment of the listeners in vocational orientation and discernment.*

#### Christ

Jesus Christ is the one constant, never-changing and only goal. Initial proclamation is not Unitarian. To those who are not *yet* believers, the proclamation and acceptance of faith in Christ serves as the spark on the road of evangelisation. To those who already believe in God, belief in the Son deepens and defines the earlier commitment (Gal 2:20; Phil 3:8; Rom 5:17). Christ rises on an utterly different plane from that of context, culture and community. While the latter three remain in constant transition and change, Christ alone remains—as the guiding star *yesterday, today and forever* (Heb 13:8).

#### MISSIONARY

1. *From ordinary lecture sessions in preparing neophytes... to a celebration as a culmination of the first stage of acceptance in the catechumenate journey.*

#### PROCLAIMER

1. *From an inadequate formation and preparation... to a more systematic and holistic catechetical formation.*

#### LISTENER

1. *From resistance to forgo negative traditional practices and beliefs... to a positive view and critical appreciation of Faith in Christ*

## **Pertaining to stages after initial proclamation**

### **MISSIONARY**

- 1. From passive teaching on media awareness... to media education*
- 2. From an indiscriminate selection of RE teachers... to assigning prepared teachers to RE classes*
- 3. From accomplishing the mission independently as a congregation... to networking with other religious congregations and agencies.*

### **PROCLAIMER**

- 1. From listeners and church-going members being silent, passive and timid spectators... to active proclaimers who participate in society, standing for human and Christian values*

### **MISSIONARY**

- 1. From an ill-prepared celebration of the sacraments of initiation... to more frequent follow-up on the journey of preparation for the sacraments of initiation.*
- 2. From a limited period of preparation for the sacraments of initiation... to a more exhaustive and involved preparation in the sacraments.*
- 3. From a personal approach or style in giving formation... to a more holistic and systematic approach in catechetical preparation.*
- 4. From a superficial way of preparing catechumens to receive the sacraments... to adopting the catechumenate journey.*
- 5. From Complacency in preparing people for the sacraments of initiation... to Creativity in the preparation.*
- 6. From ignorance of Local Church documents... to awareness of Church documents, directives on catechism & formation*

### **LISTENER**

- 1. From a stress on Initial formation only... to promotion of on-going formation*
- 2. From always compulsory attendance in liturgical celebrations... to, other times, well-organised and attractive liturgical celebration.*



## Practical Proposals

### PRACTICAL PROPOSALS - FMA

1. Deepen the personal experience of Jesus to proclaim his message, that is, to make witness of life the “primary and authentic” proclamation of Jesus
2. Study and reflect personally and as a community the documents of the Church (universal and local) and the Institute in a missionary perspective.
3. Reflect on one’s own life experience from the point of view of mission.
4. Reread personally and as a community pastoral activity in the light of mission.



### PRACTICAL PROPOSALS - SDB

*In order to face up to the requirements of the call and the challenges of initial proclamation in Oceania in the context of traditional religions and cultures, as well as cultures in the process of secularisation, we need to change our mentality and our way of evangelisation, and moving from*

- doing mission only within our educative institutions, parishes, to **reaching out to the young where they are** (through the festive oratory or youth centres, etc);
- sharing the faith in formal venues (parish, religious education, retreats, etc) to greater awareness **that activities are occasions for initial proclamation** (Basic Ecclesial Communities, youth groups, etc);
- ignoring culture (traditional, postmodern, secularised, etc) to **committing ourselves to understand and comprehend our people’s cultures** and religious beliefs through patient and trusting listening, taking them from where they are;



- a lack of contact with the family to **reaching out to families** and involving them more because initial proclamation takes place first of all in the family;
- doing mission ourselves (mission *ad gentes*, initial proclamation, ordinary pastoral activity, renewed evangelisation) to **forming and engaging lay people** as our mission partners who are co-responsible in initial proclamation and evangelisation, especially in families through living the Preventive System as our way of witnessing the Gospel way of life.



## Closing Remarks







## Three Concluding Ideas

Sr. Alaíde Deretti FMA

Thanks and three words by way of conclusion!

1. - **Return to Jesus of Nazareth**, the Son of the living God.

May his Spirit continue to work in us to become new creatures every day. The person of Jesus, his thoughts, his actions, his style of approach to all, especially the most marginalised, may these be ours:

- continuous journey of conversion, of spiritual growth
- criterion of discernment in our activities and work

Jesus is life, truth and path!

2. - **Community Witness**

Being new missionary communities that attract because they welcome everyone, because they are expressions of God's love for all.

Community in dialogue, creating bridges among those who are different, between social / cultural groups, of different faiths and sensitivity. No one is excluded!

**Communities that offer, that whisper Jesus and his Kingdom**, that promote the dignity of every person, the image of God

3. - **Integral educative passion** in every work and activity.

Education in dialogue and to dialogue, ad intra and ad extra. Stirring up the best of every person, and proposing to be honest citizens and, for those who are called, true Christians.

Each of us, as a person and as a community, is the initial proclamation of Jesus

Thank you for your life given to Christ for the salvation of all!







## Initial Proclamation Demands a New Mentality

Fr. Václav Klement SDB

**My heartfelt ‘*tenk yu tru*’ to all** who had contributed to the Study Days with their reflection, sharing as well the PNG-SI Delegation organisers. In a special way I’m grateful to the Delegate Fr. Raphael Galve and the presence of two FMA provincials. I’m happy with the fruits of these days, although we would like to reach out not only the PNG-SI Delegation conferees, but also the SDBs of other 4 countries of the AUL province.

**These days have brought us into the heart of the Church of Jesus Christ in Oceania.** We are educators to the faith of the youth in Australia, American Samoa, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji and Samoa, where the majority of the population claim to be Christians of different denominations. These Study days were enriched by the presence of Salesian and non-Salesian experts from the region, who helped us in our reflects in the light of *Ecclesia in Oceania* of John Paul II.

**At the end of these five days I would like to share three emerging issues, on which we are called to work in the future:**

**1. We need to address the ‘initial proclamation of Jesus Christ’** as one of the ongoing formation topic in the daily life of the Salesians as pastors, educators and communicators.

During these days we understood some important dynamics of the initial proclamation of Christ as a life-style, ongoing conversion for all believers in Christ.

**2. We need to reflect on the concrete dynamics of Christian faith** of our youth or our Christian communities. What is driving them to become



Christian fully alive or to come closer to the person of Jesus Christ? The cultural and religious background of Oceania requires more reflection, to avoid only superficial evangelisation, which does not reach the hearts. What attracts our youth to make the first step towards Jesus? Could we learn from the Pentecostals (Holy Spirit vs. the sorcerer) or fastest growing Christian communities?

**3. We need to growth as proclaiming communities especially along these lines:**

- a. From doing mission only within our institutions or *formal venues* to reach out to the young where they are - *vital venues* (Oratory - Youth Centre, Youth groups or youth movement, Basic Ecclesial Communities), as opportunity for faith sharing or initial proclamation.
- b. From ignoring traditional cultures to committing ourselves to understand and learn the local cultures and religions (listening with trust and patience, respect and taking them from where they are)
- c. From a lack of contact with the family of our listeners, to more linkage with the families.
- d. From doing the mission entirely by ourselves as missionaries *ad gentes* (foreigners), to giving formation and engaging Lay Mission Partners as co-responsible in initial proclamation, especially in their families through living the preventive system of Don Bosco as Gospel life witness.

I commend the whole journey to Mary, Help of Christians and Mother of all God's children who inspires, guides and protects us in our faith journey day by day.

## **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\**

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\* 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.





## “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 com-

ing 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 full-



ness 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 wave length to tune in to the Christian message, as someone sharing his own pas-

sion. “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.



## 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.





## The Encounter of Jesus with Three Different Persons in Different Contexts

Biblical Reflection on John 3-4



After describing the first 7 days of the public life of Jesus (John 1:19-51), John introduces a section that we may call “from Cana to Cana”, because it begins with the first miracle performed by Jesus in Cana, where He changed water into wine, and ends with the second miracle, again in Cana, the healing of the son of a royal official. The essential structure of this section can be introduced by this scheme:

- |                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| 1. The revelation of Jesus | a. the sign of the wedding at Cana (2:1-12)<br>b. the sign of the temple, foretelling of the resurrection (2:13-22) |
| 2. The different responses | a. Nicodemus (2:23-3:36)<br>b. The Samaritan woman (4:1-42)<br>c. The royal official (4:43-54)                      |

The three characters introduced in chapters 3-4 are very different: sex, ethnicity, place of origin, social status, culture and tradition, religion, lifestyle. They have different expectations and different interior dispositions. With them, Jesus begins three different itineraries of faith. Even the time (night, midday, an hour after midday) and the setting of the meeting (in the house, next to the well, on the street) are different. In John’s writing, the three characters are not only three individuals that Jesus meets by chance. They represent three types of people we can meet in whatever epoch and three itineraries of faith which can also be repeated today.

## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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, by the parents sought 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.





## 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 live 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.

## **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

### Opening Song

*Start with a Song to the Holy Spirit or  
“Come to the Water”*

Chorus

*Come to the water! You who are thirsty!  
Though you have nothing, I bid you come!  
And be filled with the goodness I have to offer!  
Come! Listen! Live.*

Why spend your money on what cannot fill  
The emptiness deep in your heart?  
Listen to My word and you will enjoy  
Goodness and peace in your heart!

Just as the heavens are high above earth;  
My ways and thoughts beyond you!  
Call me your Father and know I am near!  
I will be Father to you!

Just as the rain falls to water the earth;  
Just as a seed becomes bread  
My word upon you can never return  
Until My longing is filled!

### Introduction

We start our Bible Sharing reading  
an excerpt from the Post-synodal  
Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in*

#### 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 volun-  
teer to read aloud the text. A moment  
of silence follows. Then the guide in-  
vites 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 indi-  
vidual 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 fol-  
lowed 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.

*Oceania* 38 of Blessed Pope John Paul II. This is followed by a brief moment of silence for personal reflection:

“The Word of God in the Old and New Testament is fundamental for all who believe in Christ, and it is the inexhaustible wellspring of evangelisation. Holiness of life and effective apostolic activity are born of constant listening to God’s word. A renewed appreciation of Scripture allows us to return to the sources of our faith and encounter God’s truth in Christ. Acquaintance with the Scriptures is required of all the faithful, but particularly of seminarians, priests and religious. They are to be encouraged to engage in *lectio divina*, that quiet and prayerful meditation on the Scripture that allows the word of God to speak to the human heart. This form of prayer, privately or in groups, will deepen their love for the Bible and make it an essential and life-giving element of their daily lives.”

## The Word of God

Choose a passage from the texts used during the Study Days

### Reflection

For the third step take one of the *Biblical Reflections* of Sr. Maria Ko. Each one reads it silently



## Initial Proclamation: What Is It?

### The Concept of Initial Proclamation

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

“In the whole process of evangelisation, the complex process of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ, initial proclamation is considered the beginning of the whole complex process and reality. It is the first stage in the whole journey of evangelisation and re-evangelisation. Then proceeding from this initial acceptance of Christ and his message, is the maturing of such faith, the decisive personal acceptance and commitment to the person of Christ, called **catechesis**.” (*Towards a Common Understanding of 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 many of the young people who frequent our RE classes and parishes have neither consciously opted to be Christians nor do they all live committed Christian lives. It is a fact that in traditional societies of the Pacific islands many Christians continue to keep superstitious beliefs and practice traditional religions side by side with their Christian faith. While in societies which have become “Western in its cultural patterns and social structure” and “marked by increasing secularisation, individualism and consumerism,”<sup>68</sup> Christianity, and any religion for that matter, “is moved to the margin and tends to be regarded as a strictly private matter for the individual with

<sup>68</sup> *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 18.

little relevance to public life.” [...] It is precisely because the faith of Christians is not deeply rooted that traditional practices contrary to the Gospel continue to thrive, or that there is “a gradual lessening of the natural religious sense which has led to disorientation in people’s moral life and conscience.” In technologically advanced societies there is faith fatigue among Christians – which, unfortunately, is also reflected in religious life-which could be noticed in the joylessness, weariness of spirit and despair and an inner sadness in living their faith, which ultimately lead to its abandonment.<sup>69</sup> In both contexts of traditional cultures and cultures in the process of secularisation, the initial proclamation that one receives in the family is often not adequate to become the foundation of a robust faith. (*An Overview of the Topic of the Study Days*)

### Initial Proclamation in Oceania

The guide asks someone to volunteer and read the texts below from the Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Oceania* of Blessed John Paul II. This is followed by a brief moment of silence:

“18. [...] The Gospel must be heard in Oceania by all people, believers and non-believers, natives and immigrants, rich and poor, young and old. Indeed all these people have a right to hear the Gospel, which means that Christians have a solemn duty to share it with them. [...] During the Special Assembly, the Bishops shared their rich store of pastoral experience and that of the people with whom they work most closely; and thus they discerned together new perspectives for the future of the Church in Oceania [...] They were aware that new circumstances in that vast region present great challenges, and that the time is ripe for a re-presentation of the Gospel to the peoples of the Pacific, so that they may hear the word of God with renewed faith and find more abundant life in Christ. But to do this, they agreed, there is a need for new ways and methods of evangelisation, inspired by deeper faith, hope and love of the Lord Jesus”.

<sup>69</sup> *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 18, 20.

“20. [...]As ‘witnesses of divine and Catholic truth’, the missionaries in Oceania travelled over land and sea, passed through deserts and floods, and faced great cultural difficulties in accomplishing their remarkable work. Inspired by this story of the Church’s birth in Oceania, the Synod Fathers felt **the need for a new and courageous preaching of the Gospel in our own day.**”

### Deepening

Has the Bishops’ Conference in your own context made any statement about initial proclamation? If they have, please read a part of the statement.

### Sharing

What was your understanding of Initial Proclamation before? What is your understanding now? What shift of understanding did you have regarding Initial Proclamation?

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 we meet and work with everyday?

What are the challenges and opportunities of initial proclamation for our religious community?

### Our Experiences

Share positive examples or experiences of initial proclamation that you know of.

### 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.



## Get Up and Go!

Why is initial proclamation needed in Oceania?

“The challenges of modernity and post-modernity are experienced by all the local Churches in Oceania, but with particular force by those in societies most powerfully affected by secularisation, individualism and consumerism. Many Bishops identified the signs of a dwindling of Catholic faith and practice in the lives of some people to the point where they accept a completely secular outlook as the norm of judgment and behaviour. In this regard, Pope Paul VI already cautioned Christians, saying that “there is a danger of reducing everything to an earthly humanism, to forget life’s moral and spiritual dimension and to stop caring about our necessary relationship with the Creator”. The Church has to fulfil her evangelising mission in an increasingly secularised world. The sense of God and of his loving Providence has diminished for many people and even for whole sections of society. Practical indifference to religious truths and values clouds the face of divine love. Therefore, “among the priorities of a renewed endeavour of evangelisation there has to be a return to the sense of the sacred, to an awareness of the centrality of God in the whole of human existence”. A new evangelisation is the first priority for the Church in Oceania. In one sense, her mission is simple and clear: to propose once again to human society the entire Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. She is sent to the contemporary world, to the men and women of our time, “to preach the Gospel...lest the Cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the Cross... is the power of God” (*1 Cor 1,17-18*.)” (*Ecclesia in Oceania*, 18).

### Look Beyond

“Get Up and Go” is an invitation to leave our present positions and reach out, to cross the threshold and the border, to seek new frontiers to

spread the Word of God, to attract new people to Christ. Passion for the Gospel urges us to cross frontiers, not only geographical, but social and cultural, especially those of the heart.

### From the Bible

Get up and go is the command Jesus gave to a paralysed man (*Mk* 2,11; *Mt* 9,6; *Lk* 5,24; *Jn* 5,8), the word Peter addressed to the cripple at the Beautiful Gate (*Acts* 3,6). Philip the evangeliser, and with him, the whole Church was also told ‘Get up and go!’

### Appeals

The Church is not the static guardian of the faith, but must “get up and go”. “Faith is strengthened by sharing it!” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 2) and “love, by its very nature must be communicated to others. Love grows through love” (*Deus Caritas Est*, 18).

- We need to “‘Be ready to give reasons for your hope’ (*1 Pt* 3:15) (*Ecclesia in Oceania*, 24), in a language that is comprehensible to the people we live with.
- Preferably use concrete ‘experience’ methods that are recognisable as part of our human story with its weakness and strength.
- Be reborn again, like Nicodemus, to discover the breath of the Holy Spirit, the way God is present and surprises us, the many mysterious ways he shows his interest in us.

### Questions for Discussion

1. What can we say about Jesus of Nazareth to Oceania that is ever more multi-cultural, and ever more experiencing the effects of a secular society?
2. How can we proclaim and bear witness to Jesus of Nazareth to immigrants in Oceania?



The discussion concludes with the “Galilee Song”

1. Deep within my heart I feel  
voices whispering to me  
words that I can't understanding  
meanings I must clearly hear  
calling me to follow close  
lest I leave myself behind  
calling me to walk into  
evening shadows one more time!

Chorus

*So I leave my boats behind!  
Leave them on familiar shores!  
Set my heart upon the deep!  
Follow you again, my Lord!*

2. In my memories I know  
how you send familiar rains;  
falling gently on my days;  
dancing patterns on my pain!  
and I need to learn once more  
in the fortress of my mind:  
to believe in falling rain  
as I travel deserts dry!

3. As I gaze into the night  
down the future of my years  
I'm not sure I want to walk  
past horizons that I know!  
but I feel my spirit called  
like a stirring deep within -  
restless 'til I live again  
beyond the fears that close me in!





## Saint Francis de Sales: Humanism as Initial Proclamation

### 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. Charles Taylor writes that "for the devout humanists, the principal goal was to cultivate in oneself the love of God, to use the crucial term of one of their founding figures in this century, St. François de Sales. This meant that they were ready to trust the first promptings of this love in themselves; they set out to cultivate a germ which could already be identified." (A Secular Age, p.510). 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.*

### 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:**

«“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 landscape 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).

And yet the influence of his life and of his teaching on the Europe of that time and of the following centuries was immense. He was an apostle, preacher, writer, man of action and prayer; committed to carrying out the ideals of the Council of Trent; involved in controversy and dialogue with Protestants, experiencing more and more the efficacy of personal relationships and of charity, beyond a necessary theological confrontation. He was charged with diplomatic missions at the European level, and with social tasks of mediation and reconciliation. However, above all, St. Francis de Sales was a guide of souls [...].

[...]He embodied the different meanings of the word “humanity” which this term can assume today, as it could in the past: culture and courtesy, freedom and tenderness, nobility and solidarity. His appearance reflected something of the majesty of the landscape in which he lived and preserved its simplicity and naturalness. Moreover the words of the past and the images he used resonate unexpectedly in the ears of men and women today, as a native and familiar language[...].

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. To St. Jane of Chantal, he wrote: “[...] Here is the general rule of our obedience, written in capital letters: DO ALL THROUGH LOVE, NOTHING THROUGH CONSTRAINT; LOVE OBEDIENCE MORE THAN YOU FEAR DISOBE-

DIENCE. I want you to have the spirit of liberty, not the kind that excludes obedience - this is freedom of the flesh - but the liberty that excludes constraint, anxiety and scruples” (Letter of Oct. 14, 1604). 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.

[...] St. Francis de Sales is an exemplary witness of Christian humanism; with his accessible style, with words that at times have the touch of poetry, he reminds that man bears inscribed in his deepest self nostalgia for God and that only in him is found his true joy and most complete fulfilment».

### **Our Context:**

What has the Church said about this topic?

Blessed John Paul II’s Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 14:

“The Synod Fathers wanted Jesus Christ to be heard and understood by the people entrusted to their care, and by many more. They saw the need to reach out to those who live with unfulfilled hopes and desires, to those who are Christians in name only, and to those who have drifted away from the Church, perhaps because of painful experiences. Every effort should be made to heal such wounds, and to return the lost sheep to the fold. Above all, the Synod Fathers wanted to touch the hearts of young people. Many of them are searching for truth and goodness [...]”

### **Questions for Discussion and Sharing:**

- 1) In what way could the example of the humanism of St. Francis de Sales be an important 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” and in *Ec-*

*clesia in Oceania*, 3 that “it is the Lord himself who looks upon the people (of Oceania) with a love which presents itself as both a challenge and a call”. What do these statements imply in your effort to foster initial proclamation?

## Seated in the Chariot, he was Reading the Scriptures

### From Your Own Experience

What has helped you share your faith with people?

### Let Us Dialogue

“Before starting to proclaim the Good News to Melanesians the pioneer Christian missionaries had to overcome the natural distrust, or even hostility, on the part of the native population. The strategy used was that of exchanging goods particularly valuable to the locals, such as tobacco, axes, knives, fish hooks, and medicines. They specialised in exchanges done through the heads of the clans (chiefs or big-men), and thus entered into ‘friendly’ politico-personal relations with them.” Another means used by the early missionaries was “the study of the languages and the cultures of the natives was a priority to which the early Christian missionaries dedicated a lot of time. Witnesses of these are the diaries, books and dictionaries written by those pioneers. Those who had studied ethnology were certainly better prepared for the understanding of the Melanesian cultures but most of them, after the long years spent in the mission field, had a remarkable grasp of those cultures. However, missionaries varied in their evaluation of those cultures. Some showed some appreciation while many considered them as depraved and satanic.” (*Initial Proclamation of Christ in the Context of Traditional Cultures and Religions in Melanesia*)

### Look Beyond

**Jesus is God incarnate participating in our life story in different cultures.**

This gives rise to a positive attitude of trust and hope in human existence, in the personal experience of individuals, and in the concrete situa-

tions of young people who are different (ethnic origins, culture, awareness) and seem far apart in historical and scientific development. This situation demands a personal adult faith that is open to foster the positive values and forms in the culture or cultures they are immersed in which can enrich “the way the Gospel is preached, understood and lived,” yet at the same time capable to discern, elements or practices that require “some values and forms change” (*Ecclesia in Oceania*, 16).

### **From the Bible**

#### **In the chariot there was a man.**

The Spirit does not direct Philip towards the chariot, but towards the man inside it. It is not the institutional structures, nor efficient evangelising methods, but the man who “is the first road the Church must tread to carry out her mission” (*Redemptor hominis*, 14), all men and women are by the Father, “predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he might be the first born of many brothers” (*Rom* 8, 29).

### **An Appeal**

Carry out the initial proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth in the field of education or in the various moments of daily life, in dialogue with the social, cultural, religious situation of young people and adults, making the Preventive System become ever more relevant in Oceania.

### **Questions**

1. What do we need to emphasise particularly in our cultural context in order to foster the initial proclaim Jesus?
2. What elements in the culture of our young people could become opportunities for initial proclamation? How could initial proclamation actually take place?

## A Constantly Changing Context

### **Introduction:**

During the Study Days it became clear to the participants that Oceania is in constant change. In fact the “Emerging Insights” underlined that “like the waters which unite its shores, Oceania is a continent in constant transition. Its peoples - with their hundreds of languages and cultures—are in movement from traditional, village cultures to more complex modern, township and/or city lifestyles. In the more developed countries, the pace of societal fragmentation linked with secularisation is more keenly felt, even as this trend is already present and rapidly growing more daily. Oceania is marked by far distances. And even when villages may be relatively close, the lack of roads makes travel long, wearisome and hazardous. Digital, mobile technology presents great hope in the proclamation of the Faith.”

### **Instruction for Sharing:**

Someone reads aloud the text below for general comprehension. This is followed by a brief moment of silent reflection.

### **Our Text:**

From the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 20:

“The Church faces a twofold challenge in seeking to proclaim the Gospel in Oceania: on the one hand, the traditional religions and cultures, and on the other, the modern process of secularisation. In each case, “the first and most urgent task is the proclamation of the Risen Christ by way of a personal encounter which would bring the listener to conversion of heart and the request for Baptism”. Whether faced with traditional religion or refined philosophy, the Church preaches by word and deed that “the truth is in Jesus Christ” (*Eph* 4:21; cf. *Col* 1:15-20). In the light of that truth, she

in Jesus Christ” (*Eph* 4:21; cf. *Col* 1:15-20). In the light of that truth, she makes her contribution to discussion about the values and ethical principles which make for happiness in human life and peace in society. The faith must always be presented in a rationally coherent way, so as to favour its capacity to penetrate into ever wider fields of human experience. Faith in fact has the force to shape culture itself by penetrating it to its very core. Alert to both Christian tradition and contemporary cultural shifts, the word of faith and reason must go hand in hand with the witness of life if evangelisation is to bear fruit. Above all, however, what is needed is a fearless proclamation of Christ, ‘a *parrhesia* of faith.’”

#### **Understanding the Text:**

- 1) Can you narrate examples of constant change that you have experienced in your own context?
- 2) In what way could cultural change in your context foster initial proclamation? In what way could it hinder initial proclamation

#### **Deepening the Text:**

- 1) It is not unusual in Oceania to see in one and the same context expressions of traditional religions and the modern process of secularisation?
- 2) Why is the presentation of the Christian faith “in a rationally coherent way” important in our context?
- 3) How could we foster the dialogue of faith and reason among our young people?

#### **Our Experiences:**

Share examples where the presentation of the Christian faith “in a rationally coherent way” has borne fruit.

#### **Conclusion:**

Each one is invited to say a short thanksgiving prayer. A song concludes this activity.

## Reach Out!

### 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.

### Look Beyond

**Run, catch up with that chariot** is an invitation to welcome an opportunity, to take advantage of the right moment, not to waste the chance of opening up and taking part in the Biblical story...

#### **Witness and talk about god**

*The Gospel is not a system of doctrine to believe in, nor a list of moral duties to observe, it is good news that changes life; therefore it is not transmitted by means of cold statements or techniques but with human warmth and the witness of a life lived with love.*

*As Paul VI observed, witness of life is not enough, "even the most wonderful witness can lose its value if it is not explained and justified [...] explained by a clear, unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus. The Good News, proclaimed by the example of one's life, must sooner or later be proclaimed by the word of life. There is no real evangelisation if the name, teaching, life, promises, Kingdom, and mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God, are not proclaimed" (Evangelii nuntiandi 22).*

## From the Bible

**The Spirit tells Philip to overtake the chariot but he is not told who he will find in it nor what he must do or say.**

The Spirit who “breathes where he wills” (Jn 3, 8), who prays with inexpressible sighs (Rm 8, 26), does not give concrete commands to follow but stimulates man’s intelligence and creativity and enkindles his love. He acts in surprising ways and urges toward unexpected goals. He does not like dialoguing with man within his narrow schemes and desires, but launches him towards vaster horizons, to the heights of God’s plan.

## Deepen

Read excerpts from “Initial Proclamation In Catholic Educational Institutions” (Appendix 3)

## Questions

Many authors affirm that the crisis today is not one of faith but of form. What forms should be abandoned?

Many people, faced with social fragmentation and an uncertain future, look for security and direction in religious movements. Can this situation be an opportunity for initial proclamation? In what way?

## Share

Share your reflections and enrich your community.

## Celebrate

**Hymn:** Any appropriate one

**Guide:** Attentiveness in possibilities for initial proclamation is what keeps alive our missionary zeal and enthusiasm.

Lord Jesus, help us to be attentively aware of possibilities for initial proclamation. **R.** *Lord hear our prayer.*

Lord Jesus, grant us the courage to make an initial proclamation when opportunities come our way. **R.**



Jesus Christ you are God's gift to us and we have been given the mandate to share you with others. Guide us Lord, that we may be driven by an ardent desire to share you with everyone. **R.**

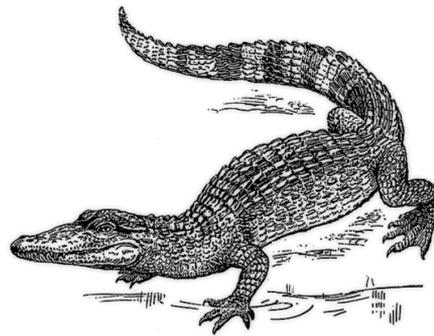
Help us Lord to be ever aware of the need to prepare the laity to collaborate with us in the proclamation of Jesus and through our systematic village/family visits. **R.**

Give us zeal Lord in our catechetical ministry and see it as an important way of sharing the gift of Jesus with the baptised. **R.**

Our Father (sung)

### Thought to Remember

Apostolic passion urges the Christian to give others the joy that he has in his heart, to give freely as he has received (Mt 10, 8). The Ethiopian eunuch did not see Philip again, but went on his way full of joy. Initial proclamation does not encourage a dependent relationship. It is planting the seed of faith and lets it continue to develop; the fire once enkindled continues to burn. Catechesis through all the stages in life becomes the continued support throughout life's journey.





## Kindness as Initial Proclamation

### 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.

### Introduction:

“The Church faces a twofold challenge in seeking to proclaim the Gospel in Oceania: on the one hand, the traditional religions and cultures, and on the other, the modern process of secularisation. In each case, “the first and most urgent task is the proclamation of the Risen Christ by way of a personal encounter which would bring the listener to conversion of heart and the request for Baptism”. (*Towards a Common Understanding of Initial Proclamation in Oceania*)

“The Synod discussions stressed that, in presenting Jesus, the Church must show his compassionate love to a world in need of healing.” (*Ecclesia in Oceania*, 5). “The apostolate of charity witnesses to the fullness of Christian love not only in speech but in action. Such love leads people to wonder about its source and makes them ask why Christians are different in their values and behaviour. Through apostolic charity such as this, Christ touches the lives of others, and leads them to a greater sense of what it might mean to speak of and build a “civilisation of love”. (*Ecclesia in Oceania* 32).

### Our Text:

“Through his many activities (St. Francis de Sales) educated the faithful, and showed them that holiness is possible in whatever state of life,

which gave rise to a different spirituality. He considered it a heresy to say that a state of life was incompatible with piety. In fact, he introduced to the “Devout Life” those who wanted to serve Christ, opening to them the secrets of God’s love, paying attention to the spiritual life also in the field of action of the laity, and making devotion pleasant and desirable.

It is surprising that, in the midst of this tireless work, the Bishop of Geneva would find time to carry on a voluminous correspondence and write which are masterpieces for spiritual guidance: “Introduction to the Devout Life”, “Treatise on the Love of God”, “spiritual conferences”. The first is addressed particularly to lay people and continues to be of great relevance and validity. At the Salesian level, in addition to those elements which were so strongly emphasised by Don Bosco, the figure of St. Francis de Sales is presented to us as a model for his kindness, goodness and meekness, with respect to any person. Not by chance is called “the kindest of the saints”, “the doctor of love”, “the most humane and loving the saints.” Reading his biography and knowing how much he had to suffer from those who were not pleased by his goodness, even through libel and slander, we know his meekness was not natural, but the fruit of the Spirit through education and the development of those values and of those virtues mentioned by Paul in his letter to the Galatians (5, 22). According to his biographers, Francis was naturally irritable, fiery. And it was only after years of intense effort and patient he became gentle, tender, gentle, holy. Even the humanism of Don Bosco is inspired by that of St. Francis de Sales, and results in the love and respect for nature and acceptance of human values and the goodness of man, the love for art and expressions of beauty, love and appreciation for good manners, love and respect for human affection.”

(excerpts from the homily of Fr. Pascual Chávez, January 24, 2012)

### Questions for Discussion and Sharing:

- 1) The gentleness and kindness of St. Francis de Sales continue to touch a chord in the minds and hearts of the people of Oceania. In what way could kindness, goodness and meekness become initial proclamation in my context?
- 2) Although St. Francis de Sales lived in a different age and context, his humanism is truly relevant in Oceania today. How can you express in your own context his “love and respect for nature and acceptance of hu-

man values and the goodness of man, the love for art and expressions of beauty, love and appreciation for good manners, love and respect for human affection”?

### **Concluding Song:**

Chorus

*I thank my God each time I think of you!  
And when I pray for you, I pray with joy.*

Now there is one thing I am sure of,  
He who began His work in you,  
will see that it is truly finished,  
when the day of Jesus comes!

That I should feel like this towards you  
Seems only natural to me.  
For you have shared with me my labours!  
The Gospel privilege with me!

Since you have borne with me my burdens,  
I now bear you within my heart!  
And God alone knows how I miss you!  
I love you just as Christ loves me!

I pray your knowledge will be deepened!  
Your love be mutual and strong!  
Then you will reach the perfect goodness!  
Then to the Lord you will belong!

I will be Spirit who walks with you!  
You will be always within My hand!  
Take my heart and give it all to Me!



## The Challenges and Opportunities of our Secular Age

### Live

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

- Identify some expressions of secularisation among our young people today?
- What are my experiences in sharing the faith with our young people who are students in our school or who frequent our oratory?

### Discuss

Read and discuss and excerpt of Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* and David Willis's «Initial Proclamation in Societies in the Process of Secularisation»

“Thus, people today, says Taylor, declare “some faith in God, and identifying with a Church, without actually attending its services.” 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.” 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.” Sociologists try to come to grips with this new phenomenon by inventing new terms like “believing without belonging”, or “diffusive Christianity.” (*Young people and Religion in our Secular Age*, Appendix 2)

“One important characteristic of societies undergoing the process of secularisation, as we have already drawn attention to, is the transfer of services, initially delivered by the Church, to the government. This in-

evitably means a diminution of the Church's presence in society on an institutional level. More often than not, Christians will be employed by the government or secular NGOs and, in these circumstances, will not have the institutional witness supporting them. Initial proclamation in these circumstances either comes from the individual Christian or it does not come at all. Thus, the importance of the awareness of how Christian proclamation is present through the individual Christian who is committed to Jesus and is respectful and open to their work colleagues. Awareness of Initial Proclamation is also vitally important when one is working within a Christian institution. Without it the institution becomes indistinguishable from a government institution or any NGO. For instance, a Christian school, without committed Christians is, in reality, a non-government or private institution" (*Initial Proclamation in Societies in the Process of Secularisation*)

## Discover

- What has the Church said about this topic?

Blessed John Paul II, in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Oceania* 7 writes:

“The cultural variety of Oceania is not immune from the worldwide process of modernisation which has effects both positive and negative. Certainly modern times have given a new and higher profile to positive human values, such as respect for the inalienable rights of the person, the introduction of democratic procedures in administration and government, the refusal to accept structural poverty as an unchangeable condition, the rejection of terrorism, torture and violence as means of political change, the right to education, health care and housing for all [...] Yet modernisation also has its negative effects in the region [...] A large part of Oceania, particularly Australia and New Zealand, has entered upon an era marked by increasing secularisation. In civic life, religion, and especially Christianity, is moved to the margin and tends to be regarded as a strictly private matter for the individual with little relevance to public life. Religious convictions and the insights of faith are at times denied their due role in forming people's consciences. Likewise, the Church and other religious bodies have a diminished voice in public affairs.”

## Deepen

“Unwittingly the introduction of Christianity became a factor of secularisation, as it was still noticed in the 1980s.

European missionaries, as part of the Western influence, have often unwittingly been agents of secularisation in their efforts to proclaim the Gospel. Although one would hope that Christianity would become as deeply integrated into the whole of life as was the traditional religion, it seems that many Melanesian converts tend to live in a more compartmentalised world, and so Christian faith tends to become a Sunday-only ritual activity” (*Initial Proclamation of Christ in the Context of Traditional Cultures and Religions in Melanesia*).

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)

## Share

Sharing in small groups

- ◆ How can Initial Proclamation take place in our context?
- ◆ What are the challenges and opportunities secularisation offers us?
- ◆ What are the challenges and opportunities of secularisation for our religious community?

## Celebrate

(make a big circle for all the participants)

- Hymn
- Opening prayer
- Gospel: Mt 28, 19-20
- Intercessions (spontaneous)
- Our Father (sung)
- Conclusion



## Initial Proclamation & Catechesis

### Introduction:

“Catechesis, distinct from the initial proclamation of the Gospel, promotes growth in this initial conversion and provides instruction in the faith to those who have converted, thus incorporating them into the Christian community. [...]

The relation between these two forms of the ministry of the Word is not, however, always easy to discover; nor is it easily done; nor should it necessarily be stated emphatically. Instead, the relation can be perceived as a two-fold action which is found united in the same pastoral activity. In fact, frequently people who come for catechesis need to live more truly converted lives. Therefore, the programmes of catechesis and introduction in the faith might benefit from putting greater emphasis on the proclamation of the Gospel, which is a call to this conversion and which fosters and sustains it. In this way, the new evangelisation can reinvigorate the present programmes of instruction in the faith by accentuating the kerygmatic character of proclamation.” (*Towards a Common Understanding of Initial Proclamation in Oceania*)

### Instruction for Sharing:

Someone reads aloud the text below for general comprehension. This is followed by a brief moment of silent reflection.

### Our Texts:

“Catechesis is an important element in our work of evangelisation. It is the process of helping the believer to know, contemplate and celebrate the mystery of Jesus Christ. Its main aim is to help people come into a personal relationship with Jesus. Catechesis helps conversion to grow into a living faith. People converted as adults and those baptised as in-

fants all need on-going catechesis to accompany their lifelong journey in the Christian community.

Our catechetical renewal has five important characteristics:

1. Catechesis must be *Christ-centred*.

It leads us to contemplate Christ's face (NMI 16) and to be in personal relationship with him.

2. Catechesis must be *rooted in the Word of God*.

Familiarity with the Bible through prayerful use, sharing and study, is essential for our Christian life. 'Ignorance of the Scriptures', says St. Jerome, 'is ignorance of Christ' (NMI 17).

3. Catechesis must be authentically *Melanesian*.

We use tools, methods and expressions of our local cultures in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands because the Catholic faith is transmitted and expressed through our people's cultures.

4. Catechesis must be *systematic*.

The whole of the Catholic faith must be presented in an ordered and programmed way

5. Catechesis must bear *witness* to the Kingdom of God.

Catechesis bears fruit when Christians radiate the joy of a life with Jesus."

(Catholic Bishops' Conference of PNG & SI, *Nurturing the Faith Pastoral Letter on Catechetical Renewal*)

"If all catechesis must find inspiration in its objectives and its dynamism on the catechumenal model, we need to base and orient all our Salesian process of evangelisation and catechesis towards it. ... The objectives of evangelisation and catechesis in a Salesian context must be based on a lived experience of what it means being a Salesian" (*Catechesis and Evangelisation from a Salesian Perspective*)

#### **Understanding the Texts:**

- 1) How is initial proclamation connected to catechesis?
- 2) Why do you think are the 5 characteristics of catechesis outlined by the Bishops of PNG & SI important for their work of evangelisation?

3) What is the 'catechumenal model' of catechesis?

**Deepening the Text:**

- 1) The Bishops of PNG & SI pointed out that catechesis in their countries need to have these 5 characteristics. Has your local Bishops' Conference identified the characteristics of catechesis in your country? How do you apply them in your catechetical ministry?
- 2) How could you foster initial proclamation, evangelisation and catechesis in your Salesian context?

**Our Experiences:**

Share your experience or positive examples you know of initial proclamation that led to the catechumenate.

Among the positive examples we have heard which of these could be helpful in our own context today? How could we adapt these to our context?

**Conclusion:**

Each one is invited to say a short thanksgiving prayer. The song below or any other song concludes this activity.

*Strong and constant is My love!  
Strong and constant is My love!*

Should you wander far away from Me,  
I will search for you in every land!  
Should you call, then you will truly know:

When you know sorrow within your life,  
I will come! I will embrace your heart!  
Through your pain you will discover Me!





## Appendices







## Priorities & Strategies Salesian Family Missionary Seminar

(Port Moresby, September 4-7, 2004)

### **Caritas Sisters of Jesus**

#### Priorities & Strategies

##### **1. Pre service formation**

- on-going formation
- inculturation - living with national communities for about 2 months
- vocational, pastoral activities, vocation camp encounters, retreats
- assistance, volunteer work
- networking, spiritual sharing with Salesian family
- evangelisation

##### **2. Inculturation**

- boarding with local community
- learning pidgin

##### **3. Working with the poor**

- recollection for ancillary staff
- scholarship for primary school children
- out-reach programs
- establish community learning centre in the school - for those who cannot afford school fees

### **Salesian Cooperators / Past Pupils / Lay Collaborators**

#### Priorities

1. Inculturate Salesian charism into the Basic Ecclesial Communities
2. Integral Salesian education

3. Build proper networking to break cultural barriers Strategies
4. Seminars, workshops, basic formation
5. Being educated in the Salesian setting - school and parish
6. Have place or office where they can feel welcome.

## **Daughters of Mary Help of Christians**

### Priorities & Strategies

1. Consolidate our presence by having our own place for vocation, for security and expand our work look for avenues for funding for consolidation of project, network with other FMAs
2. Formation and preparation of personnel (FMA, lay collaborators, catechists, mission partners)
  - sharing of resources for spiritual formation with other FMAs of other countries in Oceania
  - Have regular formative sessions with other religious to be enriched with their experiences and challenges
  - Program spiritual formation for communities
  - Have a component right from the start on formation (in view of inculturation)
  - Formation or study for missionaries prior to the mission
3. Vocation promotion
  - initiate vocation awareness and prayer encounters for girls
4. Continue the yearning desire to open other possibilities of apostolate~ for family, parish, home visitation, mothers' club

## **Salesians of Don Bosco**

### Priorities

1. Inculturation and ongoing formation of personnel
2. Promotion of local vocation
3. New evangelisation
4. Networking

### Strategies: PNG

- Hold another Delegation Assembly before celebrating 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Salesian presence in PNG

- Have an annual gathering for the Salesian Family, integrating it within the yearly plan
- To promote vocations organize: a meeting of the vocation theme; formulate a plan of vocation promotion; conduct Vocation Camps, Come and see programmes
- Consider opening a new presence for street lads
- Facilitate sharing of materials, resources and personnel among our Salesian schools.

Strategies: Solomon Islands

- PNG Delegation house to be a resource centre for training and ongoing formation for Oceania. Fr. Luciano Odorico could organise and coordinate the ongoing formation of the confreres
- strengthen the vocation area of the EPP: vocation groups, vocation days, come and see programs, personnel for vocation promotion
- need to involve families
- need to deepen catechesis
- prepare trainers
- Salesian missions to be an NGO - to represent, lobby, present projects to Australian agencies and get volunteers

Strategies: Australia, Fiji & Samoa

- Province formation commission to review the current situation against criteria and norms outlined in the New Ratio
  - Recommendations are passed on to the Provincial and his council for action
  - Samoa - continue come and see programs, personal interview, visit of families, discernment of applicants
  - SDB continue to support church rallies
1. Continue exchange of personnel in early and on-going formation; greater sharing of Salesian experiences from the Provinces at Regional meetings.





## 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,”<sup>70</sup> 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,”<sup>71</sup> 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.”<sup>72</sup>

In our region, Nicholas Tonti-Filippini, Associate Dean of John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family in Melbourne claims that

“Apart from some vestigial prayers on such an occasion as the opening of Parliament, now to be preceded by a welcome from the original owners of our land, (or an occasional speech from a member of minority religious party who became elected through the vagaries of the system for electing upper chambers and inter party dealing on preferences), Australian politics are basically secular according to Taylor’s characterisation.” He further pointed out that “Australia is even more secular than our American counterpart. In 2005, only 40% of Australian marriages took place in the presence of a Minister of religion.

<sup>70</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

Whereas in America, 40% took place without a Minister of religion. America, despite a rigorous separation of Church and State, is the Western society with the highest statistics for religious belief and practice. Formal religious practice in Australia is in decline. In that sense a secular society may mean a society in which people are predominantly not religious by belief or practice especially where that is considered in terms of attendance at formal religious observances. In that case, though constitutionally secular, one would not describe Turkey as secular, given the vast majority of the population is Muslim, with 95% declaring their belief in a God and adopting religious practices.<sup>73</sup>

It is in the light of the above situation that *Ecclesia in Oceania* no. 7 points out that “contact with secularised and urbanised Western societies and with the growing cultural influence of Asian immigrants” has caused “a gradual lessening of the natural religious sense which has led to disorientation in people’s moral life and conscience.” 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,”<sup>74</sup> 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 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.”<sup>75</sup>

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.”<sup>76</sup> They prefer “a kind of autonomous exploration, which is opposed to a simple surrender to authority; and people who en-

<sup>73</sup> [http://www.jp2institute.org/Portals/39/Documents/NTF\\_Religion\\_in\\_a\\_Secular\\_Society\\_AMF\\_.pdf](http://www.jp2institute.org/Portals/39/Documents/NTF_Religion_in_a_Secular_Society_AMF_.pdf) (accessed April 1, 2012).

<sup>74</sup> Taylor, 506.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 508.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

gage in this kind of spiritual path are indeed, put off by the moralism and code-fetishism which they find in the churches.”<sup>77</sup> 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,”<sup>78</sup> hence, they are reputed for “its subjectivism, its focus on the self and its wholeness, its emphasis on feeling.”<sup>79</sup>

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, 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.”<sup>80</sup>

Thus, people today, says Taylor, declare “some faith in God, and identifying with a Church, without actually attending its services.”<sup>81</sup> 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.”<sup>82</sup> Hence, more and more people “consider themselves Catholic

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 509.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 508.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 513.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 514.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 518.

while not accepting many crucial dogmas, or they combine Christianity with Buddhism, or they pray while not being certain they believe.”<sup>83</sup>

Sociologists try to come to grips with this new phenomenon by inventing new terms like “believing without belonging”, or “diffusive Christianity.”<sup>84</sup> 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 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.”<sup>85</sup>

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 peo-

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 513.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 518.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 519. Taylor quotes John Wolfe, *God and Greater Britain* (London: Routedledge, 1994) 92-93.

ple travel in search of faith or meaning in their lives. The pilgrimage is also a quest.”<sup>86</sup> 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.”<sup>87</sup> 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.”<sup>88</sup>

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 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.”<sup>90</sup>

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.”<sup>91</sup>

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

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 517.

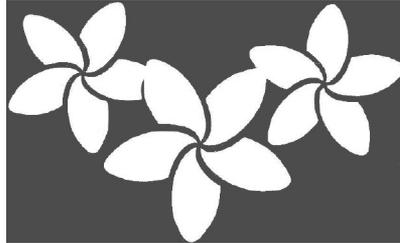
<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 516.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 516-517.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 517.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 513.

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”!<sup>92</sup>



<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 520.



## 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)<sup>93</sup>.

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".<sup>94</sup>*

<sup>93</sup> 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.

<sup>94</sup> 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 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 be 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”<sup>95</sup>

• ***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.”<sup>96</sup>*

*“In an initial proclamation, someone reacts to a situation by presenting oneself as a believer.”<sup>97</sup>*

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<sup>98</sup>.

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.

<sup>95</sup> TNOCF, p.81

<sup>96</sup> *idem*

<sup>97</sup> *idem*

<sup>98</sup> 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.”<sup>99</sup>*

• ***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.”<sup>100</sup>*

*“Whoever receives the proclamation is free to listen, to accept or reject it, to let oneself be questioned.”<sup>101</sup>*

**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 about

<sup>99</sup> TNOCF, p.81

<sup>100</sup> TNOCF, p.29

<sup>101</sup> TNOCF, p.81

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*,<sup>102</sup> gradually integrated dogmatic statements against the various heresies, would develop to become the professions of

<sup>102</sup> 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).

faith known as “Apostles’ Creed” and “Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed.”

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.”* <sup>103</sup>

#### **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

<sup>103</sup> TNOCF, p.29

the witness “which does not already presuppose a voluntary act on the part of those to whom it is addressed”<sup>104</sup>

Catechesis, “is what the Christian community offers to those who freely wish to participate in the experience and knowledge of the faith.”<sup>105</sup> 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.”<sup>106</sup>

### ***Initial Proclamation and pre-catechesis***

The two terms are not synonymous. Footnote 187 of the General Catechetical Directory<sup>107</sup> 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*

<sup>104</sup> *idem*

<sup>105</sup> TNOCF, p.27

<sup>106</sup> TNOCF, p.46

<sup>107</sup> General Directory for Catechesis. 1997

*a much wider problem which faces all institutions as such in a society as the present, characterised by rapid and profound change.”*

Or in another document *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*<sup>108</sup> 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 document:<sup>109</sup>

*“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”<sup>110</sup> by linking the educational experience with religious practices, with a witness to what is experienced, with what

<sup>108</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education.

<sup>109</sup> Congregation For Catholic Education, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools. A Shared Mission between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful* (2007).

<sup>110</sup> A successful audiovisual associates closely a complementary image and sound, avoiding the juxtaposition of the two components into a single product.

– 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 proclamation<sup>111</sup>**

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.

<sup>111</sup> 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”<sup>112</sup>.*

• **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 (*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.

<sup>112</sup> TNOCF, p.81

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.”<sup>113</sup>

<sup>113</sup> TNOCF, p.81



## Nurturing the Faith

Excerpts from the Pastoral Letter of the Bishops  
of Papua New Guinea & Solomon Islands on Catechetical Renewal

Evangelisation is the process of leading all to know and share in the life of Christ through the proclamation of the Gospel. It has many elements like, among others, witness of life, first proclamation, witnessing the love of Christ through the practice of charity and catechesis. We must however remember that “there is no true evangelisation if the name the teaching the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth are not proclaimed” (Paul VI, *Evangelisation in the Modern World* no. 22).

### **A New Evangelisation**

The way of Jesus is always the path of mission. He is now inviting us to proclaim the Gospel anew, so that culture and Gospel proclamation will meet in ways that enrich each other. In this way the Good News will be heard, believed and lived more deeply by our peoples. This must be done in faithfulness to the tradition of the Church, and in a truly Melanesian way that flows from the very heart and soul of our peoples and so has the power to change our communities for the better (*Pastoral Letter on the General Assembly*).

Evangelisation will bear fruit when a person turns away from sin and undergoes a change of mind and heart and decides to follow Jesus. Meeting with the Risen Christ brings a person to conversion of heart. Once people believe and have changed their lives, they are ready for catechesis. A renewed catechesis will bring about a new evangelisation in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

Our common experience shows that if we want to plant a tree we prepare the ground and plant the seed and water it regularly until it grows. Once it has roots it will somehow survive on its own. However, if we

want this tree to bear abundant fruit we still have to fertilise it regularly, and clean around its trunk. Only this hard work will assure us of a good harvest. We know that if we don't take care of it, it will not bear much fruit.

When the first missionaries came to our countries they planted the seed. We call this the first proclamation. The tree has grown now, but it still needs care and nourishment. We call this catechesis. Catechesis has a very important role: inspire people to live according to Gospel values. A renewed catechesis will help us to be a Church alive in Christ.

### **What is Catechesis?**

Catechesis is an important element in our work of evangelisation. It is the process of helping the believer to know, contemplate and celebrate the mystery of Jesus Christ. Its main aim is to help people come into a personal relationship with Jesus. Catechesis helps conversion to grow into a living faith. People converted as adults and those baptised as infants all need on-going catechesis to accompany their lifelong journey in the Christian community.

### **Characteristics of a Renewed Catechesis**

Our catechetical renewal has five important characteristics:

1. Catechesis must be *Christ-centred*.  
It leads us to contemplate Christ's face (NMI 16) and to be in personal relationship with him.
2. Catechesis must be *rooted in the Word of God*.  
Familiarity with the Bible through prayerful use, sharing and study, is essential for our Christian life. 'Ignorance of the Scriptures', says St. Jerome, 'is ignorance of Christ' (NMI 17).
3. Catechesis must be authentically *Melanesian*.  
We use tools, methods and expressions of our local cultures in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands because the Catholic faith is transmitted and expressed through our people's cultures.



4. Catechesis must be *systematic*.

The whole of the Catholic faith must be presented in an ordered and programmed way

5. Catechesis must bear *witness* to the Kingdom of God.

Catechesis bears fruit when Christians radiate the joy of a life with Jesus.

### Those To Be Catechised

Adulthood is when we make important choices in life. Therefore, although catechesis accompanies us through all the stages of life, Adult catechesis is of greatest importance as it is at this stage in life that we make real faith options. Adult catechesis aims at helping adults to understand and live the faith they received at Baptism. The faith of adults needs to be continually enlightened, developed and protected so that it may give sense, unity and hope to their many experiences. The catechesis of adults is a priority because it is adults who are capable of a fully responsible faith.

The catechumenate is an important expression of adult catechesis. It is a time of catechesis or formation in faith for catechumens accompanied by liturgical rites called *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)*. Because it is so important for all to receive a good Christian formation, **the catechumenate for new Christians must last at least one (1) year in all our dioceses**, though this length of time may not be necessary for Christians from mainline churches who desire to be accepted in the Catholic Church.

It is only when our catechetical programs for children, adolescents, youth and young adults is effective that adults will feel the need to continue in their faith development. Young people need a particular catechesis which addresses problems affecting their lives like the formation of conscience, education to love, involvement in society and vocational guidance. In this light pre-sacramental catechesis for Baptism, First Holy Communion, Confirmation and Marriage should be given great importance.



We must not forget that we as Church are called to reach out to people in special situations: the disabled, handicapped, seriously sick and the elderly; the marginalised like drug addicts, prisoners and victims of HIV/AIDS; the workers, professionals, politicians, members of the police and military, artists and university students, lapsed Catholics, etc. We are all challenged to organise adequate catechetical programmes that respond to their situations. Catechesis and a programme of re-entry may be necessary for Catholics who have left and now decide to come back to the Church.

Catechesis is also important for old people. For those who have a rich and solid faith catechesis brings to fulfilment their journey of faith. For others who live a faith weakened by a poor Christian life, catechesis becomes for them a moment of new light and religious experience.[...]

[...] Blessed Peter ToRot is a shining example of a person who has given his life to bear witness to Jesus. He lived his vocation as a catechist with great commitment. As a catechist he shed his life in defence of the holiness of the sacrament of Marriage. His example is an invitation to all of us to take to heart the work of catechesis. In this light the first week of July will be celebrated every year as **National Catechetical Week** which culminates on or around the feast of our first Melanesian martyr. This will be a privileged occasion for each parish and Diocese to highlight the importance of the ministry of catechesis and recognise those involved in this ministry. [...]



## Catholic Schools at a Crossroads

Excerpts from the Pastoral Letter of the Bishops of NSW and the ACT

Catholic education is at a crossroads. Changing circumstances have radically affected the composition and role of the Catholic school in recent years. In this Pastoral Letter the Bishops of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory (NSW-ACT) invite Catholic educational leaders, staff and parents, as well as the broader Catholic community, to join with us in reflecting upon the future of Catholic schools in NSW-ACT. We here reaffirm our commitment to Catholic education, while at the same time challenging all those involved to embrace the new evangelisation to which our schools are called in this new century.

The Catholic Bishops of NSW-ACT invite all those involved in Catholic education – our educational leaders and staff, clergy and religious, parents and parish communities – to dedicate themselves to ensuring that our schools:

- are truly Catholic in their identity and life
- are centres of ‘the new evangelisation’
- enable our students to achieve high levels of ‘Catholic religious literacy’
- are led and staffed by people who will contribute to these goals.

### **Identity of the Catholic School**

Much has been written in previous Church documents and elsewhere on the identity of the Catholic school and we need not repeat that here. Put simply: the Catholic school is the principal educational arm of Catholic families, parishes and the wider Church for those generally aged under eighteen. It is there to assist parents and parishes in their educational, evangelical and catechetical mission, as well as to help the wider community in its educational and civic service.



It is for this reason that the Church remains committed to ensuring that there is a 'critical mass' of Catholic students in our schools, even though we also readily welcome students from other religious backgrounds. We exhort our school leaders to re-examine how they might maximise enrolment of Catholic students, including those from socio-economic bands and ethnic and special needs groups currently underrepresented in their schools. Parish schools should continue to seek out and give preference to the children of their own parishioners, then to other Catholic children especially from the surrounding district, then to other Christian children, before offering any additional available places to children of other religious backgrounds. Regional secondary schools and Congregational schools should apply similar principles. However, much more is required for a genuinely Catholic school than just a preponderance of students from Catholic families.

It is essential that:

- leaders and staff understand, and are solidly committed to, the Catholic identity of the school
- the Religious Education (RE) curriculum is sound, attractive and professionally taught by teachers with appropriate RE qualifications
- other disciplines also consider the Catholic dimension of their subject areas
- schools are Eucharistic communities within the parish context where, as far as possible, students regularly take part in Mass and Reconciliation
- schools continue to be places of prayer, including prayer at assemblies, in classes and in other staff and student meetings, and places where practices are encouraged such as Scripture reflections, the Angelus, Eucharistic adoration and prayerful silences
- schools are places cultivating a Catholic imagination, where prayer and liturgy are supported by a Catholic visual culture, including crucifixes and pictures of Our Lady and the saints
- schools are connected to their local parish(es) and diocese, through inviting the periodic presence of the bishop, clergy, religious and parents in the school, and through active collaboration with the wider Catholic community
- families and parishes support their schools in these important endeavours.

### **Catholic Schools as Centres of ‘the New Evangelisation’**

In his Encyclical on the Church’s Mission John Paul II said: “I sense that the moment has come to commit all the Church’s energies to a new evangelisation.” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 1990) This call was the antiphon of his pontificate as he called the Church to preach the Gospel anew in previously Christian communities which were falling away from the Gospel in the face of secularisation and other cultural change. In his Apostolic Exhortation on Catechesis the Pope explained that the definitive aim of evangelisation “is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity.” (*Catechesi Tradendæ*, 1979) In this John Paul II echoed his predecessors such as Paul VI, whose own Encyclical on Evangelisation in the Modern World, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), remains a classic on this topic. This emphasis on evangelisation and catechesis has been reiterated by Pope Benedict XVI and by Church leaders around the world.

*Evangelisation* means proclaiming the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. Its goal is bringing people to faith through a personal encounter with Him. It is to be distinguished from *catechesis*, which involves deepening and instructing that faith already received. In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Jesus Christ and the Peoples of Oceania, John Paul II noted that:

*Living the life of Jesus Christ implies...a living spirituality and authentic morality, strengthened by the word of God in Scripture and celebrated in the Sacraments of the Church. When Christians live the life of Christ with deeper faith, their hope grows stronger and their charity more radiant. That was the goal of the Synod, and it is the goal of the new evangelisation to which the Spirit is summoning the whole Church...The present generation of Christians is called and sent now to accomplish a new evangelisation among the peoples of Oceania, a fresh proclamation of the enduring truth evoked by the symbol of the Southern Cross. This call to mission poses great challenges, but it also opens new horizons, full of hope and even a sense of adventure. (Ecclesia in Oceania 2001, 8 and 13)*

The ‘sense of adventure’ inspired by the new evangelisation is all the more urgent in the context of growing numbers of non-practising

Catholics, under-catechised Catholics and other-than-Catholic students in our schools. All Christians receive the gift of faith at Baptism, and many others carry “the seeds of faith” within their hearts. But many of them need the Gospel to be proclaimed to them anew. This is not a matter of proselytising or “forcing beliefs down students’ throats”– quite the contrary. Genuine faith cannot be imposed: it is freely received or rejected. If we are “up front” about our educational and catechetical goals with any prospective student, teacher or parent, while encouraging students to engage with open hearts and reasoning minds, then we are fully justified in engaging in activities of witness, formation and service.

If Catholic schools are to be centres of the new evangelisation:

- the life and activity in the school would be the context for a personal encounter with Christ and would promote, and never contradict, the teachings of the Church
- all those involved in our schools would appreciate their roles in receiving and proclaiming the Good News by word and deed, and by the example of their lives
- students would participate in RE classes, liturgies, retreats and prayers which are, as far as possible, tailored to their place in the journey of faith, addressing the core of our faith and inviting a response
- special programs would be developed for students who first enter a Catholic school later than Kindergarten (for instance in Year 7) and may not have received much prior religious education
- schools would work with their local parish(es) to establish programs for initiating children and young adults into the Church
- other efforts would be pursued to integrate the activity of our primary and secondary schools with the life of the surrounding parish(es) and diocese, so that our young people are given a sense of belonging to a wider Church beyond their family and school
- consideration would be given to the desirability of establishing Catholic pre-schools, with catechesis appropriate to this crucial stage in faith formation
- every effort would be made to engage our students and young

teachers in preparations for, participation in and enrichment after major religious events such as World Youth Day

- families and parishes would back up and support their schools in all these activities.

### **Passing on Catholic Faith, Life and Culture**

Evangelisation is crucial, but not enough. Faith, like a seed newly planted in the soil of the human heart, needs water and light. That is why our schools must deepen and instruct the faith once received. We call this *catechesis* or *religious instruction*. Faith must also be supported by the religious culture of the school so that it will be practised in worship, vocation and action in the world.

It is sometimes observed that many young people emerge from our schools with insufficient knowledge of the Catholic faith or interest in practising it. Of course seeds of faith may have been planted that will only show forth fruit later in their lives. Nor is this solely the responsibility of the school: society, parishes, families and the young themselves also bear the burden of this trend. The Catholic school is well placed, however, to support young people, teachers and families to grow in their knowledge and love for the Catholic tradition. As some teachers have received limited faith formation themselves, they need particular support and professional development. We commit our Catholic Education Offices and parishes to providing this where possible.

Young people in our schools and their families deserve no less than the fullness of “the faith that comes to us from the apostles”. (*Eucharistic Prayer I*) Therefore enthusiasm for social justice, ecology, the charism of the founder or some particular school initiative must always be situated within the broader context of Catholic faith and morals. It must never eclipse the building of a relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church. No student should leave our Catholic schools without knowing the essentials of Catholic teaching as found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and its *Compendium*, and all catechetical programs and RE texts should build upon these.

If Catholic schools are to succeed in passing on the Catholic faith to the next generation:

- schools will have as their goal the formation of Christian disciples, with appropriate world view, character and behaviour
- RE curriculum, methodologies, texts and other resources will be chosen to ensure that by the end of their schooling students know the core teachings of our faith, our Scriptures, history and tradition ('Catholic religious literacy') and how these are to be lived in the world
- in particular, students will be brought to a knowledge and, as far as possible, love of the person, life and teachings of Christ and of the Trinitarian God of Love
- students will also be brought to a knowledge and love of the People of God, the Church, who join them in their pilgrimage through life and support them through the Word of God and the Sacraments
- students will be prepared for the challenges to their faith that may come while still at school or after they have left school
- RE classes will therefore be given priority with regard to the school curriculum, time and space allocation and the choice and recognition of staff
- there will be demonstrations of Catholic religious literacy through appropriate assessment and religious activities
- our schools will also seek to involve parents and families in the process of evangelising and catechising their children, seeking in the process also to educate those families in the faith.



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(by title and year of publication)

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2. *Salesian Africa* (1986)
3. *Pastoral Amazonica. Semana de Estudos Missionarios - Camp Grande* (1986)
4. *Evangelization in India. Study sessions for the Salesian Family on Evangelization in Tribal Areas of India - Shillong* (1987)
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6. *Spiritualità Missionaria Salesiana I. La Concezione Missionaria di Don Bosco* (1988)
7. *Spiritualità Missionaria Salesiana II. L'Educazione Cristiana e Missionaria di Don Bosco* (1988)
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