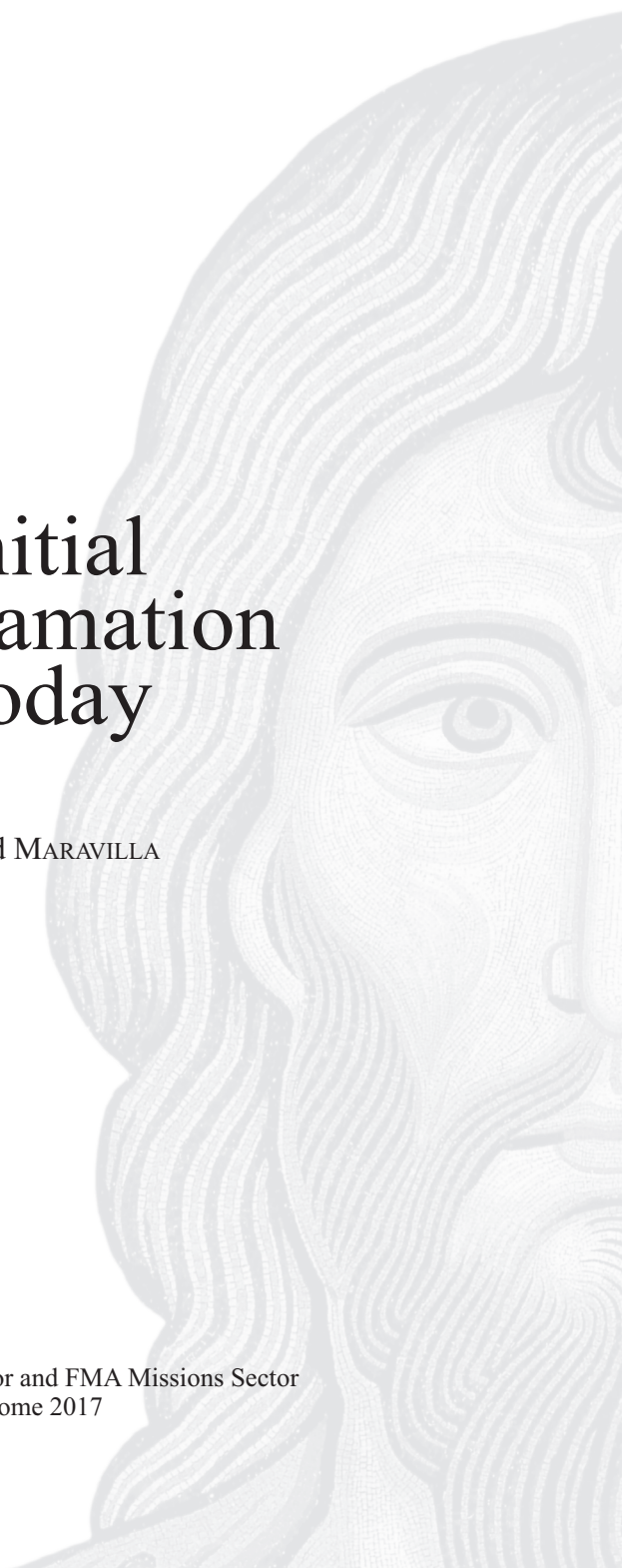


# Initial Proclamation Today

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# *Presentation*



It is with feelings of humble gratitude for the long journey shared together by the FMA and SDB that today we present to you this valuable *working tool*.

It is, above all, an *entrustment*. We entrust to you a summary of this significant journey, which we jointly made through the eight Study Days on initial proclamation that we held around the world between 2010 and 2015. During these Study Days we applied ourselves to a serious search for an initial proclamation of first quality, according the spirit of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello, aimed at young people from all continents.

This document has one *main purpose*: to stir up in us, FMA and SDB, *a greater awareness and a stronger missionary commitment*. Rather than give rise to discussions that risk becoming sterile, the intention is to strengthen in each of our religious communities a sensitivity to our missionary responsibilities. Therefore, this is an instrument to be put into practice in our apostolate!

To achieve this we propose *a fundamental* and indispensable means: *personal study and reflection*. This text is not merely to be read; it is to be studied, and to be used as a foundation for further research and analysis. The abundant footnotes on each page are already a clear indication that we have in our hands a wealth of ecclesial and Salesian missionary reflection and guidelines that require study and reflection.

Let us, therefore, vow that the punctilious work in the preparation of this synthesis, in particular through the generous dedication of Fr. Alfred Maravilla SDB, may, thanks to a prayerful and critical study, bear abundant apostolic fruits.

**Sister Alaïde Deretti FMA**  
*Councilor, Missions Sector*

**Fr. Guillermo Basaños SDB**  
*Councilor, Missions Sector*





# *Introduction*



The eight *Study Days on Initial Proclamation* in different continents, promoted by the Missions Sectors, have been a real *kairos*, that is, privileged moments in which the Holy Spirit manifested His presence to renew ourselves and our communities. “Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2Cor 6: 2). In fact, it is the Spirit who guides us, profoundly touching our hearts and our minds for our renewal.

During these Study Days, moved by the Holy Spirit, participants from different continents and cultures wanted to find a way to stir up an interest in Jesus Christ in the hearts of people, especially the young. They discussed the many concerns that arose from their pastoral experience among young people, many of whom are looking for truth and happiness. Their search could also result in some confusion and they remain deprived of the true values that lead them to true happiness. In fact, the great challenge and opportunity we have is to offer Jesus Christ to everyone, for only He can satisfy all our desires.

It was, of course, not possible to arrive at answers to all these questions during each of these Study Days. In each of them we did deepen the various dimensions of an initial proclamation of Jesus Christ, through a progressive reflection, sharing of experiences, listening to the Word of God and through prayer. These various Study Days, besides identifying techniques and methods, made us aware that to foster initial proclamation, we are first of all called to live more intensely our own Christian life. It is thus that we show the wonderful fruits of the Spirit (*Gal* 5: 22-23) and bear witness to the love and mercy of God in this world. We also need a “renewal of the mind” (*Rm* 12: 2) to widen our horizons and to see the countless possibilities for fostering initial proclamation in the context of our daily activities.

Chapter I of this study looks at initial proclamation in the New Testament, especially in the Gospels, in the activities and writings of St. Paul, and in the life of the early Christian commu-

nity. Chapter II outlines the development of theological and pastoral reflection, especially from Vatican Council II till today.

Chapters III, IV, V and VI could be considered the heart of this text because they harvest the essential elements of the discussions of all the Study Days. They define initial proclamation, showing its importance even in what is traditionally considered as Christian contexts, and its relationship with *kerygma*, through a life of witness and works of charity.

Chapter VII presents the urgent need to rethink our pastoral work among young people, pointing to initial proclamation as our primary concern. This implies a true missionary conversion to rethink and develop new strategies for our youth ministry.

“Take heart; rise, he is calling you!” (*Mk* 10: 49), the crowd at Jericho said to Bartimaeus. The same invitation is addressed to us today. “Take heart! Let’s get up! Let us not allow anyone to steal from us the joy of evangelisation! Let no one rob us of our missionary zeal! We shouldn’t miss out on our joy, dedication and boldness in fostering initial proclamation.”

May this gift be a help for every Salesian, Daughter of Mary help of Christians and member of the Salesian Family, to seize this *kairos* and launch courageous and bold initiatives to foment the initial proclamation of Christ today!

## Chapter I

# *Initial Proclamation in the New Testament*



## ENCOUNTERS WITH JESUS

Matthew summed up the missionary activity of Jesus in a rich and concise and manner: “Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity” (*Mt* 9: 35). Jesus did not expect people to come to him. Instead he went to their homes, villages and cities to meet them while they were engaged in their ordinary, daily, routine activities: Peter and Andrew while they were fishing from their boat (*Mt* 4:16 - 20), Zacchaeus watching from a tree (*Lk* 19: 1-10), Martha and Mary in their home (*Lk* 10: 38-42). This also allowed Jesus to find faith where it is not expected to be found, as in the case of the Syro-Phoenician woman (*Mt* 7: 24-30), the centurion (*Mt* 8: 5-13) and the eunuch (*Mt* 19:12). In fact, he went everywhere in search of lost sheep.<sup>1</sup>

The three personal encounters of Jesus in the Gospel of John are wonderful paradigms of initial proclamation. For the evangelist John, the ‘going around’ by Jesus is first of all the initiative of the Father. Although this is not always explicitly clear, the initiative of the Father is real and often surprising: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (*Jn* 6: 44). The disciples were drawn to Jesus; then they transmitted this attraction to others.

The call of the brothers Peter and Andrew, James and John (*Jn* 1: 35-50) is actually an initial proclamation of Jesus to humanity. It takes place in an unspecified place, as if to suggest that this first encounter with Jesus can take place anywhere. The disciples are called at different times. In the Gospel of John we have John the Baptist who, seeing Jesus passing by, exclaimed with a contagious enthusiasm: “Behold the Lamb of God!” Two of his disciples went to Jesus out of curiosity and asked him, “Where are you staying?”. Jesus answered – these are the first words of Jesus in the Gospel

<sup>1</sup> MARIA KO HA FONG, “Gesù Percorreva tutte le Città e i Villaggi” in A. MARAVILLA (ed), *Giornate di Studio sul Primo Annuncio di Cristo in Città* (Rome: SDB-FMA, 2016) 245-252.

of John – “Come and see.” Jesus allows those who seek Him to find him in an original way. He does not give them a doctrine to be understood, nor a commandment to be obeyed; he invites them to share a personal experience with him and to stay with him. Therefore, “they went and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day.” This ‘being with him’ becomes an inexhaustible internal resource for the life and mission of the disciples. One of them, Andrew, after he found the Messiah, leads his brother Peter to him. The next day Philip, after becoming a disciple of Jesus, brings Nathanael to him. The disciple starts off a chain reaction of attraction and the circle of Jesus' disciples widens.<sup>2</sup>

In his dialogue with “a Pharisee named Nicodemus” (*Jn* 3: 1-42), it is Nicodemus who utters the first words, but it is Jesus who guides the development of the dialogue. Nicodemus claims that he knows Jesus; but in reality he only knows something about Jesus. He had a little data in his hands whose full significance he had not fully grasped yet. Nicodemus is a sincere and good person who prefers to meet Jesus in the dark of the night because he is unable to open up to the new, to live with flexibility and freedom. Through their dialogue, Jesus helps him to make a leap from the dark of his narrow-mindedness towards the totally new and transcendent. John will later narrate that Nicodemus spoke in defense of Jesus against the entire Sanhedrin (*Jn* 7: 48-52). After the crucifixion he anointed his body with precious oils and, with Joseph of Arimathea, provided him with a proper burial (*Jn* 19, 39). Thus we see initial proclamation gradually guiding a person to move from ambiguity and fear to knowledge and faith in Jesus.

Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman (*Jn* 4: 5-42) evokes the image of one who is in permanent initial proclamation. The village well is the place where the lives of people are intertwined, where water is sought for and given, where strangers become friends and where they create unexpected relationships. The well becomes the place of encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman who ends up transformed. Jesus takes the ini-

<sup>2</sup> MARIA KO HA FONG, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” “We have Found the Messiah!” “What are you Looking for?” “Come and See” in *Salesian Mission in Frontier Situations and Initial Proclamation in Europe Today* (Rome: SDB-FMA, 2013) 21-30.



tiative and makes a request: “Give me a drink.” The request not only opens the woman to a dialogue that dissipates ethnic hatred and widens her horizons, but leads her to enter into herself and face the truth she finds there. Under the guidance of Jesus she not only finds herself but, more importantly, recognises Jesus as the Messiah. At the end of this encounter the woman runs to the village to preach Jesus to her countrymen.

The encounter of Jesus with the royal official whose son was sick takes place at Capernaum (*Jn* 4: 43-54). Jesus leads the official to take a leap of faith from seeing Jesus only as a miracle worker to believing in him. We see the same dynamics in the healing of the centurion’s servant (*Mt* 8: 5-13) and the daughter of the Canaanite woman (*Mk* 7: 24-30). Ordinary life situations, suffering and disease, become the starting point of faith that takes birth, and then develops to the extent that people grow in their knowledge of the person of Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

## INITIAL PROCLAMATION IN SAINT PAUL

St. Paul is an incomparable model of initial proclamation. He felt that his mission in life was the promotion of initial proclamation of the Gospel in order to establish new communities. He clearly stated: “I have fully preached the gospel of Christ, thus making it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on another man’s foundation” (*Rm* 15: 19-20). He did it especially through the witness of his life and his preaching. He introduces himself as “a servant of Jesus Christ” (*Rm* 1: 1), a humble and unworthy herald of his Gospel, a fragile earthen vessel holding a great treasure (*2Cor* 4: 7). He himself was “the servant of all, to win over the largest number possible” (*1Cor* 9: 19), “I have become all things to all, that I might by all means save some.” (*1Cor* 9: 22). To the Corinthians to whom he proclaimed the Gospel against all odds, opposition and adversity, he writes: “we do not intend to lord it over your faith; we

<sup>3</sup> MARIA KO HA FONG, “The Encounter of Jesus with three Different Persons in Different Contexts” in *Salesian Mission in Frontier Situations and Initial Proclamation in Europe Today*, 47-57.

work with you for your joy” (2Cor 1: 24). He invited his Christian communities to imitate him as he himself imitated Christ (1Cor 11: 1) and to have “the same spirit as Christ” (Phil 2: 5).<sup>4</sup>

At the heart of the Christian experience of Paul is a concrete event which gave him a sublime vision. He knew Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. His ‘knowledge’ does not have the usual Greek meaning of intellectual engagement. It is beyond knowledge and understanding. Knowledge in the biblical sense implies more. It signifies entering into communion and developing an intimate relationship to such an extent that he himself does just as Jesus would. This relationship allows Christ to shape the destiny of Paul’s life. The fruit of this knowledge is a radical and permanent change of values, the way of looking at reality and, above all, the way people see themselves before God.<sup>5</sup> However, for Paul, the source and strength of all his preaching was totally “from the Spirit and His power” (1Cor 2: 4).

“The surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil 3: 8) is the root and foundation of the apostolic understanding of Paul. He understood that his primary duty in life was to proclaim “Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1Cor 2: 2). He was fully aware that God had intervened in his life in an unusual way and, as a consequence, he insisted that he was sent to the nations (Gal 1: 17) with a single supreme duty: “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!” (1Cor 9: 16).<sup>6</sup>

For his missionary strategy Paul chose the areas that had not been evangelised, making big cities the launching pad to spread the Gospel. All major roads led to these cities in which almost everyone understood Greek. Paul felt at home in an urban environment where he could use his skills for popular preaching. The

<sup>4</sup> MARIA KO HA FONG, “¿Comprenden lo que Acabo de Hacer con Ustedes?” in M. LOES (ed), *Las Jornadas de Estudio del Primer Anuncio al Discipulado Misionero en América y el Caribe* (Rome: SDB-FMA, 2014) 222-223; IDEM, “Paolo, Missionario della Città” in A. MARAVILLA (ed), *Giornate di Studio sul Primo Annuncio di Cristo in Città* (Rome: SDB-FMA, 2015), 257.

<sup>5</sup> JUAN JOSÉ BARTOLOMÉ, “To feel Oneself Conquered by Christ, the Core of Paul’s Christian Experience” in A. MARAVILLA (ed), *Study days on the Salesian Presence Among Muslims* (Rome: SDB-FMA, 2013) 191-196.

<sup>6</sup> JUAN JOSÉ BARTOLOMÉ, “To Reveal his Son to Me’, Source and Cause of Paul’s Mission” in *Study days on the Salesian Presence Among Muslims*, 179-184.

presence of the Jews in Diaspora also facilitated his mission, but he did not allow himself to remain shut in within their ghetto. He tried to bring the Gospel to all. He established deep personal relationships with people and with the communities he founded, creating a movement of people for the sake of the Gospel.<sup>7</sup>

His speech at the Areopagus in Athens (*Acts* 17: 16-34) is a classic example of Pauline initial proclamation. Paul tried to explain to the citizens of this great city of the Mediterranean world, as concisely as possible, the characteristics of this new religion. He used various strategies that allowed him to deal with his listeners and immediately to feel in tune with them. He touched on the fundamental philosophical presuppositions of the Stoics, Epicureans and the prestigious philosophical schools of Athens; he showed great familiarity with the significant literary and historical traditions of the Athenians; he used an apologetic scheme common to pagan mentality, appealing to natural revelation where it dealt with universal norms. Although many left him when he started talking about the resurrection of the dead, some did follow him and believed him; among them was Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris.

## **INITIAL PROCLAMATION IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY**

The Acts of the Apostles presents the simple way of life of the members of the early Christian community. They “found favour with all the people” (*Acts* 2: 47) because of their lifestyle: they sold everything they had and pooled the proceeds to distribute it to those in need (*Acts* 4: 32-37). They were living witnesses of the Gospel, good news that changes lives; they did not present it as a collection of doctrine to believe in, or a set of moral rules to be followed. Instead, the Gospel was passed on with human warmth, witness of life and love. It was a community imbued with the Spirit, experienced like a vital principle (*Acts* 2, 29-47). It “lived in peace and grew; and, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied” (*Acts* 9, 31).

The early Church proclaimed with courage and frankness, as

<sup>7</sup> MARIA KO HA FONG, “Paolo, Missionario della Città”, 253-259.

seen in Philip's dialogue with the Ethiopian eunuch (*Acts* 8: 26-40). Apostolic passion drove these evangelisers to bring Christ to others with creativity and enthusiasm. The early Christians were clearly aware that it was the Holy Spirit that made the encounter with the Gospel easy for people of any age, gender, race or culture. The Spirit leads and precedes the evangelist and sustains his apostolic passion, but also prepares the recipient of initial proclamation to nourish his passion in his search for truth and the fullness of life.<sup>8</sup>

The Ethiopian eunuch did not lack an open heart, but Philip spurred him on with a short initial proclamation, which he stood in need of to enlighten his mind and inflame his heart. The Christian community passed on their faith in Jesus – which they had received for free – to those who were captivated by him. After his baptism, the eunuch went on with his journey, but he had already been inwardly transformed and he was full of joy. In fact, the Acts of the Apostles shows that the spread of the early church is permeated with joy, even in the midst of persecution. It is the joy of seeing someone believe in Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup>

## Summarising

It is a personal encounter with Jesus that triggers faith in Him. The first Christians also presented the encounter with Jesus as a call to conversion from the former way of life to a new life in faith. Apostolic preaching led to a second look at various aspects of human life in the light of the teachings of Jesus. Christianity was considered a 'path', a 'way' that invites a journey, with many implications for the life of believers. So, initial proclamation is only the beginning of a journey, which proclaims a promise and demands loyalty to a spiritual and communal path.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> RUTH DEL PILAR MORA, ALEXIUS MULONGO, "Emerging Insights and Perspectives during the Study Days in View of a Renewed Missionary Praxis in Africa and Madagascar" in M. LOES (ed), *Study Days on the Initial Proclamation of Christ in Africa and Madagascar* (Rome: SDB-FMA, 2014), 126, 129.

<sup>9</sup> MARIA KO HA FONG, "Go up and Join that Chariot" in A. MARAVILLA (ed), *Study Days on the Salesian Mission and the Initial Proclamation of the Gospel in South Asia* (Rome: SDB-FMA, 2013) 135-143.

<sup>10</sup> BISHOPS OF THE DIOCESE OF LOMBARDY, "La Sfida della Fede: il Primo Annuncio" in *Regno – Documenti*, vol. 21 (2009), 726.



Chapter II

*Pastoral-Theological  
Reflection  
on Initial Proclamation*



## DEVELOPMENT OF THE UNDERSTANDING OF INITIAL PROCLAMATION

The Apologists at the end of the second century sought a dialogue and a comparison with pagan culture, for two reasons: on the one hand they wanted to justify their conversion; on the other they felt the need to eliminate the prejudices against Christians. They tried to dialogue with Jews and Gentiles, stressing the role of culture in the history of salvation. In this way, through dialogue, they tried to spark interest in the person of Jesus Christ and his Gospel.

Cyril and Methodius promoted initial proclamation through the creation of an alphabet for the Slavonic language, trying to learn more about the inner world of the Slavic people and translating the Bible and liturgical books into their language. This enabled them to proclaim the Word of God using images and concepts that were familiar to Slavs and easily aroused their interest.<sup>11</sup> Throughout history, countless missionaries have promoted this methodology among peoples and nations on every continent.

After Vatican II, the growing onslaught of secularism has led the Church to rediscover the importance of initial proclamation. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is one of the first documents of the Magisterium to speak of the need to promote initial proclamation (calling it ‘pre-evangelisation’) not only among those who do not know Christ, but also among those who are baptised but have a weak faith, who do not practise it or have abandoned it completely.<sup>12</sup> Initial proclamation will appear gradually in other papal documents, albeit with varying nuances.

At the beginning of his pontificate, John Paul II emphasized that catechesis is based on initial proclamation, describing it as “missionary preaching through the *kerygma* to stir up faith.”<sup>13</sup> In *Redemptoris Missio* it is reaffirmed that initial proclamation has

<sup>11</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Encyclical Salvorum Apostoli* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1985), n.11, 21.

<sup>12</sup> PAUL VI, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1975), n. 51-52.

<sup>13</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Apostolic Exhortation Catechesi Tradendae* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979), n.18.

a central and irreplaceable role in the Church's mission because it introduces each person to a personal relationship with Christ.<sup>14</sup> In this light, the *General Directory for Catechesis* underlines the importance of initial proclamation, not only in contexts where there is a need for a mission *ad gentes*, but also within the Churches of ancient Christian tradition.<sup>15</sup> It is important to note, however, that the Directory describes it as “the explicit proclamation of the Gospel”<sup>16</sup> and considers it the third moment of evangelisation, preceded by the witness of charity and Christian life and followed by the sacraments and catechesis, from education to faith and mission.<sup>17</sup>

Initial proclamation was taken up again in some continental synods and this helped to clarify its identity and emphasize some of its elements. It is necessary for the ‘new evangelisation’ of the old continent, because several of its social and cultural aspects need a true *missio ad gentes*. Here initial proclamation is aimed at the non-baptised in the continent, whereas the ‘renewed proclamation’ is aimed at enabling those already baptised to be converted to Christ and his Gospel.<sup>18</sup> In multi-religious contexts such as Asia, initial proclamation needs to follow a pedagogy which will lead people step by step, through the use of myths, folklore and narrative methods close to local cultural forms.<sup>19</sup> In contexts where there are vibrant cultures and traditional religions such as Africa, these are to be considered as a starting point for initial proclamation which could stir up a vibrant and exhilarating experience of Jesus Christ.<sup>20</sup>

Although initial proclamation is not explicitly mentioned in other continental post-synodal exhortations, one could deduce

<sup>14</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Encyclical Redemptoris Missio* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990), n.44.

<sup>15</sup> CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *General Directory for Catechesis* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), n. 25, 58.

<sup>16</sup> *IBID*, n. 47.

<sup>17</sup> *IBID*, n. 48

<sup>18</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Europa* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2003), n. 45-47.

<sup>19</sup> *IBID*, n. 45.

<sup>20</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Africa* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1999), n.57.



that, in Oceania, personal encounter and dialogue with traditional religions promote initial proclamation.<sup>21</sup> In America, joy, conviction and witness of life are its necessary conditions.<sup>22</sup> While in the Middle East, the Gospel becomes credible through the witness of charity as an expression of God's love for humanity responding to the immediate needs of all.<sup>23</sup>

Some Bishops' Conferences have also insisted on initial proclamation. In 2005 the French Bishops' Conference published the "National Document for Guidance of Catechesis in France and its Organizational Principles" (*Texte National pour l'Orientation de la Catéchèse en France et Principes d'Organisation*). The French bishops stressed the importance and necessity of initial proclamation, inviting families and movements to promote it. They also insisted on its importance in Catholic institutions. In addition, they stressed the important characteristics to be identified, articulated and deepened in the reflection and the practice of initial proclamation. In 2009 the bishops of Lombardy, too, published a letter calling on all Christian communities in the region to be 'witnesses of initial proclamation'.<sup>24</sup>

Over the past 15 years, the National Catechetical Office of the Italian Bishops' Conference has called for a much deeper reflection and understanding of the importance of initial proclamation in catechesis. In 2003 it organised a Study-Seminar on initial proclamation, and also a Convention on initial proclamation in the Parish. In 2005 it published a Pastoral Note on initial proclamation. In 2007 it convened a Second Seminar on initial proclamation and in 2009 a Conference on 'Initial Proclamation between *Kerygma* and Catechesis'.

The Aparecida Document of CELAM V in 2007 stressed the importance of kerygmatic proclamation as a way to develop a personal relationship with Christ and begin discipleship. But at the

<sup>21</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Oceania* (Vatican City Editrice Vaticana, 2001), n.10, 20.

<sup>22</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in America* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1999), n.67.

<sup>23</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Medio Oriente* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2012), n. 11, 89.

<sup>24</sup> BISHOPS OF THE DIOCESES OF LOMBARDY, "La Sfida della Fede: il Primo Annuncio", 716-730.

same time it referred to *kerygma* as initial proclamation. Aparecida did not clearly define initial proclamation and this, perhaps, opened up the possibility of variety in the understanding it in the American Continent. The Bishops' Conference of Colombia, during its plenary assembly in 2013, presented initial proclamation as part of the process of evangelisation. The Assistant Secretary for CELAM, Leonidas Ortiz Losada, in his presentation at the same plenary assembly of bishops, continually interchanged between *kerygma* and initial proclamation. At the National Seminar on Catechesis in Argentina in 2011 initial proclamation was presented intertwined with catechesis.<sup>25</sup>

In preparation for the Year of Faith (October 11, 2012 - November 24, 2013) Cardinal Filoni, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, explained that the *Propaganda Fide* had plans to celebrate the Year of Faith from the perspective of initial proclamation. Similarly, the Synod on New Evangelisation held that year (7 to 28 October 2012) insisted on the importance of initial proclamation.

After Vatican II, many post-conciliar Church documents never entirely abandoned the conciliar concept of evangelisation, but at the same time they also adopted a broader view of it, by adding adjectives and prefixes such as, for example, first evangelisation, pre-evangelisation, re-evangelisation and new evangelisation. This understanding of the process of evangelisation also led some to emphasise one dimension over the other.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, the re-discovery of the actuality and importance of initial proclamation also gave rise to different approaches to its place in the process of evangelisation, especially as regards its identity and its relationship with *kerygma* and catechesis. In fact, initial proclamation is often confused with *kerygma* and catechesis.<sup>27</sup>

Although Pope Francis, following Aparecida, identified *kerygma*

<sup>25</sup> ALFRED MARAVILLA, "El Primer Anuncio como Fundamento del Discipulado Misionero", in *Jornadas de Estudio del Primer Anuncio al Discipulado Misionero en America y el Caribe*, 45-48.

<sup>26</sup> UBALDO MONTISCI, "Initial Proclamation: Towards a Shared Concept" in *Salesian Mission in Frontier Situations and Initial Proclamation in Europe Today*, 35.

<sup>27</sup> FRANCIS, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), n. 164-166.

with initial proclamation, he also stated an important point in his first apostolic exhortation that helps to clarify the identity of initial proclamation.<sup>28</sup> He stressed that it is ‘initial’ “not because it is there at the beginning and can then be forgotten or replaced by other more important things”; but, rather “because it is the principal proclamation, what we ought to hear repeatedly in different ways.” Initial proclamation is, then, distinct from, but closely linked to *kerygma* and catechesis.

Several authors also have reflected on the importance of initial proclamation. Already in 1990, Joseph Gevaert had insisted on the need for initial proclamation in his book *Prima Evangelizzazione*. In 2001 he reiterated this in *La Proposta del Vangelo a chi non Conosce il Cristo*. In 2009, Xavier Morlans devoted an entire book to the subject: *El Primer Anuncio. El Eslabon Perdido*. In 2011 Enzo Biemme, in *Il Secondo Annuncio*, shared strategies on initial proclamation in traditionally Christian contexts. In 2013, Serge Tyvaert stressed the role of initial proclamation in a secular context in the publication *De la Première Annonce à la Nouvelle Évangélisation*.

## Study Days

In this context of continuous theological and pastoral reflection, in 2010, the Missions Sectors of the SDB and FMA decided to organise *Study Days on initial proclamation* in each continent: Europe (Prague, 2010), South Asia (Kolkata, 2011), East Asia (Sampran, 2011), Oceania (Port Moresby, 2011), Africa and Madagascar (Addis Ababa, 2012), America and the Caribbean (Los Teques, 2013); furthermore, on the Salesian presence among Muslims (2012) and initial proclamation in the city (Rome, 2015). These eight Study Days were intended to promote discussion and in-depth, contextualised reflection on the importance of initial proclamation in our Salesian mission. The target was to arrive at a deeper understanding of the challenges we face and discover

<sup>28</sup> CARLOS MARÍA GALLI, “La Teología Pastoral de Aparecida. Una de las Raíces Latino-americanas de Evangelii Gaudium” in *Gregorianum* 96/1 (2015): 25-50.

new insights and perspectives in view of a renewed missionary praxis. This booklet summarises the discussions and new insights of these Study Days to help every Salesian, Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, member of the Salesian Family and every member of the educative community in the promotion of initial proclamation of Christ in all our contexts.

## Chapter III

# *What is Initial Proclamation?*



## “COURAGE! GET UP, HE IS CALLING YOU!”

“The Gospel of Mark speaks of the encounter between Jesus and Bartimaeus in Jericho (*Mk* 10,46-52), not only as a story of the healing of a blind man but, even more so, as the healing of the blindness of his disciples to the mystery of Jesus. Mark wants to emphasise, above everything else, that the blindness of people can be healed if they follow Jesus and accept his rule, entering more deeply into the mystery of his person and his mission. In fact, the disciples are cured of their blindness, gradually and in stages, in the same way that the mystery of Jesus is revealed to them step by step.

The journey of Jesus to Jericho became initial proclamation for Bartimaeus. In the awareness of his blindness Bartimaeus accepted the good news in his heart and cried out for Jesus to have mercy on him that he might see. Once cured of his blindness, Bartimaeus became a disciple “and followed him on the way” (*Mk* 10: 52). Similarly, initial proclamation is to lead people to meet Jesus saying to them, “*Courage! Get up, he is calling you.*”<sup>29</sup>

## INITIAL PROCLAMATION AS “FALLING IN LOVE”

Just as we compare initial proclamation to the healing of Bartimaeus, we could compare it to falling in love.<sup>30</sup> When two people from different backgrounds meet and in some way discover some mutual feeling for each other, their initial curiosity grows into a desire know each other better. It all starts from the level of the senses, the experiential level. Love evolves only when the two lovers learn to accept the other’s uniqueness, when they are capable of considering their differences as mutual enrichment. So, too, initial proclamation always involves inculturation through an awareness and understanding of the language, the culture,

<sup>29</sup> MARIA KO HA FONG, “Take courage, get up, He is calling you!” in M. LOES (ed), *Study Days on the Initial Proclamation of Christ in Africa and Madagascar* (Rome: SDB-FMA, 2014), 151-158.

<sup>30</sup> ALFRED MARAVILLA, “El Primer Anuncio como Fundamento del Discipulado Misionero”, 47-48.

the needs and the capacities of those at whom the initial proclamation is targeted. There is also a need for the capacity to discern the seeds of the Word in their context.

When, at last, a young man says to his beloved, “I love you”, the verbal expression, which is very common, is actually the result of the steps that went before. They were timid and awkward steps at times, but aimed at knowing each other better. For a person who loves, this is not just a cliché; it, in fact, uncovers, reveals and brings to life the deeper meaning of all the previous good times they enjoyed together. Although it is an overused expression, which risks losing its meaning, for these two people, “I love you” becomes a challenging invitation to which one may respond.

Just like the encounter of Bartimaeus with Jesus, or the meeting of two people who do not have a plan to fall in love, initial proclamation is not planned and organised. It is neither a programme nor a method, neither an activity nor a celebration. Therefore, we do not make an initial proclamation. It occurs in “each single daily moment of our lives, through Christian charity, faith and hope”,<sup>31</sup> in season and out of season (*2 Tim* 4: 2), especially in the context of ordinary daily life, in different forms, according to the culture, context, the pace of life and the historical and social situation of those to whom the proclamation is directed. It is an invitation, free and respectful, to the interlocutor, who freely decides to accept or reject the invitation. We see this in the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well (*Jn* 4, 3-42).

It is “initial” not only because it is heard for the first time; it is not even to be understood in a strictly chronological sense. It is that moment, preceded by other essential conditions that, through the power of the Spirit, can arouse an initial interest in the person of Jesus Christ. Initial proclamation is like the spark that, after several strikes with the match, finally lights the flame. It is the moment when, through the power of the Spirit, the human heart opens to the person of Jesus, triggering an initial

<sup>31</sup> UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, *Disciples Called to Witness. The New Evangelization* (Washington D. C: USCCB, 2012) Parte IV, 11.



interest in the person of Christ, or raising questions about the place they give to God in their lives.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, the discernment of the right moment and the most appropriate method to promote initial proclamation are crucial to its effectiveness.

It is therefore necessary, first of all, to create an environment, an atmosphere, in which we can encourage and provoke the desire to know Jesus Christ. Certainly, a clear understanding of Christology is important for Christians. But the main challenge regarding initial proclamation is not the correct formulation of the faith in Jesus Christ. In fact, the concern of initial proclamation is not to proclaim *who* Jesus is, but rather *how* to lead others to the discovery of Jesus Christ and to be fascinated by his person, who alone leads to faith.

Life witness, a personal relationship and dialogue prepare the heart for initial proclamation. Faith is not the result of an educational program or a scientific study. In fact, neither an ethical nor a doctrinal discourse, nor even a logical exhortation or a presentation of faith-based arguments can trigger the desire to know Jesus Christ.<sup>33</sup> Faith is but the result of an encounter with God who reveals Himself freely in Jesus Christ.<sup>34</sup>

Just like the young man who focuses on identifying the right time to reveal his feelings to his beloved, so also a Christian who lives his life in a permanent state of mission is always attentive to discern the moment for initial proclamation. He is like a sentinel always ready to give reasons for his hope.<sup>35</sup> After getting to know each other better, there is that magical moment when the young man finally says to his beloved: “I love you.” There is no programmed plan to reveal his personal feelings to the beloved. How-

<sup>32</sup> JOSEPH HERVEAU, *Moment 3. Le Bulletin de la Première Annonce*, n. 1 (April 2012), 2; ANDRÉ FOSSION, “La Désirabilité de la Foi Chrétienne comme Condition de l’Évangélisation et de l’Initiation à l’Expérience Chrétienne”, *Revue Théologique de Louvain*, vol 44 (2013): 45-53.

<sup>33</sup> JOSEPH PHUOC, ALMA CASTAGNA, “Emerging Insights and Perspectives during these Study Days in View of a Renewed Missionary Praxis”, in A. MARAVILLA (ed), *Study Days on the Salesian Mission and the Initial Proclamation of Christ in East Asia* (Rome: SDB-FMA, 2013), 114.

<sup>34</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Encyclical Deus Caritas Est* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2006), n. 1.

<sup>35</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Africae Munus*, n.30.

ever, having this thought firmly in place, the lover is always vigilant to seize the opportune time to freely make his declaration of love.

This 'I love you' is not the end but the beginning of a process that leads to courtship, engagement and wedding; It is the foundation of a happy and lasting marriage. Especially after the wedding, over the years, the couple needs to periodically relive this first 'I love you'. That reinforces the mutual love that will enable them to face the adversities of life. Similarly, initial proclamation needs to be deepened through the other phases of the process of evangelisation (conversion, catechumenate, baptism, sacramental initiation and catechesis). It goes on throughout life. Similarly, a baptised person who has had an inadequate initial proclamation, lacks the foundation of a strong faith. Without this initial option that leads to conversion and initial personal faith, catechesis is likely to become sterile. In this light, even Catholics who attend our parishes, courses of catechesis and religious instruction, as well as Christians in all our centres, are all in need of the first proclamation of the Gospel in view of deepening their faith and their personal adherence to Jesus Christ.

## **A DEFINITION OF INITIAL PROCLAMATION**

Initial proclamation may be defined as the **witness** of every Christian and the whole Christian community, **every activity or group of activities** that foster an overwhelmingly exhilarating experience of Jesus, **through the action of the Holy Spirit, inspires a search for God and stirs up an interest in his Person, while safeguarding the freedom of conscience which, ultimately, leads to an initial adhesion to Him, or to a revitalisation of faith in Him.**

Initial proclamation, then, is primarily a *way of life* that establishes a kind of relationship like those of Jesus in the Gospel. It allows us to be engaged in a profound and transformative relationship with him, as it was for Bartimaeus, the Samaritan woman, Nicodemus and Zacchaeus. It is *the way that the Church presents itself* as an institution, starting from its public events because these constitute the initial proclamation that the public

perceives. It is also a *pastoral activity* with concrete initiatives aimed at triggering interest in Jesus. It should be noted that initial proclamation is effectively fostered if the faith journey follows a gradual pedagogy, which is attentive to the cultural, historical and social context of the recipient.<sup>36</sup>

It is *initial* neither in a strictly chronological sense, nor just because it leads to conversion, nor only because it starts off the life long process of evangelisation. It is initial, rather, because it is the principal or foundational proclamation (the way in which the term *arché* was understood by ancient Greeks). It becomes that spark which first leads to the initial act of personal faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>37</sup> Its goal is *how* to lead others to discover and be fascinated by the person of Jesus. Hence it is clear that initial proclamation is “not, first of all, an elementary message concentrated in a ‘brief formula’ (the *kerygma*, the Easter proclamation) which will then be followed by a series of liturgical, spiritual, moral and missionary ‘clarifications’ for a Christian life (the *didache*, the exhortation of the apostles).<sup>38</sup>

## TO WHOM IS IT ADDRESSED?

Every Christian and every Christian community is the subject of initial proclamation, although there are members of the ecclesial community to whom the mission to promote it is specifically entrusted.<sup>39</sup> The Study Days from Prague (2010) to Rome (2015)

<sup>36</sup> XAVIER MORLANS, *El Primer Anuncio. El Eslabon Perdido* (PPC: Madrid, 2009), 29-31; SERGE TYVAERT, “De la Première Annonce à la Nouvelle Évangélisation”, *Cahiers Internationaux de Théologie Pratique*, n. 10 (2012): 97-99; UBALDO MONTISCI, “La Pastorale Giovanile e la Città: la Sfida e la Gioia del Primo Annuncio”, *Giornate di Studio sul Primo Annuncio in Città*, 153-154; EDMUND ARENS, “Dall’Istruzione all’Interazione. Cambiamento di Paradigma nella Comunicazione della Fede nella Cultura Moderna” in CORRADO PASTORE, ANTONIO ROMANO (ed), *La Catechesi dei Giovani e i New Media* (Elledici, Turin, 2015), 22-26. L’autore parla di sette modalità di comunicare la fede oggi: la narrazione, la memoria, la celebrazione, l’annuncio, la testimonianza, la confessione e la condivisione.

<sup>37</sup> *IBID*, 153-160; CARMELO TORCIVIA, *Teologia della Catechesi. L’Eco del Kerygma* (Turin: Elledici, 2016), 6-7, 102. In Greek philosophy *ἀρχή* is the principle or the fundamental element from which everything has its origin, or that from which all things are formed.

<sup>38</sup> BISHOPS OF THE DIOCESES OF LOMBARDY, “La Sfida della Fede: il Primo Annuncio”, 726.

<sup>39</sup> UBALDO MONTISCI, LORENZINA COLUSI, “Horizons for Initial Proclamation by the Salesian Family in Europe Today: Conditions, Strategy, Methodology, Content”, in *Salesian Mission in Frontier Situations and Initial Proclamation in Europe Today*, 96.

pointed out that initial proclamation, by its very nature, is primarily aimed at:<sup>40</sup>

- 1) those who do not know Jesus Christ (non-Christians);
- 2) Christians who have received insufficiently the first proclamation of the Gospel; hence:
  - a) persons who have known Jesus and then abandoned him;
  - b) those who call themselves Christians or Catholics, but do not practise it with the community, or do not receive the sacraments or do not get involved in the life and activities of the parish;
  - c) those who are weak and vulnerable in their Christian identity;
  - d) those who believe that they already know Jesus enough, but live their faith as a routine or simply as a part of their culture;
- 3) those who are looking for someone or something they perceive but to which they are unable to give a name;
- 4) those who live a meaningless daily life.

For those who do not know Christ, initial proclamation is that spark that leads to conversion and begins the process of evangelisation. For those who have already been baptised but have abandoned the practice of their faith or live it as something cultural, initial proclamation triggers the revitalisation of faith and helps them to deepen their initial adhesion to the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>41</sup>

## **THE RELEVANCE OF INITIAL PROCLAMATION**

Initial proclamation is most relevant because it emphasises the importance of a personal encounter with Christ, not the doctrines, as the source of our faith in him. In the final analysis, initial proclamation focuses on four elements:

<sup>40</sup> ALFRED MARAVILLA, "Dio Vive con il suo Popolo in Questa Città", in *Giornate di Studio sul Primo Annuncio in Città*, 22; PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 52-53.

<sup>41</sup> PAMELA VECINA, JOHN CABRIDO, "Emerging Insights and Perspectives during these Study Days in View of a Renewed Missionary Praxis" in A. MARAVILLA (ed), *Study Days on the Salesian Mission and the Initial Proclamation of Christ in Oceania* (Rome: SDB-FMA, 2013), 107.

- on the person, taking into account his socio-cultural-religious context and events of ordinary daily life, because initial proclamation takes place in the heart of the recipient;<sup>42</sup>
- on the person of the Christian believer, who practises his faith and lives a committed Christian life as a disciple-missionary. It focuses on being a Christian believer, not on his human qualities or the ‘techniques’ to arrive at initial proclamation;<sup>43</sup>
- on “a personal encounter with God, which touches me in the most intimate fabric of my being and puts me in front of the living God in absolute immediacy so that I can talk to him, love him and enter into communion with him.” It is this profound contact that gives birth to faith. Thus, “the Church must introduce him to this encounter with Jesus Christ and bring him to His presence in the sacrament.”<sup>44</sup>
- on the Holy Spirit who is the true protagonist of initial proclamation, and not the Christian nor the ‘preacher’. It is through the power of the Holy Spirit, who “works as it pleases him, when he wants and where he wants”,<sup>45</sup> that the way of life of every Christian and every activity of the Christian community becomes an initial proclamation. It is the same Spirit who gives every Christian the strength not to be timid in proclaiming that Jesus Christ is Lord, when God opens the door to the heart of a person.<sup>46</sup>

With this understanding of initial proclamation it is not important whether one serves in a school, a parish, a youth centre, or a mission station; whether one is involved in first evangelisation through education, pastoral activities or promotion of human development. What matters most is to live one’s life as

<sup>42</sup> GIULIO ALBANESE, “Evangelizzazione Urbana. Città terra di Missione”, in *Giornate di Studio sul Primo Annuncio in Città*, 78-81.

<sup>43</sup> FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no.24, 50; UBALDO MONTISCI, “La Pastorale Giovanile e la Città: La Sfida e la Gioia del Primo Annuncio”, in *Giornate di Studio sul Primo Annuncio in Città*, 179.

<sup>44</sup> JACQUES SERVAIS, “Intervista al Papa Emerito Benedetto XVI. La Fede non è un’Idea ma la Vita”, in *L’Osservatore Romano* (17 March 2016) 4.

<sup>45</sup> FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 279.

<sup>46</sup> PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n.75.

a Christian and a religious ‘permanently in the state of mission’; In this way, every person and every community becomes a radiant centre of Christian life which favours initial proclamation.<sup>47</sup>

## The Way Forward

Experiencing initial proclamation means crossing over to the other bank, and this necessarily implies a continuous process of conversion of the person and community, pastoral work and missionary service. It drives us to open ourselves to new frontiers of society. So everything we are and everything we do as witnesses of Jesus becomes initial proclamation.<sup>48</sup> In this light, a conversion of hearts and minds is essential. It makes us move:

- from a neglect of reflection and experience of initial proclamation to fostering of opportunities for reflection and sharing of experiences of initial proclamation;<sup>49</sup>
- from an ‘ordinary’ life to a form of personal and community life that is credible, attractive and fascinating; that will lead others to be curious about the motivations and the ultimate reasons for such a lifestyle;<sup>50</sup>
- from a vision of the mission of evangelisation and education centred on pastoral attention to programmes conducive to the pedagogy of initial proclamation.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 25; CONFERENCIA GENERAL DEL EPISCOPADO LATINO AMERICANO Y DEL CARIBE, *V Conferencia General. Documento Conclusivo* (Lima: Conferencia Episcopal Peruana, 2007), n. 551, 362.

<sup>48</sup> ANA MARIA FERNANDEZ, ISABEL MADRID CISNEROS, RAFAEL ANDRÉS BORGES, “Ensancha sin Miedo el Espacio de tu Tienda”, *Jornadas de Estudio del Primer Anuncio al Discipulado en América y Caribe*, 173; “Prospettive Emergenti nelle Giornate di Studio: La Città, Spazio e Opportunità per il Primo Annuncio”, 208.

<sup>49</sup> PAMELA VECINA, JOHN CABRIDO, “Emerging Insights and Perspectives during these Study Days in View of a Renewed Missionary Praxis”, 106; ANA MARIA FERNANDEZ, ISABEL MADRID CISNEROS, RAFAEL ANDRÉS BORGES, “Ensancha sin Miedo el Espacio de tu Tienda”, 178.

<sup>50</sup> *IBID*, 173, 174.

<sup>51</sup> *IBID*, 175.

## Chapter IV

# *Initial Proclamation in Christian Contexts*





## “HE WENT ABOUT ALL THE CITIES AND VILLAGES”

In his Gospel, Matthew makes a summary of the missionary activity of Jesus in rich and concise words: “Jesus went about all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity” (*Mt* 9: 35). Jesus did not go to the large urban centres of his time. He went to Jerusalem several times as the Holy City (*Ps* 48: 2) and the dwelling place of God (*Ps* 135: 21), never as a visit to a big city. Jesus went where people lived, to find the “lost sheep” wherever they were. So he visited towns and villages to meet people, each with his own history and in unpredictable situations. In fact, Jesus did not give priority to territory as such, but to any context of human life where he could bring salvation.<sup>52</sup>

Paul, instead, chose urban centres. It was a rather strategic choice because Roman cities had good roads interconnecting them. City folk spoke a common language – Greek (*koine*) – which was the medium of communication for the entire Mediterranean basin. Paul chose as his mission field and centre of evangelisation the big cities with large populations and large groups of migrants from different backgrounds and traditions. These towns were to be centres from which the Gospel message would radiate to the surroundings. He would arrive in a city and make the synagogue his point of reference. He would then reach out more and more to the pagans and not remain closed in within the ghetto. But his openness to all was not a vague and scattered one, rather the fruit of a discernment of the Spirit: “And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, bound in the Spirit...” (*Acts* 20: 22). Wherever he stopped he created a network of missionary collaborators, mobilizing many people around his missionary project.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> MARIA KO HA FONG, “Gesù Percorreva tutte le Città e i Villaggi”, in *Giornate di Studio sul Primo Annuncio di Cristo in Città*, 245-246; 250-252.

<sup>53</sup> MARIA KO HA FONG, “Paolo, Missionario della Città”, 253-259.

## INITIAL PROCLAMATION OR NEW EVANGELISATION?

Today initial proclamation is needed in all contexts. Hence it is important to mention it also in contexts that are considered 'Christian' or 'Catholic' by tradition or culture. Many families live a cultural faith nourished by the popular practices of piety and the sacramentalization of children and young people. They are nominally members of the Church. But it is not surprising that in contexts that are traditionally or historically considered Christian, but where faith has now been abandoned or is lived as a routine, one wonders if what is really needed is initial proclamation or rather a new evangelisation.<sup>54</sup>

In fact, in these contexts, the initial proclamation that Christians have had at home from parents is poor and often not adequate as the foundation for a strong faith. Without this initial conversion and initial personal faith, their faith is likely to remain weak. Hence, even after years of catechesis, they easily abandon the practice of their faith, or live it only as something cultural. Therefore, the *General Directory for Catechesis* insists that Christians who have abandoned the practice of the faith, as well as those who live the faith out of habit, need the initial proclamation of the Gospel to promote their personal re-adhesion to Christ.<sup>55</sup> In this light, initial proclamation is considered as the necessary first step towards a new evangelisation.<sup>56</sup>

## NEW EVANGELISATION AS 'SECOND PROCLAMATION'

This initial proclamation to Christians who had received it inadequately could be called the second initial proclamation or simply "second proclamation"<sup>57</sup> to distinguish it from the initial proclama-

<sup>54</sup> GLORIA ELENA GARCIA PEREIRA, "Las Oportunidades y los Desafíos del Primer Anuncio para SDB y FMA en América Latina y el Caribe" in *Jornadas de Estudio del Primer Anuncio al Discipulado Misionero en América y el Caribe*, 132.

<sup>55</sup> CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *General Directory for Catechesis* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), n.61.

<sup>56</sup> Synod on New Evangelisation, Proposition n. 9 on new evangelisation and initial proclamation underlines the continuity of catechesis and initial proclamation: systematic teaching of the *kerygma* in Scripture and Tradition; teachings and quotes from missionary saints and martyrs and the formation of Catholic evangelisers today.

<sup>57</sup> The expression had been used by Saint John Paul II on 9 June 1979 during his

tion that targets those who do not know Christ. Speaking of a second proclamation does not negate the theological basis of initial proclamation. It is a “proposal of faith to those who were Christian and no longer are so, for whom it is just a civil status or a habit; for those who think they are Christian, as well as for those who actually are.”<sup>58</sup> Its purpose is to stir up in Christians an interest that reawakens their initial fascination with the person of Jesus Christ.

Hence, second proclamation takes into consideration the reality that there has already been an initial proclamation that may have left some Gospel values and habits that may surprise us. As they are already baptised the starting point is the faith that is more or less present. It was received, to some extent, as an inheritance; but it has lost its vitality, perhaps through forgetfulness, neglect, hostility, the influence of a secularised culture or of other religions. The Gospel has ceased to fascinate them because they take it for granted, as something already known and obvious. In some cases their image of the Church, of Catholicism or of Christianity has been blurred by prejudices, negative experiences, scandals and fears. When this is the case, a testimony of Christian life, an interpersonal relationship, or an experience of ecclesial life becomes a second free invitation to rediscover the person of Jesus Christ and his Gospel.<sup>59</sup> Obviously, the second announcement has profound consequences in catechesis.

This second proclamation implies four challenges for every individual Christian and for the entire Christian community. The first is to undertake a second listening to the Word of God to promote “an encounter with Christ, the living Word of God”.<sup>60</sup> A second challenge is for us to become a reflection of this Word for others. A third is to promote the dynamics of accompaniment,

homily at the Shrine of the Holy Cross in Mogila, Poland: “A new evangelisation is started as if it were a second proclamation, even if in reality it is always the same”. *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol II/1 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979) 1505.

<sup>58</sup> ENZO BIEMME, “Catechesi e Iniziazione Cristiana”, in GILLES ROUTHIER, LUCA BRES-SAN, LUCIANO VACCARO (ed), *La Catechesi e le Sfide dell’Evangelizzazione Oggi* (Brescia: Morceliana, 2012), 113.

<sup>59</sup> ENZO BIEMMI, *Il Secondo Annuncio* (Bologna: EDB, 2011) 37; SALVATORE CURRÒ, ENZO BIEMMI, “Il Secondo Annuncio e ... Oltre. Dialogo su Questioni Catechetiche Attuali”, in *Catechesi*, vol. 81/ 5 (2011-2012): 35-38; 40-41.

<sup>60</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Apostolic Exhortation Verbum Domini* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010), n. 87.

so that the availability and openness of people may lead to a new act of faith through the Spirit. Finally, the fourth challenge is the pastoral care of families.

The family is the seedbed where faith is planted and nourished in the hearts of children. But the ideal family does not exist; so the pastoral ministry of accompaniment of families is important in order to follow them up with steady pastoral mercy through reflection and discernment. This is particularly needed by families in situations of fragility and imperfection. In this way, each family is helped to become the privileged place to support, accompany and guide the human, social, sexual, ethical and religious education of children. Thus the family becomes the place for the transmission of faith to all those it comes in contact with as well as a truly missionary family!<sup>61</sup>

To promote the second proclamation it is necessary to encourage a pastoral ministry which reaches out to the peripheries in order to help rediscover the faith. It focuses attention on the places where it is possible to experience Christianity and to find real opportunities to meet Jesus. By *place* is not meant merely the concrete, geographic space, rather, the experiential and relational space: the *family* as a place where the beauty of the faith is first picked up; the *Christian community*, as a place where faith is experienced as a life of commitment; the *liturgy*, where Christians live and celebrate the beauty of their faith; the practices of *popular religiosity* as the expression of an inculturated faith; *sacred art* as an expression of the beauty of faith; *educational centres* as a place of integral formation and the definition of one's identity and meaning in life; *catechesis* as an opportunity to understand Christianity and the Catholic religion. It is important to have a systematic approach with a strategy which starts from what already exists, recognises the present situation, and favours the maturation of the 'buds' that have sprouted. These can become places which are real thresholds for an access to faith.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>61</sup> FRANCIS, *Postsynodal Exhortation Amoris Laetitia* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2016), n. 287, 289, 293-312.

<sup>62</sup> UBALDO MONTISCI, "La Pastorale Giovanile e la Città: la Sfida e la Gioia del Primo Annuncio", 149, 168-159, 162-163, 166: GIOVANNI CASAROTTO, "Una Pastorale Kerygmatica per il Rinnovamento Ecclesiale", in *Catechesi* vol 85, no. 1 (2015-2016): 64-72.

## INITIAL PROCLAMATION IN URBAN CONTEXTS

The Church was born and grew in urban centres since its beginnings. It developed in such contexts from the beginning. Today it has to confront again the urban phenomenon, because most of the faithful live in cities. Even most of our SDB and FMA presences are in urban contexts. The starting point of our urban ministry is to look at urban reality with a sympathetic eye following the invitation of *Gaudium et Spes*. We need to learn to discern the ‘signs of the times’, and avoid generalizations and attitudes of preconceived judgments.<sup>63</sup>

In urban centres the social networks are the context inhabited by young people of the *app generation*. Our technological culture has developed applications for tablets and smartphones that are easy to use. They offer us numerous new ways of connecting and sharing. This *app world* has become an environment that creates culture. In the urban context the Church speaks and addresses its message to the inhabitants of this ‘world’. The message of the Church is in itself complex. Often it is perceived as a judgmental, an incomprehensible and moralising voice. Instead, in the *app world* communication is simple and immediate. The challenge, then, is how to foster initial proclamation.<sup>64</sup> One strategy is to enter the vibrant world of cyberspace and understand its language. This will enable us to create a space where the Gospel can be discovered, experienced and lived by the digital natives. This is better than just carrying on a mere repetition of the traditional forms of Christian life.<sup>65</sup>

In the city, one must also confront the growing phenomenon of migration which brings about a melting pot of numerous cultures. This makes every urban society increasingly multireligious and multicultural. On the one hand, globalisation has multiplied the possibilities of relationships and exchange between cultures,

<sup>63</sup> IBID, 32-34

<sup>64</sup> HOWARD GARDNER, KATIE DAVIS, *The App Generation. How Today's Youth Navigate Identity, Intimacy and Imagination in a Digital World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 121- 154, 169, 441-443; GIOVANNI CASAROTTO, “Una Pastorale Kerygmatica per il Rinnovamento Ecclesiale”, 66.

<sup>65</sup> NORBERT METTE, “Comunicazione del Vangelo nell’Era Digitale, in Particolare con la Generazione che Cresce, in *La Catechesi dei Giovani e i New Media*, 39-40.

people and individuals. A new global culture is emerging that is increasingly homogeneous. On the other hand, this new culture is imbued with principles of materialism and secularism, with no space for religious principles and ethical values. As a reaction to globalisation, we also see a reassertion of cultural origins and ethnic identity that could result in nationalist extremism.<sup>66</sup>

The process of secularisation is a positive feature of our time. It has paved the way for an appropriate separation between the Church and the state, bringing about a civil society where there is a plurality of perspectives and worldview.<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, *secularism* is rooted in the Enlightenment and in the French Revolution that forged laicity as a political doctrine. This has now become an agnostic and atheistic ideology, often expressed in opposition to what is religious and especially to the Church as an institution. And “when secularisation becomes secularism, there is a serious cultural and spiritual crisis”<sup>68</sup> which is deeply felt in urban contexts.

It is in the urban context that the consequences of *aggressive secularism* are most strongly felt. It creates a *soft* secular culture that favours religious indifference and avoids being deeply passionate of one’s own faith or of the beliefs of others. It brings believers to an obvious “faith fatigue “ and “the feeling of having enough of Christianity.” It is in the city that one feels very much a new atheism that presents beliefs that makes allowances for human frailty. It is the bearer of a way of life which is less burdened by norms and principles. In urban centres we see, especially among young people, a rediscovery of religious beliefs and practices as well as the phenomenon of fluid religiosity expressing itself in ‘being spiritual’, but not religious, or in ‘believing without belonging’.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>66</sup> ANA MARIA FERNANDEZ, ISABEL MADRID CISNEROS, RAFAEL ANDRÉS BORGES, “Ensancha sin Miedo el Espacio de tu Tienda”, 165-166.

<sup>67</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 36; DAVID WILLIS, “Initial Proclamation in Societies in the Process of Secularisation”, in *Study Days on the Salesian Mission and the Initial Proclamation of Christ in Oceania*, 81-87.

<sup>68</sup> PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR CULTURE, *Towards a Pastoral Approach to Culture* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1999), n.23.

<sup>69</sup> ALFRED MARAVILLA, “Dio Abita col Suo Popolo in Questa Città!” in *Giornate di Studio sul Primo Annuncio in Città*, 27-30, 32-34; CARMELO DOTOLO, “La Città e il Secolarismo Oggi: Sfide e Opportunità per il Primo Annuncio”, in *Ibid*, 123-126.

There is increasing human mobility, whether international (from one country to another) or domestic (from villages to cities). The reasons are varied and numerous – economic, cultural, political or religious; or for employment, to escape terrorism, violence or drug trafficking. The consequences are strongly felt in urban areas, especially in deprived neighborhoods or in urban slums of the mega cities. This often provokes manifestations of intolerance, xenophobia and racism which are born out of the fear and panic of many who see immigrants as a burden, a danger and a threat. Violence has resulted in a significant flow of migrants in several continents. Most of these are followers of other religions, and many of them are Muslims. The migrant is often in need of gestures of openness, acceptance, and solidarity, so that he may feel welcomed, acknowledged and valued as a human person, a protagonist of his own future. The witness of life and the expressions of concrete charity among migrants trigger their interest and curiosity, and become a respectful but powerful initial proclamation. There is also a large number of Christians among the immigrants, particularly from Catholic villages and from Eastern Catholic rites.<sup>70</sup> They turn to Church institutions to receive emotional and social support as well as to affirm their own cultural identity or liturgical tradition. The pastoral care of Catholic migrants offers the opportunity to foster initial proclamation, the first step necessary for a new evangelisation.<sup>71</sup>

In the urban context, we also see popular religiosity, both among immigrants and among the locals. These are different expressions of positive values (*semina verbi*) brought in from different traditional cultures and their encounter with the Gospel.<sup>72</sup> Although they are cultural expressions of a people, genuine forms of popular religiosity are fruits of the Holy Spirit and are expressions of the piety of the Church. Through a fruitful interaction among the revealed Word, tradition and liturgy, popular religios-

<sup>70</sup> PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE, *Instruction Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), n. 6, 7, 10, 49-59, 65, 69, 96, 100; MILVA CARO, "Pastorale Interculturale a Favore dei Giovani e dei Migranti", in *Giornate di Studio sul Primo Annuncio in Città*, 106-109.

<sup>71</sup> CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *General Directory for Catechesis*, 62.

<sup>72</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, n. 16.

ity not only helps many faithful to persevere in prayer, praise God and bear witness to Christ, but may become an opportunity for the initial or the second proclamation of Christ. It is a fact that popular religiosity is most interested in extraordinary phenomena and events, often associated with private revelations. In these cases, it is the task of the Pastors of the Church to discern and authenticate whatever is appropriate.<sup>73</sup>

## The Way Forward

Every city is truly *multicultural, multireligious, globalized and digital!* More than ever “we are called to understand in depth the style of Don Bosco in his relationship with the city and with the young people who let themselves be drawn to it. Each encounter of Don Bosco with his youth was an opportunity to present them ‘the things of God’”.<sup>74</sup> His experience teaches us that, in order to foster initial proclamation in the city, we need to place the person at the centre. A personal relationship, and an attitude that welcomes, listens and promotes an encounter with Christ create an opportunity to be challenged by Him. It is important that there be a Christian presence in all places where people encounter one another, places of exchange and culture: where public opinion is created, in study seminars, in the editorial offices of newspapers and publications, in conferences where social issues are discussed, in circles that cultivate the civil right to dialogue with diverse social, economic and political situations, and to promote the human being and let the common good flourish. It is here that a humanizing relationship, animated by the faith of a disciple, becomes epiphany, a memory, and a prophecy of the Kingdom. It may, then, trigger an interest in Jesus or may become a starting point for re-launching a faith journey.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>73</sup> ENRIQUE ALÍ GONZÁLEZ ORDOSGOITTI, “La Complejidad Religiosa de América Latina. La Grande Como Texto y Contexto para una Nueva Evangelización” in *Jornadas de Estudio del Primer Anuncio al Discipulado Misionero en América y el Caribe*, 70; ANA MARIA FERNANDEZ, ISABEL MADRID CISNEROS, RAFAEL ANDRÉS BORGES, “Ensancha sin Miedo el Espacio de tu Tienda”, 166, 171; CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS, *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy. Principles and Guidelines* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002), 84, 86, 90.

<sup>74</sup> “Prospettive Emergenti nelle Giornate di Studio: La Città, Spazio e Opportunità per il Primo Annuncio”, 207-208.

<sup>75</sup> GIULIO ALBANESE, “Evangelizzazione Urbana. Città Terra di Missione”, in *Giornate*



We need to see, understand and judge urban realities. We cannot be naïve and accept indiscriminately all of these realities. We must learn to discern the spirit that animates everything that happens in urban societies. To promote this *pastoral discernment*, we need a change of mentality and modify structures by moving:

- from a traditional ministry to an attitude that welcomes all that is good and beautiful in the new expressions of faith among young people who are seeking a deeper meaning in their life;<sup>76</sup>
- from an attitude of mistrust and fear of what is different, from looking at cultural diversity and the migrant as a danger and a threat, to an attitude of openness to accommodate the other, the migrant, looking at cultural expressions as an opportunity to foster the initial proclamation;<sup>77</sup>
- from a lack of contact with families to a pastoral care of families;<sup>78</sup>
- from indifference to social communications and technology to promoting the initial proclamation; to a deepening of our knowledge of new technologies, “new courtyards”, the language of the young; solidarity to transform the “internet’s non-space” into a place of encounter, friendship and solidarity with young people and by young people;<sup>79</sup>
- from a confused understanding of secularisation and secularism, as well as from our pastoral and conceptual judgements that consider the city as a “non-place”, to a right understanding of the lights and shadows of the process of secularisation with its consequent return to the sacred, to the religious dimension and a search for God. All this through a pastoral work that seeks to transform urban reality and its existential peripheries into a more humane place, a place that highlights the presence of God.<sup>80</sup>

*di Studio sul Primo Annuncio in Città*, 80-81; CARMELO DOTOLO, “La Città e il Secolarismo Oggi: Sfide e Opportunità per il Primo Annuncio”, 129-131; UBALDO MONTISCI, “La Pastorale Giovanile e la Città: la Sfida e la Gioia del Primo Annuncio”, 165.

<sup>76</sup> “Prospettive Emergenti nelle Giornate di Studio: La Città, Spazio e Opportunità per il Primo Annuncio”, 207.

<sup>77</sup> IBID; ANA MARIA FERNANDEZ, ISABEL MADRID CISNEROS, RAFAEL ANDRÉS BORGES, “Ensanchar sin Miedo el Espacio de tu Tienda”, 165.

<sup>78</sup> PAMELA VECINA, JOHN CABRIDO, “Emerging Insights and Perspectives during these Study Days in View of a Renewed Missionary Praxis”, 106.

<sup>79</sup> “Prospettive Emergenti nelle Giornate di Studio: La Città, Spazio e Opportunità per il Primo Annuncio”, 206-207.

<sup>80</sup> IBID; ANA MARIA FERNANDEZ, ISABEL MADRID CISNEROS, RAFAEL ANDRÉS BORGES, “Ensanchar sin Miedo el Espacio de tu Tienda”, 173; PAMELA VECINA, JOHN CABRIDO, “Emerging Insights and Perspectives during these Study Days in View of a Renewed Missionary Praxis”, 106.

- from an attitude of tolerance towards popular cultural religiosity to a pastoral ministry that renews it so that it may encourage its followers to live a life deeply inspired by the Gospel.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>81</sup> IBID, 105; ANA MARIA FERNANDEZ, ISABEL MADRID CISNEROS, RAFAEL ANDRÉS BORGES, “Ensancha sin Miedo el Espacio de tu Tienda”, 166-169, 177.



Chapter V  
*Kerygma  
and Initial Proclamation*



## “HURRY, CATCH UP WITH THAT CHARIOT!”

Luke recounts in the Acts (8: 26-40) an example of initial proclamation in the early Church. It is the Spirit that pushes Philip to seize this opportunity, because he may not get another: “Hurry, catch up with that chariot!” A eunuch from Ethiopia, who had just made his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, was reading the book of prophet Isaiah. This eunuch, considered a foreigner by orthodox Judaism and excluded from salvation (*Dt* 23: 2), was a sincere man and had an open heart. The Spirit was well ahead of Philip. He had fueled the eunuch’s passion in his search for truth and for the fullness of life. Philip joined him and offered him the prospect of faith, passionately sharing with him his own faith in Jesus.

In the Acts we see that there was a strong apostolic passion in the Primitive Church. The Christian community felt the urge to seek constantly for ways and means to offer their faith through their kindness. They had the art of a passionate heart, always in search of those who did not yet know Jesus. In this specific case it is a matter of presenting the fascination of Jesus to someone who is already engrossed in his search for understanding. The passage ends with the eunuch no longer seeing Philip but continuing on his way filled with joy. In fact, the fire of faith triggered by the initial proclamation continues to burn within and sustains the path of every believer.<sup>82</sup>

## THE KERYGMA

As we saw in Philip’s encounter with the eunuch, *kerygma* was a response to the memory of Jesus. Its core consisted of his life, his preaching, and his resurrection. This has been pondered upon, accurately formulated, proclaimed, celebrated, and lived, as evidenced by various Christological formulas found in the New Testament (*Mt* 28:6; *Mk* 16:6; *Lk* 24: 6,34; *Acts* 2:24; 1 *Tim* 4:14). The

<sup>82</sup> MARIA KO, “Go Up and Join that Chariot!” in *Study Days and the Salesian Mission and the Initial Proclamation of Christ in East Asia*, 178-182.

Gospel is the word of truth (Eph 1, 13) and the truth of the Gospel is the essence of *kerygma* (*Gal 2: 5,14; 4,16; 5,7*). In other words, there can be no *kerygma* without a narration of the memory of the person, life, and preaching of Jesus Christ. Indeed, as we have seen in Chapter I, in the New Testament the proclamation of John the Baptist (*Behold the lamb of God*) and Paul (*Jesus Christ and Him crucified*) is presented not only as the narration of an event. It is above all a proclamation of the story of Jesus Christ, of which the four Gospels are the extended versions. This kerygmatic narrative is, in fact, the confluence of Jesus' story, the sharing of the narrator's experience of faith with the hopes and expectations of a listener in search of a meaning in his life. When these converge, a relationship develops between the announcer and the listener. This promotes the experience of the presence of the Lord that may give rise to an interest in knowing more about the person of Jesus. Ultimately it may give birth to faith (*Rm 10:17*), resulting in radical conversion, *metanoia*, (*Acts 5, 31, 11, 18*) and the commitment to follow and imitate Him (*Phil 2: 1-11*).<sup>83</sup>

As the faith spread, the early Church gradually made a clear distinction between *kerygma* as preaching to nonbelievers to lead them to the faith, and *didach* as teaching to strengthen the faith of believers. *Kerygma*, by its very nature, is linked to the essential and central data of Christian faith – the incarnation, death, resurrection, and message of Jesus – and all that is to be believed in to be Christians. It is the *kerygma* that gives birth to the Church.<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, the boundaries between initial proclamation and *kerygma* are not clearly defined. It is inconceivable to create barriers between them, or to put them in separate water-tight compartments. It is necessary, however, not to lose the identity of the initial proclamation because it is the attention given to it that puts every individual Christian, every

<sup>83</sup> JEAN AUDUSSEAN, XAVIER LÉON-DUFOUR, "Prêcher", in Xavier Léon-Dufour (ed), *Vocabulaire de Théologie Biblique*, Second edition., (Cerf: Paris, 1970), 1106-1011; CESARE BISSOLI, "Il Primo Annuncio nella Comunità Cristiana delle Origini", CETTINA CACCIATO (ed), *Il Primo Annuncio tra "Kerygma" e Catechesi* (LDC: Turin, 2010), 13-22; COLIN BROWN, "Proclamation", in COLLIN BROWN (ed), *New Testament Theology*, III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Corporation, 1978), 44-68.

<sup>84</sup> CARMELO TORCIVIA, *Teologia della Catechesi. L'Eco del Kerygma*, 104- 105.

Christian community, and the whole Church in a 'permanent state of mission'.<sup>85</sup>

It's not enough to strike a match to light a fire. If the spark created is not used to light a candle or a lamp, it will be put out and become useless. Just as the "I love you" expressed by two lovers must lead to engagement and marriage, so too the initial proclamation must lead to *kerygma*; and *kerygma* is intimately linked to initial proclamation.

As Philip shows in the Acts, *kerygma* is presented at that propitious moment in which the Spirit opens the door of the heart through an initial proclamation. At this point, it consists only of a brief, joyful, intelligent and respectful invitation such as "Jesus is the Lord" (*Rm* 10: 9; *Phil* 2: 11), or "God has made Lord and Christ the Jesus whom you crucified" (*Acts* 2: 36). Only a brief proclamation is enough because, at this stage, primacy is given not to words, but to an experience that provokes interest; not to a dogmatic formula, but to God who communicates Himself in Jesus Christ. Once interest is stirred up in knowing the person of Jesus Christ, the proclamation of commitment follows at the right time.

This proclamation becomes a verbal introduction to the life of Jesus, his miracles and his preaching, but flowing from his own experience of Christ. The narration becomes an initial proclamation when it is woven into the listener's search for meaning in life; it raises hope and gives strength to face the struggles of everyday life. The Holy Spirit is a Master Weaver. He works in the depths of every conscience. Through Him this narrative could trigger existential questions that lead to a revelation of the truth and the values profoundly desired by the human heart. He is the one that stirs up the listener to the message of Jesus Christ and to faith in Him.<sup>86</sup>

Certainly, it is through the strength and fervour of a person's faith that he feels the urgency and the need to repeatedly tell oth-

<sup>85</sup> FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 25

<sup>86</sup> RICARDO TONELLI, *La Narrazione nella Catechesi e nella Pastorale Giovanile* (LDC: Turin, 2002), 54-64; JOHANN BAPTIST METZ, "Breve Apologia del Narrare" in *Concilium* 5 (1973): 864-868.

ers of his own personal experience of Jesus, without wanting to impose anything on his listeners. This, in turn, promotes “an encounter with an event, a person who gives a new horizon to life and thus a decisive direction”.<sup>87</sup> Eventually it could start off and lay the foundation for a process of evangelisation that lasts an entire lifetime.

## **ORIENTED TO CATECHUMENATE AND MISSIONARY CATECHESIS**

Expressing your love to a loved one is not enough. Falling in love is just the beginning. That needs to be followed up by an engagement, a marriage proposal and a lifelong commitment. Therefore, once you decide to know the person of Jesus Christ, faith is “explicitly proposed in all its amplitude and wealth”,<sup>88</sup> using a pedagogy that introduces the person step by step to the mystery of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.<sup>89</sup> Catechesis promotes and matures the initial conversion, the fruit of initial proclamation. However, initial proclamation should not be considered in isolation. It is necessarily linked to the next stage in the process of evangelisation. There is progression from an option to begin a Christian initiation or catechumenate – or a renewal of initiation for tepid and neglected Christians – to the rites of Christian initiation, sacramental life, and permanent integral formation to live the faith and to share it with others.<sup>90</sup>

Indeed, the initial grace which, through initial proclamation has sowed the seed of faith, must be developed into an explicit faith in Jesus Christ through catechesis.<sup>91</sup> “There is no true evangelisation if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God,

<sup>87</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, n.1.

<sup>88</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in America*, n. 69.

<sup>89</sup> ANA MARIA FERNANDEZ, ISABEL MADRID CISNEROS, RAFAEL ANDRÉS BORGES, “Ensancha sin Miedo el Espacio de tu Tienda”, 178.

<sup>90</sup> SERGE TYVAERT, “De la Première Annonce à la Nouvelle Évangélisation”, 104 ; Antonio L. Arocha, “Del Primer Anuncio y la Educacion a la Fe”, in *Jornadas de Estudio del Primer Anuncio al Discipulado Misionero en América y el Caribe*, 113-114.

<sup>91</sup> ENZO BIEMME, “L’Annonce de l’Évangile dans l’Espace de la Gratuité” in JEAN-PAUL LAURENT (ed), *L’Évangélisation: Une Annonce Gracieuse, Cahiers Internationaux de Théologie Pratique*, Série “Actes” n. 9 (2016): 14-16.



are not proclaimed!”<sup>92</sup> Similarly, catechesis without an initial proclamation, conversion and initial personal belief, risks becoming sterile. The initial proclamation is indispensable for effective catechesis throughout life.

A missionary catechesis changes the paradigm of faith transmission from education (social patrimony) to initiation (personal proposal). First, some provisions are promoted to help a better acceptance of *kerygma*: closeness, openness to dialogue, patience, and a cordial welcome that does not condemn. There follows a logical proposal of a faith that depends more on affirmation and personal ownership. It is no longer seen as something merely cultural or only as a tradition to be maintained. This, in turn, has practical consequences on catechesis.

Missionary catechesis always comes back to a listening to the initial proclamation in various ways, in one form or another, in all its stages and moments. Starting from the infinite yearning that exists in every human heart, faith is centered on God’s salvific love without limiting it to a few doctrines, or moral and religious bonds. “Proclamation in the missionary-style is focused on the essentials, on elements that are absolutely necessary: this is also what makes it more fascinating and attractive, what sets the heart on fire, as it did for the disciples of Emmaus.”<sup>93</sup> Missionary catechesis, rather than impose the truth, calls for truth to generate joy, vitality, and a harmonious completeness.

This personalization of faith is like learning: the disciple learns to live the way of Jesus Christ and orientates his life as an effective and long-lasting journey towards the Kingdom of God, which at the same time requires exercise, endurance, perseverance and asceticism.

Therefore, catechesis is not seen solely or primarily as doctrinal instruction. Knowledge of doctrine does have its importance, but the teaching of this doctrine is linked to places and celebrations of faith, so that it can actually be seen, touched and visited. It begins with an understanding of the Word of God, explains

<sup>92</sup> PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 22.

<sup>93</sup> ANTONIO SPADARO, “Intervista a Papa Francesco” in *La Civiltà Cattolica* n. 3918 (19 September 2013): 464.

the sacramental gestures of faith, incorporating them into one's life, and thus it walks in hope towards the Kingdom.<sup>94</sup>

## The Way Forward

Our missionary zeal invites us to enter with respect into the culture of those with whom we want to share the Gospel; to recognise the value of their vision of the world and the expressions of their own identity (language, art, architecture, folklore, rites of life ...); to discover in them the presence of the seeds of the Word (*semina verbi*).<sup>95</sup> To address the needs of an experiential, educational and pastoral presence among young people, it is necessary to convert our mentality and change our structures by moving:

- from a perception of *kerygma* as identical to initial proclamation to an understanding of the distinct identity of Initial Proclamation which, at the same time, leads to and is intimately linked to *kerygma*.<sup>96</sup>
- from an improvised preparation for the Sacraments of Christian initiation to a community awareness that realises an Initial Proclamation before catechesis starts, and to providing a more systematic accompaniment in the preparation for the Sacraments of initiation.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>94</sup> STIJN VANDENBOSSCHE, “Grandir dans la Foi toute la Vie: les Défis d’une Catéchèse Permanente”, in *L’Évangélisation: Une Annonce Gracieuse* : 25-39.

<sup>95</sup> ANA MARIA FERNANDEZ, ISABEL MADRID CISNEROS, RAFAEL ANDRÉS BORGES, “Ensancha sin Miedo el Espacio de tu Tienda”, 171.

<sup>96</sup> RUTH DEL PILAR MORA, ALEXIUS MULONGO, “Emerging Insights and Perspectives during the Study Days in View of a Renewed Missionary Praxis in Africa and Madagascar” 129; ANA MARIA FERNANDEZ, ISABEL MADRID CISNEROS, RAFAEL ANDRÉS BORGES, “Ensancha sin Miedo el Espacio de tu Tienda”, 167-169.

<sup>97</sup> PAMELA VECINA, JOHN CABRIDO, “Emerging Insights and Perspectives during these Study Days in View of a Renewed Missionary Praxis”, 108; RUTH DEL PILAR MORA, ALEXIUS MULONGO, “Emerging Insights and Perspectives during the Study Days in View of a Renewed Missionary Praxis in Africa and Madagascar” 130; ANA MARIA FERNANDEZ, ISABEL MADRID CISNEROS, RAFAEL ANDRÉS BORGES, “Ensancha sin Miedo el Espacio de tu Tienda”, 176; UBALDO MONTISCI, LORENZINA COLUSI, “Horizons for Initial Proclamation by the Salesian Family in Europe Today: Conditions, Strategy, Methodology, Content”, 97.

Chapter VI

*Witness  
of Life and Charity  
as Initial Proclamation*



## **“GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT YOURSELVES!”**

Mark tells us in his Gospel (*Mk* 6: 30-44) that Jesus had compassion on the multitude that followed him because they were like sheep without a shepherd. The disciples certainly did not think it was their responsibility to feed such a crowd. They asked Jesus to send them away. Instead He tells them: “Give them something to eat yourselves!” He thus wants to make them understand that instead of distancing themselves from the needs of people, they have to try and ask, “What can we do to help them?”

By ordering His disciples, “Give them something to eat yourselves!” Jesus urges his disciples to pass from a passive attitude to active involvement, from a cold distance from the world’s problems to a deeper dive into history. Here Jesus clearly showed his wish that all those who follow him will also share His compassion for people, that they will have His heart, and His strong and caring love. Jesus goes on to ask his disciples, “How many loaves have you? Go, see!” Five loaves and two fish are far too little for a crowd. But these few things will become material for a miracle. In the hands of Jesus, these few gifts were transformed into sufficiency to satiate a crowd. Even the disciples were transformed from being spectators uninvolved in people into men immersed in the compassion of Jesus, into active collaborators who are instruments for a miracle.<sup>98</sup>

## **WITNESS**

Evangelisation is achieved not only through the public proclamation of the Gospel or through activities. It should not happen that the haste to proclaim the Gospel to many people makes us forget personal witnessing. It is an alternative manner of transmitting the Gospel from person to person. This form of proclamation is always a highly effective way of evangelising, because it reaches and touches the conscience in a totally extraor-

<sup>98</sup> MARIA KO HA FONG, ¿“Cuántos Panes Tienen? Vayan a Ver”, in *Jornadas de Estudio del Primer Anuncio al Discipulado Misionero en América y el Caribe*, 205-208.

dinary way.<sup>99</sup> This primacy of testimony and lifestyle does not rule out an explicit proclamation when the right moment for it arrives at the next stage of evangelisation.

Initial proclamation “cannot be dissociated from the positive, existential testimony of the person making the proclamation”.<sup>100</sup> In fact, witnessing is an important element in the transmission of the faith because “faith comes from listening (*fides ex auditu*). Listening in turn always involves a partner. Faith is not a product of reflection and not even of an effort to penetrate into the depths of my being. Both of these may be present, but they remain insufficient ... In order for me to believe I need witnesses who have met God and make Him accessible to me.”<sup>101</sup>

This testimony is also rooted in the initial attitude of respect and appreciation of the human and religious values of one’s own friends and neighbours who do not know Christ. “True witnessing demands the recognition and respect of the other and a true openness to dialogue. There is need for patience as a dimension of love, the simplicity and humility of one who recognises himself as a sinner before God and neighbour. There has to be the capacity for forgiveness, reconciliation and purification of memory, at personal and community level.”<sup>102</sup>

The witness of an authentic Christian life and the practice of charity are initial proclamation because they dare the other to examine his own lifestyle, values, and priorities. They are a constant invitation and a challenge for the other person to go deeper into himself in a more conscious, personalized, and profound way that could trigger existential questions. The testimony of life and the practice of charity are primary means of initial proclamation. These require, first of all, to live in total availability to the Spirit so that we are better conformed to Christ within ourselves. In fact, “one cannot bear witness to Christ without reflecting his image, which is made alive in us by grace and through the

<sup>99</sup> CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF FAITH, *Doctrinal Notes on Some Aspects of Evangelisation* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana: Vatican City, 2007), n. 11.

<sup>100</sup> UBALDO MONTISCI, LORENZINA COLUSI, “Horizons for Initial Proclamation by the Salesian Family in Europe Today: Conditions, Strategy, Methodology, Content”, 93.

<sup>101</sup> JACQUES SERVAIS, “Intervista al Papa Emerito Benedetto XVI”, 4.

<sup>102</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, n. 12.

work of the Spirit”.<sup>103</sup> Hence, personal contact, interpersonal relationship and dialogue that are preceded, accompanied and followed by charity, and under the inspiration of the Spirit, are of great importance because the testimony of charity inspires, questions and challenges.<sup>104</sup> These questions are presented without any shades of proselytism but, rather, with respect for human dignity and freedom of conscience.

Celebrations of the faith and popular religious expressions are also occasions that promote initial proclamation. Therefore, particular care and attention should be given to “traditional” pastoral activities (celebration of sacraments, especially baptism and marriage, pilgrimages, popular devotions) because they are a reflection of ecclesial life. When these celebrations are carefully prepared, on the one hand, they may inspire a deepening of evangelical life. They nurture and enhance hope among the participants. On the other hand, these realities could stir up within those who do not know Christ a fascination of faith that could trigger an interest in His person.<sup>105</sup>

It is equally necessary to address the opportunities and challenges offered by the new frontiers (e.g., the digital continent, migration, multicultural and multi-religious settings), as well as the new situations resulting from cultural evolution (e.g., individualism, fluidity, secularism). These do affect the lifestyle of Christians. It is also important to find and create occasions or places of encounter where one can feel free to talk about existential and religious questions and feel understood and listened to.<sup>106</sup>

We need to be women and men of God, of strong faith and courage. We need to strive to live the Beatitudes, forgiveness, welcome, and love for all, to the point of offering our lives for others “so that they may have life and have it in abundance” (*Jn* 10: 10). Such a life would always be truly prophetic.<sup>107</sup> The testimony of

<sup>103</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 87.

<sup>104</sup> “Prospettive Emergenti nelle Giornate di Studio: La Città, Spazio e Opportunità per il Primo Annuncio”, in *Giornate di Studio sul Primo Annuncio in Città*, 206.

<sup>105</sup> ANA MARIA FERNANDEZ, ISABEL MADRID CISNEROS, RAFAEL ANDRÉS BORGES, “Ensanchar sin Miedo el Espacio de tu Tienda”, 176-177.

<sup>106</sup> UBALDO MONTISCI, LORENZINA COLUSI, “Horizons for Initial Proclamation by the Salesian Family in Europe Today: Conditions, Strategy, Methodology, Content”, 97-100.

<sup>107</sup> RUNITA BORJA, PIERGIORGIO GIANAZZA, “Emerging Perspectives in the Study Days

apostles, burning with love for Jesus in ordinary everyday life, becomes an interesting invitation to understand the motivations and deeper reasons for such a lifestyle. A credible witness triggers existential questions of the kind: “Why do you live this way?” “Why do you do this?”<sup>108</sup> So these questions really become a “gateway that leads to faith.” This focus on the importance of the Christian lifestyle in initial proclamation helps to overcome the danger of reducing Catholicism or Christianity simply to a set of doctrines.

Our witness of Salesian and apostolate life ought to trigger the desire to pose existential questions in the minds of those we encounter and those who observe us. That would start off a search for truth. It is then that our presence actually becomes true salt and true light (*Mt* 5: 13-16). This is precisely the opposite of a presence “without taste” (*Mt* 5:13). Indeed, the testimony of individual Christians or of the Christian family, the lifestyle of SDBs and FMAs, of religious communities and the entire Christian community, or the institutional and collective image of the Congregation and of the Church in all their public manifestations are all forms of initial proclamation or, unfortunately, an obstacle to it.<sup>109</sup> This implies that every Christian and every Christian community lives in a state of constant conversion while walking toward holiness. It starts first of all in the family, which is a domestic church. The testimony of parents’ lives and the educational environment in the family give children the opportunity to know better about Jesus Christ. They foster the growth and development of their faith so that they actually live the doctrine and become credible witnesses.

in View of a Renewed Missionary Praxis”, in *Study Days on the Salesian Presence Among Muslims*, 153-154, 158.

<sup>108</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Fides et Ratio*, n.67.

<sup>109</sup> ANDRÉ FOSSION, “Proposta della Fede e Primo Annuncio”, *Catechesi* 78, no.4 (2008-2009): 29-34; 30; LUCA BRESSAN, “Quali Esperienze di Annuncio Proporre?”, *Notiziario dell’Ufficio Catechistico Nazionale* 36, no.1 (2007), 61-68.



## CHARITY

The witness of life is necessary; however, it is not enough. It needs to be preceded, accompanied, and followed by charity. The testimony of charity inspires questions and challenges the intellect and the will to ask existential or religious questions. On the other hand, the practice of charity goes hand in hand with the credible lifestyle of individual Christians, the Christian family, and the entire Christian community. This testimony of life and charity takes shape in specific cultural expressions at important moments of human existence, in relationships and in socio-political expressions of everyday life.

“Give them something to eat yourselves!” A true Christian recognises Jesus in the hungry, in prisoners, the sick, the naked or those who have no work but must sustain a family. He sees Jesus in those who are alone, sad, in those who have made mistakes and need advice, in those who need someone to walk beside them in silence so that they experience being accompanied.<sup>110</sup> This Christian witness finds expression also through the service of reconciliation, justice and peace, through a concern for the oppressed, the uninitiated, the marginalised, through a struggle for peace and justice, and the commitment to integral human development, reconciliation and the construction of a more humane society.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, these works of mercy are the characteristics of the face of Jesus Christ, who takes care of “my little brothers” (*Mt* 25: 40) to bring God’s tenderness and closeness to each one of them.<sup>112</sup>

That is why the testimony of charity and the sincere service of every Christian living with faith, hope and love and immersed in prayer become communicators of their own experience of the Divine. The power of the witness of charity and sincere service sound loud and clear in the words of Saint Francis of Assisi: “Preach always and, whenever necessary, use words!”

In addition, proclaiming Christ is first and foremost an act of charity because it makes known God’s love for each of us.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>110</sup> FRANCIS, General Audience, 30 June 2016.

<sup>111</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 44-45, 68, 77; BENEDICT XVI, *Africae Munus*, n.15

<sup>112</sup> FRANCIS, General Audience, 12 October 2016.

<sup>113</sup> FRANCIS, *Message for the World Mission Sunday* (2016).

Therefore, the places where the Church is committed to helping the sick and the suffering, the poor, the migrants and the marginalised, where the Church struggles for justice, peace and the integrity of creation, are open to initial proclamation. There are two dangers to avoid: first of all, that of losing sight of initial proclamation as the fundamental goal of our social commitment. Without this primary concern to foster initial proclamation, our social works are reduced to mere philanthropy and we become only social workers. Yet, neither the Church nor the Congregation is an NGO.<sup>114</sup> The other danger is that of allowing the testimony of charity to degenerate into proselytism. This happens when, through social services, we offer social or material benefits to people for an apparent interest and adherence to the person of Jesus.<sup>115</sup>

We are aware that in multi-religious contexts, in most cases, our presence may be limited to a silent witness of life and action through an authentic Christian life.<sup>116</sup> This is the reality confronting those who work among Muslims, Hindus, or even Buddhists. That is the reason why Christianity as a “style” of life is of great importance. It is a form of initial proclamation. In that light, our friendship or the way of dealing with people of different cultures, religions and social status, which is open and welcoming, becomes initial proclamation.<sup>117</sup> Thus, ordinary daily life among people is an arena of dialogue, of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, and the foundation on which to build theological and spiritual dialogues. The Christian witness in ordinary everyday life then becomes a manifestation of a living Christianity for those who do not know Christ. The ‘style’ of life in ordinary daily life becomes initial proclamation and a gradual path to faith.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>114</sup> FRANCIS, Homily at Casa Santa Martha, 24 April 2013.

<sup>115</sup> PAOLO RICCA, “Il Primo Annuncio tra Afonia e Proselitismo”, AA. *Primo Annuncio. Tra Afonia e Proselitismo. Le Religioni si Interrogano* (Livorno: Pharos, 2015) 62-66.

<sup>116</sup> PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 41.

<sup>117</sup> TC GEORGE, THERESA JOSEPH, “Emerging Insights and Perspectives during these Study Days in View of a Renewed Missionary Praxis”, *Study Days on the Salesian Mission and the Initial Proclamation of Christ in South Asia* (Rome: SDB-FMA, 2013), 94.

<sup>118</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Fides at Ratio*, n. 67; CHRISTOPH THEOBALD, *Le Christianisme Comme Style*, vol. 1 (Cerf: Paris, 2007), 125-131, 188-189, 385-387; ANGELO FERNANDES, “Dialogue in the Context of Asian Realities”, *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 55 (1991): 548.

## CONVERSION IN MULTI-RELIGIOUS CONTEXTS

God wants all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. His Son, Jesus, is the only Saviour and “there is no salvation in any other” (*Acts* 4:12). However, by the invisible action of the Spirit, through ways that He alone knows, God can bring to salvation those who, through no fault of theirs, do not know the Gospel. It is, however, necessary for all to convert to Christ and, through Baptism, to be incorporated in Him and in His body, the Church.<sup>119</sup>

The theme of conversion in the context of the initial proclamation is certainly a thorny problem in multicultural and multi-religious contexts. In fact, initial proclamation respects people’s freedom of conscience. It is never violent to a person’s conscience nor could it be confused with proselytism. Proselytism is not respectful of the people we meet. It does not conform to our Salesian charism, which uses reason and loving-kindness as our approach. We are aware that the truth is not the private property of anyone nor can it be imposed on others. It is, instead, a gift that unfolds only in a loving encounter and by journeying together towards an increasingly intensified assimilation of truth.<sup>120</sup> In this journey, “the Holy Spirit is already at work, opening up and disposing hearts to the reception of evangelical truth”.<sup>121</sup> However, “we will not be timid when God opens the door to an explicit proclamation of the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and as the response to fundamental questions of human existence.”<sup>122</sup>

True conversion leads to true knowledge of God, which, in turn, is geared towards mutual openness with others. This is conversion to God, which is of fundamental importance and which is the indispensable condition for initial proclamation. However, it

<sup>119</sup> *Ad Gentes*, n.7; CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Doctrinal Notes on Some Aspects of Evangelisation*, n.10; PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Dialogue and Proclamation* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1991), n. 29.

<sup>120</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, n. 27; PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, n. 41, 79.

<sup>121</sup> CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Doctrinal Notes on Some Aspects of Evangelisation*, n.4.

<sup>122</sup> FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS CONFERENCES, “V Plenary Assembly”, 4.3 in Gaudencio Rosales, Cayetano G. Arevalo (ed), *For All Peoples of Asia*, vol. I (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997), 282.

is also important to emphasise here that true conversion depends exclusively on God's internal calling and the free decision of the person. Thus, the bishops of Asia insist that "a dialogue aimed at converting the other to one's faith and religious tradition is dishonest and immoral".<sup>123</sup> Indeed, sincere and authentic interreligious dialogue cannot have conversion of others as its goal, even if it is not entirely excluded. And if a sincere conversion happens, this is God's gift and not the fruit of human effort.

Instead, in an interreligious relationship, everyone is called to a deeper conversion to God and a deeper conversion to his own religious tradition and its potential. It promotes mutual enrichment and communion in spirit with the followers of other religions. Thus, through initial proclamation, we share our "religious experience of faith and the love of Jesus, not to proselytise, but merely to share what we are, in transparent friendship and unity". We do not deny, however, that Christians "may bring the Good News of Salvation to people who want to listen and receive it freely."<sup>124</sup>

<sup>123</sup> BISHOPS' INSTITUTE FOR INTERRELIGIOUS AFFAIRS V/3, "Working for Harmony in the Contemporary World", 6 in Franz-Josef Eilers (ed), *For All Peoples of Asia*, vol. II (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997), 158.

<sup>124</sup> FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS CONFERENCES, "VIII Plenary Assembly", 97 in Franz-Josef Eilers (ed), *For All Peoples of Asia*, vol. IV (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2007), 36; PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 53: "neither respect and esteem for these religions nor the complexity of the questions raised is an invitation to the Church to withhold from these non-Christians the proclamation of Jesus Christ. On the contrary the Church holds that these multitudes have the right to know the riches of the mystery of Christ - riches in which we believe that the whole of humanity can find, in unsuspected fullness, everything that it is gropingly searching for concerning God, man and his destiny, life and death, and truth".

## The Way Forward

From experience we know that people suffering from material poverty are often richer in religious and cultural expressions through their symbols and rites. At the same time we are aware that we cannot proclaim Jesus to them without relieving their miseries so that they can live with dignity as God's children. We are also aware that many people appreciate our services for their human development but are not interested in knowing more about Jesus. Unfortunately, often enough, we ourselves do not make efforts to stir up in them any profound questions about the meaning of human life.<sup>125</sup> In many places where we work, it is not possible to explicitly proclaim the Gospel. Many times we are compelled into silence and restricted to a mere presence. In these contexts, our witnessing is an incisive proclamation.<sup>126</sup> To make our witness of life and charity a true initial proclamation it is necessary to convert our mentality and modify our structures by moving:

- from an attitude that considers poverty as an obstacle to evangelisation, and the poor as only recipients of our social work, to an attitude that sees the poor we are serving as an opportunity for a better understanding of the Gospel, and our social services (projects of rural development, people's housing, health care, education, vocational training) as a space and opportunity to foster initial proclamation;<sup>127</sup>
- from frantic social activities and initiatives to a contemplative spirit that gives greater importance to being than to doing and succeeding, becoming the living Gospel to our brothers and sisters of other religions;<sup>128</sup>
- from a relativistic and simplistically naïve attitude towards followers of other religions who come to our centres (young and adult), to an integral education (of educators as well as of the young), starting from

<sup>125</sup> JOSEPH PHUOC, ALMA CASTAGNA, "Emerging Insights and Perspectives during these Study Days in View of a Renewed Missionary Praxis", 115; 118.

<sup>126</sup> "Prospettive Emergenti nelle Giornate di Studio: La Città, Spazio e Opportunità per il Primo Annuncio", 206.

<sup>127</sup> JOSEPH PHUOC, ALMA CASTAGNA, "Emerging Insights and Perspectives during these Study Days in View of a Renewed Missionary Praxis", 115; TC GEORGE, THERESA JOSEPH, "Emerging Insights and Perspectives during these Study Days in View of a Renewed Missionary Praxis", 94.

<sup>128</sup> RUNITA BORJA, PIERGIORGIO GIANAZZA, "Emerging Perspectives in the Study Days in View of a Renewed Missionary Praxis", 154.

positive elements, bearing in mind the recommendation and the example of Jesus, “be wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Mt 10:16);<sup>129</sup>

- from an attitude that considers followers of other religions as targets of our proclamation of the Gospel to an appreciation of their religious traditions and of what God has done for them (in particular, their propensity to contemplation, which leads to silence, self-detachment, care and compassion for others) and consider them as resources for initial proclamation;<sup>130</sup>
- from a mentality that Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians will learn “in the field” how to work with followers of other religions, to a preparation in all stages of initial formation and vocational training so that appropriate pastoral educational programmes may be carried out.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>129</sup> IBID, 158, 159.

<sup>130</sup> ANA MARIA FERNANDEZ, ISABEL MADRID CISNEROS, RAFAEL ANDRÉS BORGES, “Ensancha sin Miedo el Espacio de tu Tienda”, 177; TC GEORGE, THERESA JOSEPH, “Emerging Insights and Perspectives during these Study Days in View of a Renewed Missionary Praxis”, 94.

<sup>131</sup> RUNITA BORJA, PIERGIORGIO GIANAZZA, “Prospettive Emergenti nelle Giornate di Studio in Vista di una Rinnovata Prassi Missionaria”, 159, 160.

## Chapter VII

# *Initial Proclamation and Salesian Charism*





## **“WIDEN THE SPACE IN YOUR TENT!”**

Chapter 54 of Isaiah returns to a symbol dear to Hosea, Ezekiel and Jeremiah: Israel is going to be married to God. Because of her infidelity Israel was alone, childless and disgraced. Now, through the covenant, she is the Lord's bride and a fruitful mother. It is God who makes her fruitful. So she needs to enlarge her tent to accommodate her many children: “Widen the space in your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; hold not back, lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your descendants will possess the nations and will populate the desolate cities.” (*Is* 54: 2-3). In the Bible, the tent is the meeting place of God with His people and a space that is alive with encounters and exchange. The tent gives shelter from the weather. It is used to rest in and then to go on with the journey. Hence it is important that the tent be wide enough to welcome and accommodate everyone.

Our faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who pitched His tent among us (*Jn* 1:14), invites us, as Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, to widen our missionary horizons so that initial proclamation becomes the main concern of our lives as consecrated educators and evangelisers. Attention to initial proclamation will certainly make our pastoral work more fruitful among young people.

## **A GLANCE AT OUR ORIGINS**

Don Bosco's pedagogical style was all oriented towards the creation of the family spirit as an indispensable educational environment to accomplish initial proclamation among the poor and abandoned boys of Turin. Don Bosco made people feel that they were not entering a school. They were being welcomed into a family under the guidance of a father whose only desire was their spiritual and material good. In fact, he always meant the oratory to be a 'home' rather than an institution. In this educational setting, he stirred up in the young a thirst for God. They were made to per-

ceive that He is lovingly close to them and that he manifests Himself in their desire to embark on a journey of faith. Don Bosco did not differentiate between initial proclamation and catechesis, but, whenever he met a boy, he immediately invited him to a Christian life. He thus integrated catechesis into the lives of his boys.<sup>132</sup>

In his letter from Rome, 1884, he wrote about the necessity of “breaking the fatal barrier of mistrust and replacing it with the warmest confidence. ... How many conversions were brought about by a few words of his, whispered unexpectedly into a young man’s ear while he was having fun. He who feels loved, loves, and he who is loved gets everything, especially from the young. This confidence releases a flow as of an electric current between the young and the superiors. Hearts open up and make known their needs, and they recognise their faults.”<sup>133</sup>

Likewise, in Mornese, Maria Domenica Mazzarello spent her life with the young girls of the village to draw them to the practice of the faith. Fr. Pestarino asked every Daughter of the Immaculate to teach mothers how to educate their children in the Christian way. Young Maria Mazzarello prepared her catechism lessons and her counsels with great care. She was convinced that the Christian life of girls and of the entire family depended on the mother. In fact, the religious education of girls, especially those who were neglected and abandoned, was deeply imprinted on her heart even before she became a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians.

The catechetical style of Mother Mazzarello was colloquial. She used a simple and practical pedagogy as regards prayer and relationship with God. Her catechesis was based on the Word of God and focused primarily on the interests of young people and their experience of Jesus. For her, catechesis depended on the entire educative environment. It was not merely a matter of style or method.

<sup>132</sup> SALESIAN YOUTH MINISTRY DEPARTMENT, *Salesian Youth Ministry. Frame of Reference* (Rome: SDB, 2014), 143.

<sup>133</sup> JOHN BOSCO, “Lettera da Roma alla Comunità Salesiana dell’Oratorio di Torino-Valdocco”, in ISTITUTO STORICO SALESIANO, *Fonti Salesiane. 1. Don Bosco e la Sua Opera* (Rome: LAS, 2014), 444-451.

Her biographers recall that Maria Domenica introduced dance into the oratory to counteract the effects of the carnivals in the villages. Teaching girls to dance was something unheard of among the inhabitants of Mornese of that time. She encouraged dancing because she saw it as a way of being happy without offending God. Later, at Don Costamagna's suggestion, she organised theatrical performances to which she invited also the inhabitants of Mornese. The educational style inaugurated in Mornese by Mother Mazzarello and the early FMA was a true mystagogy, the art of leading the young to Christ.

For Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello, everything could be an appropriate opportunity to proclaim the Good News of salvation. They gave the maximum importance to the creation of an educational environment. In it, people, activities, and words could stir up in everyone the awareness of the presence of God; and this could take place in the oratory, in schools, in homes, in workshops, and even in recreation, in playgrounds, or on outings.<sup>134</sup>

## THE PREVENTIVE SYSTEM

Don Bosco gave great importance to young people's experiences. He used their life experiences as the foundation on which to build his educational system, and that has been very fruitful. Pope John Paul II summarised it well:

*“One may say that the peculiar trait of his brilliance is linked with the educational method which he himself called the “Preventive System”. In a certain sense this represents the quintessence of his pedagogical wisdom and constitutes the prophetic message which he has left to his followers and to the Church, and which has received attention and recognition from numerous educators and students of pedagogy. The term “preventive” which he uses is to be understood not so much in its strict linguistic sense as in the richness of the character-*

<sup>134</sup> GLORIA ELENA GARCIA PEREIRA, “Las Oportunidades y los Desafíos del Primer Anuncio para SDB y FMA en América Latina y Caribe”, 134-135, 139-140; 146; ISTITUTO FIGLIE DI MARIA AUSILIATRICE, *Perché Abbiamo Vita, Vita in Abbondanza. Linee Orientative della Missione Educativa delle FMA* (LDC: Turin, 2005) 30.

*istics typical of the Saint's educative skill. It implies in the first place the intention of foreseeing and preventing anything that might give rise to negative experiences which could compromise youthful energies or commit young people to long and distressing efforts at recovery. But the term also includes deep intuitions, precise options and methodological criteria, all lived with particular intensity: examples are: the art of positive education by putting forward what is good through appropriate experiences which call for the involvement of the pupil and are attractive because of their splendour and lofty nature; the art of producing growth in the young persons "from within" by appealing to their inner freedom to oppose external conditioning and formalism; the art of winning the heart of young people so as to inculcate in them a joyful and satisfied attraction to what is good, correcting deviations and preparing them for the future by means of a solid character formation."*<sup>135</sup>

## **PREVENTIVE SYSTEM AS INITIAL PROCLAMATION**

The heart of Don Bosco's educational system is the religious dimension. In fact, Don Bosco's love for young people cannot be understood unless it is seen as rooted in his fiery zeal for their integral salvation. In his dream at the age of nine, it was revealed to him for the first time that his vocation was to bring young people to God through persuasion and loving-kindness, showing them "the beauty of virtue and the ugliness of sin." However, it was in the Oratory at Valdocco that he himself was able to verify the effects of this educational method.

Presence is critical to the Preventive System. The educator is present as a sign and witness of God's radical love for mankind. Through this presence an I-You dialogue is developed. This relationship is at the centre of this educative pastoral practice.<sup>136</sup> Education and evangelisation of young people take place through relationship and exchange, through friendship and dialogue, through proposal and proclamation. This, in turn, creates an

<sup>135</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Letter Iuvenum Patris* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1988), n.8.

<sup>136</sup> MARIA AROKIAM KANAGA, "Meaning, Opportunities and Challenges of the Salesian Presence among Muslims", in *Salesian Presence among Muslims*, 131-132.

educative environment in which the young person lives the beauty and charm of Christian life expressed in the joy of loving and serving God: *Servite Domino in laetitia!*<sup>137</sup>

Don Bosco knew every boy well, not only by name and by character, but also interiorly. For his boys, he was a *'faithful friend of the soul'* who knew what to tell them without ambiguity for the good of their soul. In such a context, permeated by trust and confidence, the short, precise, but intense words – referred to in salesian pedagogy as *the word in the ear* – became like a dart that penetrated the young man's mind and illuminated his heart. They were words that Don Bosco said confidentially to the young man at totally unexpected moments (such as while he was at play in the courtyard). For this reason, *the word in the ear* remained imprinted in the mind and heart of the young man and it could no longer be erased. The word in the ear was therefore a way of whispering the Gospel into the young man's heart such that it would trigger in him an interest in knowing Jesus and his Gospel. This is, indeed, a method of realizing initial proclamation provided that whoever uses it is committed to being consistent with the message it proclaims.<sup>138</sup>

## **A YOUTH MINISTRY PERMEATED BY INITIAL PROCLAMATION**

The pastoral care of the young is an organic action of an Educative-Pastoral Community that wants to enable young people to grow to their personal maturity and to communion in the Church with Jesus Christ.<sup>139</sup> Fr. Pascual Chávez, the then Rector Major, had pointed out to Salesians that “our pastoral work is still too weakly missionary, i.e., it pays little attention to initial proclamation, or to a renewed proclamation of the Gospel”. He went on to urge a rethinking of youth ministry to give our educative-pastoral project a greater educational and evangelising quality and

<sup>137</sup> PIERA RUFFINATTO, “Il Sistema Preventivo Spazio del Primo Annuncio in Stile Salesiano” in *Giornate di Studio sul Primo Annuncio in Città*, 184-186, 196-199.

<sup>138</sup> *IBID*, 193-195.

<sup>139</sup> ISTITUTO FIGLIE DI MARIA AUSILIATRICE, *Perché Abbiamo Vita, Vita in Abbondanza*, 5, 37.

thus lead the young to an encounter with Jesus.<sup>140</sup> The result of this rethinking is the Framework of Reference which is an excellent organic synthesis, an overview of Salesian pastoral heritage that responds to today's challenges.<sup>141</sup> Unfortunately, as Ubaldo Montisci points out, "there are only five references to initial proclamation."<sup>142</sup> In the same line, the *Guidelines for the Educative Mission of the FMA*<sup>143</sup> that has as its core "the explicit message of Jesus" makes only one reference to initial proclamation!

Let us enlarge the space in our tent! This implies a real missionary conversion of the entire service of youth ministry to place it at the service of initial proclamation or of a renewed proclamation of the Gospel. In this light, a change of mentality is required in order to rethink, elaborate and experiment with different and perhaps unpublicized strategies that meet the expectations and hopes of teenagers and young people in our centres. The stage of defining one's identity by teenagers and the initiation of young people to intimacy are opportunities to face up to questions of the truth and meaning in life: there we propose the most stable foundations for a faith, which can then be lived out as adults. It is therefore crucial to build an environment with minimal structures in which personal relationships are taken care of; where the young man can do what he enjoys most (sports, music, groups, trips ...), or study and qualify himself; where Gospel values are breathed; where they meet people with convictions and who bear witness to them. Consequently, the formation of evangelising educators is indispensable. Their spiritual qualification is more important than all else. They need to become people with a strong missionary conscience and an intense experience of the faith, capable of narrating their experiences of faith, hope and charity in the first person singular.<sup>144</sup>

<sup>140</sup> PASCUAL CHAVEZ VILLANUEVA, "Salesian Youth Ministry" in *ACG* 107 (2010), 23.

<sup>141</sup> FABIO ATTARD, "Presentation", *Salesian Youth Ministry. Frame of Reference*, 17.

<sup>142</sup> UBALDO MONTISCI, "La Pastorale Giovanile e la Città: la Sfida e la Gioia del Primo Annuncio", footnote 68, p.160.

<sup>143</sup> ANTONIA COLOMBO, "Presentation", *Perché Abbiamo Vita, Vita in Abbondanza*, 5.

<sup>144</sup> ISTITUTO FIGLIE DI MARIA AUSILIATRICE, *Perché Abbiamo Vita, Vita in Abbondanza*, 161, 171, 173-174, 175-179.

## The Way Forward

If our pastoral care of the young is to be permeated by initial proclamation and if the practice of the Preventive System is to become a way to carry out initial proclamation, a threefold conversion is needed: anthropological, spiritual and pedagogical. Anthropological conversion requires that Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians deeply feel anguished at the fact that many young people have not yet heard the Gospel, or live their faith as something merely cultural. SDBs and FMAs seek out young people in the peripheries. They are convinced that, in the midst of their struggles, these young people have a heart open to the Gospel and that, as consecrated educators, they also have Someone to Offer: Jesus Christ. True spiritual conversion leads to a renewal and strengthening of our vocation as a faithful friend of the soul and educator to the faith. Every encounter with them becomes educative and evangelising. Finally, pastoral conversion means committing our missionary ardour and apostolic courage so that our educative-pastoral work is innervated by initial proclamation and truly becomes a way to bring the Gospel to the young.<sup>145</sup> To accomplish this, we need to convert our mentality and modify our structures, moving:

- from a routine presence among young people to a presence that is always attentive to various opportunities that come up to foster initial proclamation;<sup>146</sup>
- from a concern for the management of our works through our managerial roles to the attention and promotion of positive cultural values, together with the local Church, so that they enrich the practice of the Preventive System;<sup>147</sup>
- from a routine service among young people to Salesian assistance as a way of accompanying young people in their choices of life, leading them to cooperate with the Holy Spirit to stir up their interest in Jesus and His Gospel;<sup>148</sup>

<sup>145</sup> Piera Ruffinatto, “Il Sistema Preventivo Spazio del Primo Annuncio in Stile Salesiano” in *Giornate di Studio sul Primo Annuncio in Città*, 199-202.

<sup>146</sup> JOSEPH PHUOC, ALMA CASTAGNA, “Emerging Insights and Perspectives during these Study Days in View of a Renewed Missionary Praxis”, 114, 119; “Prospettive Emergenti nelle Giornate di Studio: La Città, Spazio e Opportunità per il Primo Annuncio”, 208.

<sup>147</sup> RUTH DEL PILAR MORA, ALEXIUS MULONGO, “Emerging Insights and Perspectives during the Study Days in View of a Renewed Missionary Praxis in Africa and Madagascar”, 128-129; RUNITA BORJA, PIERGIORGIO GIANAZZA, “Emerging Perspectives in the Study Days in View of a Renewed Missionary Praxis”, 158.

<sup>148</sup> ANA MARIA FERNANDEZ, ISABEL MADRID CISNEROS, RAFAEL ANDRÉS BORGES, “Ensancha sin Miedo el Espacio de tu Tienda”, 175,176, 178.

- from a “comfortable pastoral criterion of “we have always done it this way”<sup>149</sup> to being women and men of great faith and courage, inflamed by the fire of the *Da mihi animas*, who live their lives in a permanent state of mission, able to rethink, elaborate and experiment with original strategies that serves as Initial Proclamation among young people.<sup>150</sup>

<sup>149</sup> FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 33.

<sup>150</sup> “Prospettive Emergenti nelle Giornate di Studio: La Città, Spazio e Opportunità per il Primo Annuncio”, 209-210.



## *Conclusion*



Mary's conception of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit (*Lk* 1: 35; *Mt* 1, 18:20) was "a culminating moment of His action in the history of salvation."<sup>151</sup> She not only became a temple of the Holy Spirit but also "let herself be led by the Spirit, through a journey of faith, towards a destiny of service and fruitfulness."<sup>152</sup> Her *fiat* was truly a total openness to the will of God and "to the person of Christ, to all of his work, to all of his mission".<sup>153</sup>

In the Gospel of Luke the announcement by the angel Gabriel to Mary is immediately followed by her visit to her cousin Elizabeth (*Lk* 1: 26-57). The angel gave Mary a sign to confirm what had just been announced to her: "And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible" (*Lk* 1: 36). At Ain Karim Maria was able to verify for herself that "nothing is impossible to God" (*Lk* 1:37).

At the conclusion of our reflection on initial proclamation, let us look at Mary and draw strength from her who hurried to Elisabeth to proclaim the Good News - Jesus Christ, the Saviour. Hers was a real missionary journey. Her going "in a hurry to the mountainous region" became the image of the Church, which, immediately after Pentecost, went out to spread the Gospel to the extreme ends of the earth. On that morning of Pentecost she saw in her prayer the beginning of the evangelisation brought about by the Holy Spirit.<sup>154</sup>

On her journey to the home of Elizabeth at Ain Karim, Mary gave no thought to the distance, the time, the discomfort or the risks associated with it. Mary, "the handmaid of the Lord," be-

<sup>151</sup> PAUL VI, *Apostolic Exhortation Marialis Cultus* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1974), n. 26.

<sup>152</sup> FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 287.

<sup>153</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Encyclical Redemptoris Mater* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1987), n. 39.

<sup>154</sup> PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 82.

come the one who revealed God through her love and service. Throughout her journey, bearing Jesus within herself, she remained united with Him. She “kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (*Lk* 2:19). She went “in haste”; she went quickly, but remained with the Lord. Her exterior journey as she moved quickly along winding paths reflects her inner journey of faith. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit she moved from the docile acceptance of her *fiat* at the visit from the messenger of God to the joyous explosion of her *magnificat* as a messenger of God for others. It was Mary’s interior journey of faith to God in her heart that directed and gave meaning to her external actions. In her we have a model of someone who carries out Initial Proclamation. She merges her inner life with her external activity. She harmoniously intertwines her beliefs and her deeds. Her journey is also a symbol of the journey of faith of every Christian who moves from an initial adherence to God’s plan to being a missionary disciple.

The journey of Mary culminates in her encounter with Elizabeth: the two women bear within themselves the ineffable mystery. This encounter placed them at the threshold between the Old and the New Testament, between the time when God spoke through signs and wonders and the time when He manifests Himself through His Son incarnate. Their mutual support became the space within which God revealed Himself and did great things. Elizabeth had John in her womb, the one who is to bring a message from almighty God, while the child in the womb of Mary is the almighty God Himself. Indeed, we have attained the “fullness of time” (*Gal* 4: 4).<sup>155</sup>

Luke concludes his story from the Annunciation until the early infancy of Jesus (*Lk* 2: 8-20, 51), pointing out that “His mother kept all these things in her heart” (*Lk* 2:51). From the moment when she starts to meditate on all the events that have taken place up to her understanding of the extraordinary works

<sup>155</sup> MARIA KO HA FONG, “Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country”, *Study Days on the Salesian Mission and the Initial Proclamation of Christ*, 179-186; IDEM, “Mary the ‘First Evangelised’ and the ‘First Evangeliser’”, in *The Salesian Mission and the Initial Proclamation of Christ in the Three-fold Context of South Asia*, 146-147.

of God in her life, “she can recognise the footsteps of the Spirit of God in the great events and even in those that seem imperceptible. She is a contemplative of the mystery of God in the world, in history and in the everyday life of one and all.”<sup>156</sup>

In his Gospel, John has given us the last recorded words of Mary, those at Cana, the only ones addressed directly to people. It is like her “spiritual will and testament.” She asks the servants at Cana’s to do “whatever He tells you”. In those words Mary expressed the idea that is essential for every human person, that is, to open their own heart to Jesus, who alone has “words of eternal life” (*Jn* 6: 68). Yet, this short injunction was real Initial Proclamation. In fact, when we read these last words of Mary in conjunction with the last words of the Risen Lord, we see clearly that Mary leads us to Jesus: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (*Mt* 28: 19). At Cana the deep faith she had expressed in her *fiat* became a convincing *facite* addressed to others. In Mary we see that it is only a profound personal attachment to God that can make us bring others to God.<sup>157</sup>

On the Cross Jesus gave us his mother (*Jn* 19: 26-27) to be our mother on our journey. Mary, in fact, is the mother and the help of the Church. She is close to us, walks by our side, shares our struggles and constantly surrounds us with the love of God. She is the inspiration and model of that motherly love that all missionary disciples must nourish.<sup>158</sup>

The Church, missionary by its very nature, constantly looks at the example of Mary to reveal the hidden God more effectively, not only through a proclamation but also by stirring up an interest in her Son through a testimony of love and service, especially to those who are in the existential peripheries of our society.

For Don Bosco, the Virgin Mary was the guide and support of his work for young people. For Mother Mazzarello, young people were entrusted to her by the Virgin. This has deeply marked the

<sup>156</sup> FRANCESCO, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 288.

<sup>157</sup> MARIA KO HA FONG, “Mary the ‘First Evangelised’ and the ‘First Evangeliser’”, 148-150.

<sup>158</sup> FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 285-286; JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, n.92.

charismatic and spiritual identity of the groups that make up the Salesian Family. As we continue our journey in faith, through the deserts of our time, we entrust ourselves to her so that we may respond generously to our mission of being instruments of initial proclamation.<sup>159</sup>

With a prayer on our lips and hope in our hearts, along with all the young people entrusted to us, we ask Mary to be with us as she was with the first community of disciples waiting for the coming of the Spirit (*Acts* 1, 14). She is our help and our guide. We implore her to help us so that our prayers and our lives can be one and so that, through us, the Spirit may arouse in the hearts of many young people the desire to know and follow the blessed fruit of her womb, Jesus Christ!

<sup>159</sup> *Identity Card of the Salesian Family* (2012), art 11, 37.

# *Appendices*





## **Practical Proposals during the Study Days (2010-2015)**

### ***Salesian Mission in Frontier Situations and Initial Proclamation in Europe Today***

Prague, 4 - 10 November 2010

#### **SDB**

1. To open new presences in the European countries where there is no Salesian presence yet, so as to stir up missionary sensitivity and apostolic enthusiasm among the Salesians of Europe.
2. Intensify and promote pastoral care for families, especially through family catechesis.
3. Follow up more closely the new missionaries arriving in Europe and help them integrate better.
4. Promote reflection among the Provincials of Europe to arrive at a common policy for European confreres who have made a discernment and recognised a vocation to be missionaries within Europe.
5. Strengthen processes so that our ministry becomes more evangelising, for an integral Salesian youthful ministry.
6. Each Province will undertake a study in view of launching a concrete project whose priority will be the initial proclamation of Christ.

### ***Salesian Mission and Initial Proclamation of Christ in the Three-fold Context of South Asia***

Kolkata, 7-11 August 2011

#### **FMA**

To foster a new mentality in the minds and hearts of our Sisters in the light of initial proclamation:

1. Let every ministry be a proclamation of Jesus.
2. Formation of the Proclaimer (also those still under formation, initial and ongoing), with a deeper experience of God, of the Word of God and open to the reality of our locality
3. Prepare our lay collaborators in the proclamation of Jesus.
4. During village/family visits to focus systematically on initial proclamation

5. Revive the Marian dimension in the work of initial proclamation.
6. Respect for and tolerance of people of other faiths; courage to proclaim Christ with prudence
7. Transmit the content, experience and conclusions of these Study Days at local and provincial levels with a focus on mission *ad gentes*. Present the conclusions in one's own Province. The forthcoming PCI Meet will be a privileged moment for this presentation.
8. To study the teachings of the Church regarding initial proclamation (especially the documents under preparation for the forthcoming synod of bishops, which has initial proclamation as its theme)
9. To make initial proclamation a point of evaluation
10. To make a commitment to evaluate our existing ministries in the Provinces to see whether of they are in line with initial proclamation.

## **SDB**

In order to foster concrete ways of giving primacy to initial proclamation in the Salesian Provinces of South Asia:

1. A Provincial level meeting is needed as part of the follow up of this programme. This should be done through the SPCSA. The PDMA can organise it as well as introduce it at the meeting of the leaders of communities.
2. The primacy of initial proclamation should be evident in the EPP of each community. This should be followed up by the Provincial during his annual visitation.
3. We need to start and follow up missionary groups in our various settings.
4. Networking with the other members of the Salesian Family and other missionary religious communities will help in the sharing of experiences and successful methods of initial proclamation.
5. Undertake a national level research regarding the impact of initial proclamation in our various settings.
6. Christian families should be sensitised not to restrict the number of their children on the pretext of responsible parenthood.
7. We need better collaboration and coordination among the four Provincial Commissions (Youth Ministry, Social communication, Formation and Mission).
8. The PDMA's will create in the Provinces like-minded groups on the primacy of initial proclamation.
9. Provincials should regularly send confreres to study Missiology at Sacred Heart Theological College at Shillong, Meghalaya.

10. A short-term course can be regularly organised at the national level on initial proclamation (regional level at Bangalore or Shillong).
11. Initial proclamation should be given appropriate attention during the Rectors' Course.
12. Greater emphasis could be given to initial proclamation in the curriculum for initial formation.
13. Personal exposure to the missions should be a part of the annual Deacons' course in our theologates.

***Salesian Mission and Initial Proclamation of Christ  
in the Three-fold Context of East Asia***

Sampran, 14-18 August 2011

**FMA**

1. To Create in all the sectors of our mission a climate that is immersed in the love for Christ
2. To transmit the fruits of these Study Days to the sisters of the Province, involving the provincial council and the mission animation team
3. To continue our reflection on initial proclamation, above all committing ourselves to a deeper understanding of the documents of the local Churches and to know the initiatives of other institutes working in this field in order to create a network
4. To accompany and empower the Christian youth, so that they may become missionaries for other youth

**SDB**

1. We make conscious efforts to stir up a desire to know the person of Jesus. We need to develop personal skills (linguistic, information technology, good knowledge of cultures, religions and socio-political reality, etc...) and prepare ourselves through immersion.
2. To promote a proper understanding of the life and nature of the mission, missiological formation should be included in the programme of initial formation.
3. To re-enforce the role of the mission animator of the provinces. Missionary animation in the provinces is done in 2 dimensions: "*ad gentes*" and "*inter gentes*"; give special importance to "*inter gentes*".
4. Awareness is to be given to individuals as well as to communities on the need to live a life of Christian witness as a way to proclaim Christ to others.

5. To empower lay members of the Salesian family (co-operators, volunteers, SYM members, etc...) so that they, too, become agents of initial proclamation
6. To make a better use of our traditional settings (schools, oratories, youth-centres, etc.) as auspicious places for initial proclamation; to go out to the new frontiers of ministry and apostolate.

***Salesian Mission and Initial Proclamation of Christ in Oceania  
in the Context of Traditional Religions and Cultures,  
and Cultures in the Process of Secularisation***

Port Moresby, 21-25 November 2011

### **FMA**

1. Deepen the personal experience of Jesus to proclaim His message, that is, to make a witness of our life a “primary and authentic” proclamation of Jesus.
2. Study and reflect personally and as a community the documents of the Church (universal and local) and of 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 our pastoral activity in the light of mission.

### **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, moving:*

1. from doing mission only within our educational institutions and parishes, to **reaching out to the young where they are** (through the festive oratory, youth centres, etc.);
2. from sharing the faith in formal venues (parish, religious education, retreats, etc.) to greater awareness **that all activities are occasions for initial proclamation** (Basic Ecclesial Communities, youth groups, etc.);
3. from 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;

4. from 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;
5. from doing mission ourselves (mission *ad gentes*, initial proclamation, ordinary pastoral activity, renewed evangelisation) to **forming and engaging lay people** as our mission partners, co-responsible with us in Initial Proclamation and evangelisation, especially in families, through living the Preventive System as our way of witnessing the Gospel way of life.

### **Salesian Presence among Muslims**

Rome, 30 July - 4 August 2012

#### **FMA**

The FMA participants in the “Study Days on Salesian Presence among Muslims” have underlined a few points to be kept in mind for a continuity and deepening of the Study Days:

1. To bring their voice to the Provincial Councils, Provincial Assemblies, Interprovincial Conferences;
2. To raise the awareness of Provincial Superiors, so that they get involved in giving a picture of the reality on the said theme;
3. To grow in the knowledge of the reality of Islam at the European level;
4. To enhance the presence of the Coordinator for the Mission *ad/inter gentes* as a significant “voice” within the Council and Provincial Team;
5. To take into account the reality and richness of the dioceses that work with Muslim immigrants, and to find ways to integrate themselves into this work and collaborate therein;
6. To incorporate the contents of the Study Days in the initial formation (next year there will be young people from the Middle East arriving in Turin for their postulancy);
7. To encourage the Sisters to become sensitive to the mission and the Islamic context through reading and personal encounters (cf. Louis Massignon);
8. To enhance local literature that helps in the dialogue with Muslims;
9. To make known the phenomenon of migration and Islam as an emerging “pastoral ministry”;
10. To organise other similar meetings;
11. To plan meetings of FMA and SDB working in Europe to reflect on ways to face the reality of Islamic migration;

12. To include the topic of Islam in the preparation for the 23rd FMA General Chapter.

## **SDB**

*These suggestions take into account the reality of each participant of the Study Days.*

### **1. What can we bring into our provinces at the operational level?**

- Educative Pastoral Project (PEPSI) and Directory of the Province: let the Provinces take into account the conclusions of the reflection of these days; let them draw up projects, and give directives in the directory during the Provincial Chapter 2012-2013.
- Dedicate time in the Provinces to contextualise the conclusions of the Study Days.
- Take advantage of the next Provincial Chapter to talk about the issue of new frontiers.
- Seek ways to participate in the commission for Interreligious Dialogue of the Bishops' Conferences (sub-Saharan Africa ...); get into direct contact with the experiences and resources of the local Church; share our own experiences.
- Organise similar meetings among the Provinces (as was already done by the 'AFO-AFW in 2010).
- Collect everything that has been shared in the various groups, especially the good practices, facts and concrete inspirations.
- Give opportunities to the participants to share in their Provinces (council, rectors, Youth Ministry Team, local communities, annual or quarterly retreats).
- Have some young SDBs specialise in dialogue with Muslims, who can guide the path of dialogue in the Provinces.
- Share the conclusions of these Study Days during the course for new missionaries.
- At the local level invite local leaders and Muslim scholars to share with us.
- Integrate the ministry among Muslims into the youth ministry of the 30 Provinces. It is important to work with the Provincial Delegates for youth ministry and other commissions.
- What importance do we give to the formation of missionary confreres? Emergencies reveal our situation of unpreparedness. We should be more informed about the possibilities of formation centres in the regions and countries - not only PISAI in Rome (e.g. Hyderabad - India...)
- Add "an introduction to Islam" in the initial formation of confreres.
- Aim at making a collection of positive experiences that encourage,

inspire or motivate confreres towards a Salesian presence among Muslims.

- The bulletin of missionary animation “*Cagliero 11*” is important. Take advantage of it, especially for the topic of our presence among Muslims. Make a special invitation to document our experiences of missionary life and concrete good practices.
- We must be careful not to be just ‘politically correct’ as per the expectations of the media, but to be ‘prophetically correct’ as Jesus wants us to be.

## **2. How can we strengthen our work through networking (among the participants, among the Provinces, in the Congregation)?**

- We need a reference point to ensure the continuity of this reflection on our presence among Muslims.
- Attach to the documents of the Study Days also a personal record of the Salesians who work among Muslims (personal profile, specific experiences) to facilitate a further journey, which may bear fruits.
- Here is a more specific request: an exchange of people and experiences, besides digital spaces. (For example, in Project Europe our mission to/with migrants is in the pipeline. In this light, we need to have a platform for sharing of information (see [www.sdb.org](http://www.sdb.org) / AGORA, a reserved area; or the Salesian Digital Library SDL, an open space).
- Exchanges and, possibly, regular meetings among the Provinces, especially between adjacent ones and more homogeneous zones.

## **3. Concrete suggestions for some provinces**

- AFW – Nigeria: Involve the confreres and communities in trying out some experiments in the North where we are not yet present (only some summer camps).
- MOR – Not to expect immediately great results from our presence among the Muslims. At times we are limited to just a few opportunities for a large number of baptisms, which may be the only satisfaction from the mission.
- INK – Promote devotion to Mary and other saints (popular devotions) as a method of initial proclamation; e.g., the shrine at Bangalore, India.
- SLK – Azerbaijan: We need to send here non-Slovak missionaries for the inculturation of the Gospel and our charism so that we become more effective in our pastoral work.
- ITM – Indonesia: It is important to help the Indonesian confreres to be more missionary.
- FIS – Mindanao: These study days may help the confreres to open up

to the mission among Muslims (to go beyond the two communities with nine confreres, which is only 10% of the province).

- AFE – Delegation of South Sudan: Sensitize the confreres of the South towards a presence among the Muslims of Sudan (in the North).

***Study Days on the Initial Proclamation of Christ  
in Africa and Madagascar***

Addis Abeba, 5-9 November 2012

### **FMA**

For the FMA the conclusions of the Study Days could be summarised this way:

1. To transmit with enthusiasm the contents of these Study Days to the whole Province, in agreement with the Provincial
2. To focus all our efforts on Initial Proclamation, during this year of faith
3. To review the aspect of evangelisation in the Provincial plan
4. To organise community moments on initial proclamation in order to carry out missionary animation in every reality
5. To insist on the quality of our personal and community witnessing, which is fundamental to initial proclamation

To give continuity to the Study Days, the FMA propose:

- a. To plan formative encounters together with the SDB and FMA participants in these Study Days in their respective Provinces
- b. To maintain contact among the participants for the sharing of reflections, contents and experiences on Initial Proclamation, through all available means of communication
- c. In the long term, to develop a basic plan for the SDB and FMA Provinces to have an event similar to these Study Days, that is, of a missionary nature, as well as an evaluation of work jointly undertaken

### **SDB**

1. **What can we take back to our respective Provinces at the practical level?**
  - a. In the area of '**Awareness of initial proclamation**' for the formation and animation of SDBs:
    - we will use the tools already available in our Provinces (Newsletter, Salesian Bulletin, Missionary animation bulletins) especially for the formation and animation of SDBs.



- we shall break down the topic of the dynamics of Initial Proclamation for each month.
  - the upcoming Provincial Chapter in our Provinces is a good opportunity to raise awareness about Initial Proclamation with some concrete suggestions on how to foster it in the different sectors of our ministry.
- b. The Year of Faith and Salesian Mission Day 2013** are opportunities to promote awareness of the importance and relevance of Initial Proclamation.
- we shall share our experiences of initial proclamation with the youth and adults in our educative and pastoral presences (parishes, oratories, social works, schools - animators, catechists, parents, teachers, educators, volunteers, missionary groups) or, prepare a celebration with Initial Proclamation as its theme.
  - the push for Initial Proclamation could be a good starting point for the missionary animation in all Provinces in the region since it attracts and stirs up a lot of missionary enthusiasm.
- c. Produce some simple materials** on initial proclamation (for the use of our lay collaborators or youth):
- possible content: What is Initial Proclamation? Presentation on how initial proclamation is done. Some simple formation materials in promoting initial proclamation both as a lifestyle and as *praxis* (break down the concepts to daily life in a very simple and practical way).
  - since we are working in many different contexts (parish, formation, social communication, rural or urban mission stations) an exchange of materials might be very helpful and inspiring.
- 2. How do we reinforce our networking on this matter among the participants, within our Provinces and in the Congregation?**
- a. Ongoing Missionary Formation:** We endorse the idea that was developed during these Study Days on the need to launch the concept of a '*Regional Centre*' for Ongoing Formation or, at least, to start the formation of a **Reflection Group** of 3 African SDBs from each language zone, who would promote a critical reflection on our African cultures and study the inculturation of the Gospel and our charism.
- We, as a group of Province Delegates for Missionary Animation, need to network with the already existing two working commissions of CIVAM (Formation - Youth Ministry) and also with the CONFORM (Ongoing Formation Commission).
- b. Networking** among the Study Days' participants could be facilitated by

- keeping in touch with one another by e-mail (as a minimum); this would encourage us to keep going.
  - as we have the internet, the best way would be to save all materials in some Province's server and facilitate access to it (upload or download through links).
  - create a BLOG of missionary animation or, possibly, create a *Facebook* page.
- c. The Radio is an important means for Initial Proclamation. It might be enriching to network among the already existing **Salesian Radio Stations**, Internet Radio Broadcasting, Radio Don Bosco (MDG), Sudan Tonj (AFE), etc.

***Initial Proclamation and Missionary Discipleship  
in America and Caribbean***

Los Teques, 20-25 November 2013

**FMA**

**The practical conclusions of the FMA could be summarised as :**

1. An initial proclamation requires, first of all, a personal encounter with Jesus and a consistent commitment to growth in one's faith. To live the initial proclamation, we need to enter into the cultural context. God is present in every culture! We need to go out to meet people, not wait for them to come to us. We need to overcome fear and other blocks; to strengthen our missionary resolve and revive the fire of missionary passion in the Province.
2. We are called to live in a permanent state of mission: may our presence, starting from our personal encounter with Jesus and with our sisters, speak to people and provoke questions.
3. Let us ask ourselves: How can we carry forward, through missionary animation, what we have learnt during these Study days? How can we be witnesses before young people? We need formation that is specifically missionary, formation that results in a growth of true convictions in the whole Institute.
4. Strengthen our work with the Salesian Family; renew our enthusiasm which, so often, due to circumstances of age or other difficulties, has become enfeebled. Renew our desire to announce the Gospel with joy, to listen to the young, to the community, to those who share the mission with us. Perhaps this is our greatest challenge!

5. Our charism is alive! Sharing our experience and giving the witness of our life are silent pre-proclamation, but are meaningful.
6. Strengthen the missionary spirit of the young during initial formation, as well as that of all the rest of us. Restudy our formation programme for initial formation, taking into consideration not only the missionary dimension of our vocation, but promoting initial proclamation also among us, the FMA. We need to welcome this experience of a personal and liberating encounter with Jesus. Live the experience of initial proclamation with young people who are in the process of vocational discernment.

**For the continuity of the Study Days the FMA propose:**

1. To integrate the reflections of these Study Days into initial formation, in the formative processes of our Provinces and in the experiences we offer to young people who are in the process of vocational discernment, in the programmes that the Province organises (monthly recollection, spiritual retreats, community projects ...); in the formation of animators and coordinators of local ministries
2. To see to the witness of our community life; to see to missionary prayer, whether of the FMA or of lay people. Benefit from the limited possibilities within our reality to accompany the young and propose new programmes as alternative responses, giving primacy above all to moments of personal encounter with Jesus.
3. To encourage a change of mentality towards initial proclamation and the universal mission of the Church and of the Institute. We need to see every single presence of ours as a “missionary house”. To educate ourselves personally and as a community to the use of the means of communication for evangelisation and not merely for our personal satisfaction. We need to evangelise ourselves and our context. To propose experiences and formation that will make us unlearn old paradigms and open our hearts to new horizons, changing a mentality that does not let us march ahead in the mission or do not promote a personal encounter with Jesus.
4. To offer profoundly missionary experiences to the young people in our Province. To run an open house, allowing young people to come in and share our life. This is a very meaningful way of proclaiming Jesus.
5. To get the provincial councilors of the FMA and SDB to provide space for formation and reflection on initial proclamation, which support concrete activities. To do pastoral work together with the SDB.
6. To promote Study Days and intercultural formation (by regions, Provinces ...) to accompany the process of inculturation in the

Province, in the areas that are home to ethnic minorities, for mutual education and help. To promote inter-sectoral formation in our Provinces. To arrive at greater synergy and to network among the Provinces. To remain in contact among ourselves to ensure continuity to what we have learnt about integrating initial proclamation into our realities.

7. To integrate the missionary dimension and ethnic identities into our curricula. To promote the inculturation of our liturgy using our knowledge of cultures and their spirituality.
8. To verify at the provincial level where we are at on the missionary front and in initial proclamation in all our institutions. We truly are in need of conversion and re-dimensioning. To make concrete proposals of formation and missionary experience (groups, volunteering, ...) for the sisters, the young, etc.
9. To strengthen the movement of Missionary Childhood in our Provinces.

### **SDB**

1. To benefit from the processes of on-going formation to help Salesians to understand and deepen the importance of initial proclamation and to live their Salesian vocation in a permanent state of mission
2. To rediscover Salesian presence in the playground as an opportunity for initial proclamation
3. To rediscover the volunteer movement as an opportunity for initial proclamation for the young and, through them, also for their families
4. To arrive at synergy among youth ministry, social communication and missionary animation in order to promote better focus on initial proclamation, above all within our youth groups
5. To invite some young people to have an experience of community life together with Salesians, as an opportunity for initial proclamation
6. To celebrate the Missionary Week or the Salesian Mission Day as an opportunity for initial proclamation
7. To promote the new experience of missionary families

## ***Initial Proclamation of Christ in the City***

Rome, 15-21 November 2015

### **FMA**

The FMAs have synthesized all the Study Days of the previous six years in this way.

1. Deepen the experience of a personal encounter with Jesus to proclaim his message, through our personal and community witnessing in a permanent missionary state.
2. Strengthen our formation in the missionary spirit together with the young people at all levels (initial formation, continuing formation and educating community).
3. Introduce into the provincial plan the missionary dimension of our vocation and evaluate all pastoral activity in this perspective.
4. Improve the quality of our missionary activity through networking with the Salesian Family and other civil and religious institutions.

### **SDB**

#### **At the congregational level:**

1. Let the whole Congregation know the relevance of initial proclamation, using existing spaces, such as: websites (sdb.org); Salesian News Agency (ANS); materials for initial proclamation (working modules); 'worksheets' found in the Acts of the Study Days.
2. Take advantage of the Salesian Family Spirituality Days to talk about initial proclamation using media tools (video clips) featuring the experience of the *Study Days on Initial Proclamation in the City*.

#### **At the regional level:**

1. Take advantage of the regional meetings of the Provincial Delegates for Missionary Animation (PDMA) to help them re-echo the Study Days in the Provinces of the Region.

#### **At the Provincial level:**

1. PDMA's will involve other Provincial delegates (Formation, Youth Ministry, Communication) for a synergy in the work of helping our confreres understand well initial proclamation, using the Salesian Bulletin, video clips and other initiatives in their contexts, eg., re-echo to the Provincial and his Council, good nights, Provincial Study Days with the Salesian Family and with all local communities using a suitable language.

## The Letter from Rome (1884)

*In this letter, so well-known in Salesian circles, Don Bosco narrates in two parts, a dream he had on two consecutive nights. The theme of the dream was the boys of the Oratory in Valdocco and its educative climate: above all the happy environment of the early years of the Oratory, and then the different atmosphere in 1884. Given the pedagogical importance of the dream, which underlines the value of the indispensable educative environment which fosters Initial Proclamation, we publish here the full text. The subtitles are ours.*

Rome, 10 May 1884

*My dear sons in Jesus Christ,*

*Whether I am at home or away I am always thinking of you. I have only one wish, to see you happy both in this world and in the next. It was this idea, this wish of mine, that made me write this letter. Being away from you, and not being able to see or hear you, upsets me more than you can imagine. For that reason I would have liked to write these few lines to you a week ago, but constant work prevented me. And so, although I shall be back very soon, I want to send you this letter in advance, since I cannot yet be with you in person. These words come from someone who loves you very dearly in Christ Jesus, someone who has the duty of speaking to you with the freedom of a father. You'll let me do that, won't you? And you will pay attention to what I am going to say to you, and put it into practice.*

### **The early Oratory in 1870**

*I have said that you are always and exclusively in my thoughts. Well, a couple of evenings ago I had gone to my room, and while I was preparing for bed I began to say the prayers my good mother taught me, and whether I simply fell asleep or became distracted I don't know, but it seemed that two of the former pupils of the Oratory in its early days were standing there before me. One of them came up to me, greeted me warmly, and said: "Do you recognise me, Don Bosco?"*

- "Of course I do," I answered.*
- "And do you still remember me?", the man went on.*
- "I remember you and all the others. You're Valfre, and you were at the Oratory before 1870."*

– “Tell me,” went on Valfre, “would you like to see the youngsters who were at the Oratory in my time?”

– “Yes, let me see them,” I answered. “I would like that very much.”

Valfre then showed me the boys just as they had been at that time, with the same age, build and looks. I seemed to be in the old Oratory at recreation time. It was a scene full of life, full of movement, full of fun. Some were running, some were jumping, some were skipping. In one place they were playing leap-frog, in another tag, and in another a ball-game was in progress. In one corner a group of youngsters were gathered around a priest, hanging on his every word as he told them a story. In another a cleric was playing with a number of lads at “chase the donkey” and “trades”. There was singing and laughing on all sides, there were priests and clerics everywhere and the boys were yelling and shouting all around them. You could see that the greatest cordiality and confidence reigned between youngsters and superiors. I was overjoyed at the sight, and Valfre said to me: “You see, closeness leads to love and love brings confidence. It is this that opens hearts, and the young people express everything without fear to the teachers, to the assistants and to the superiors. They become frank both in the confessional and out of it, and they will do everything they are asked by one who, they know, loves them.”

### **The Oratory in 1884**

At that moment the other past pupil, who had a white beard, came up to me and said: “Don Bosco, would you like to see and know the boys who are at the Oratory at the present time?” This man was Joseph Buzzetti.

– “Yes,” I replied, “it is a month since I last saw them.” And he showed them to me.

I saw the Oratory and all of you in recreation. But no more could I hear the joyful shouts and singing, no longer was there the lively activity of the previous scene. In the faces and actions of many boys there was evident a weary boredom, a surliness, a suspicion, that pained my heart. I saw many, it is true, who ran about and played in light-hearted joy. But I saw quite a number of others on their own, leaning against the pillars, a prey to depressing thoughts. Others were on the steps or in the corridors, or up on the terraces near the garden so as to be away from the common recreation. Others were strolling about in groups, talking to each other in low tones and casting furtive and suspicious glances in every direction. Sometimes they would laugh, but with looks and smirks that would make you not only suspect but feel quite certain that St Aloysius

would have blushed to find himself in their company. Even among those who were playing, there were some so listless that it was clear they were not enjoying their games.

– “Do you see your boys?”, asked my former pupil.

– “I can see them,” I replied with a sigh.

– “How different they are from what we used to be,” went on the past pupil.

– “Too true! What an apathetic recreation!”

– “This is what gives rise to the coldness of so many in approaching the sacraments, to neglect of the prayers in church and elsewhere; to their reluctance to be in a place where Divine Providence heaps every possible blessing on their bodies, their souls and their minds. This is why so many do not follow their vocation, why they are ungrateful to their superiors, why they are secretive and grumble, with all the other regrettable consequences.”

### **We miss the best**

– “I see, I understand,” I said. “But how can we bring these youngsters to life again, so that we can get back to the liveliness, the happiness, the warmth of the old days?”

– “With charity!”

– “With love? But don’t my boys get enough love? You know how I love them. You know how much I have suffered and put up with for them these forty years, and how much I endure and suffer even now. How many hardships, how many humiliations, how much opposition, how many persecutions to give them bread, a home, teachers, and especially to provide for the salvation of their souls. I have done everything I possibly could for them; they are the object of all my affections.”

– “I’m not referring to you.”

– “Then to whom are you referring? To those who take my place? To the rectors, the prefects, the teachers, the assistants? Don’t you see that they are martyrs to study and work, and how they burn out their young lives for those Divine Providence has entrusted to them?”

– “I can see all that and I am well aware of it, but it is not enough; the best thing is missing.

“That the youngsters should not only be loved, but that they themselves should know that they are loved.”

– “But have they not got eyes in their heads? Have they no intelligence? Don’t they see how much is done for them, and all of it out of love?”



- "No, I repeat: it is not enough."
- "Well, what else is needed?"
- "By being loved in the things they like, through taking part in their youthful interests, they are led to see love in those things which they find less attractive, such as discipline, study and self-denial, and so learn to do these things too with love."

**The Salesian: soul of recreation**

- "I'm afraid you'll have to explain that more clearly."
- "Look at the youngsters in recreation."

I looked, and then asked: "Well, what is special about it?"

- "You've been educating young people for so many years and you don't understand! Look harder! Where are our Salesians?"

I looked, and I saw that very few priests and clerics mixed with the boys, and fewer still were joining in their games. The superiors were no longer the heart and soul of the recreation. Most of them were walking up and down, chatting among themselves without taking any notice of what the pupils were doing. Others looked on at the recreation but paid little heed to the boys. Others supervised from afar, not noticing whether anyone was doing something wrong. Some did take notice but only rarely, and then in a threatening manner. Here and there a Salesian did try to mix with a group of boys, but I saw that the latter were bent on keeping their distance from teachers and superiors.

Then my friend continued: "In the old days at the Oratory, were you not always among the boys, especially during recreation? Do you remember those wonderful years? They were a foretaste of heaven, a period of which we have fond memories, because then love was the rule and we had no secrets from you."

- "Yes, indeed! Everything was a joy for me then, and the boys used to rush to get near me and talk to me; they were anxious to hear my advice and put it into practice. But don't you see that now with these never-ending interviews, business matters, and my poor health I cannot do it any more."

- "Well and good; but if you cannot do it, why don't your Salesians follow the example you gave? Why don't you insist, why don't you demand, that they treat the boys as you used to do?"

- "I do. I talk till I'm blue in the face, but unfortunately not everyone nowadays feels like working as hard as we used to."

- "And so, by neglecting the lesser part they waste the greater, meaning all the work they put in. Let them like what pleases the youngsters

*and the youngsters will come to like what pleases the superiors. In this way, their work will be made easy. The reason for the present change in the Oratory is that many of the boys no longer have confidence in their superiors. There was a time when all hearts were wide open to their superiors, when the boys loved them and gave them prompt obedience. But now the superiors are thought of precisely as superiors and no longer as fathers, brothers and friends; they are feared and little loved. And so, if you want everyone to be of one heart and soul again for the love of Jesus you must break down this fatal barrier of mistrust, and replace it with a happy spirit of confidence. Then obedience will guide the pupil as a mother guides her baby; and the old peace and happiness will reign once again in the Oratory."*

*– "How then are we to set about breaking down this barrier?"*

*– "By a friendly, informal relationship with the boys, especially in recreation. You cannot have love without this familiarity, and where this is not evident there can be no confidence. If you want to be loved, you must make it clear that you love. Jesus Christ made himself little with the little ones and bore our weaknesses. He is our master in the matter of the friendly approach.*

*"The teacher who is seen only in the classroom is a teacher and nothing more; but if he joins in the pupils' recreation he becomes their brother. If someone is only seen preaching from the pulpit it will be said that he is doing no more and no less than his duty, whereas if he says a good word in recreation it is heard as the word of one who loves. How many conversions have been brought about by a few words whispered in the ear of a youngster while he is playing.*

### ***Loving-kindness and Supervision***

*"One who knows he is loved loves in return, and one who loves can obtain anything, especially from the young. This confidence creates an electric current between youngsters and their superiors. Hearts are opened, needs and weaknesses made known. This love enables superiors to put up with the weariness, the annoyance, the ingratitude, the troubles that youngsters cause. Jesus Christ did not crush the bruised reed nor quench the smouldering flax. He is your model. Then you will no longer see anyone working for his own glory; you will no longer see anyone punishing out of wounded self-love; you will not see anyone neglecting the work of supervision through jealousy of another's popularity; you won't hear people running others down so as to be looked up to by the boys: those who exclude all other superiors earn for themselves nothing but*

*contempt and hypocritical flattery; people who let their hearts be stolen by one individual and neglect all the other boys to cultivate that particular one. No one will neglect his strict duty of supervision for the sake of his own ease and comfort; no one will fail through human respect to reprimand those who need reprimanding.*

*“If we have this true love, we shall not seek anything other than the glory of God and the good of souls. When this love languishes, things no longer go well.*

*“Why do people want to replace love with cold rules? Why do the superiors move away from the observance of the rules Don Bosco has given them?”*

*“Why the replacement little by little of loving and watchful prevention by a system which consists in framing laws? Such laws either have to be sustained through punishment and so create hatred and cause unhappiness or, if they are not enforced, cause the superiors to be despised and bring about serious disorders.*

### ***Let the educator be everything***

*“This is sure to happen if there is no friendly relationship. So, if you want the Oratory to return to the happiness of old, then bring back the old system: let the superior be all things to all, always ready to listen to any boy’s complaints or doubts, always alert to keep a paternal eye on their conduct, all heart to seek the spiritual and temporal good of those Divine Providence has entrusted to him. Then hearts will no longer be closed and deadly subterfuge will no longer hold sway. The superiors should be unbending only in the case of immoral conduct. It is better to run the risk of expelling someone who is innocent than to keep someone who causes others to sin. Assistants should make it a strict duty in conscience to refer to the superiors whatever they know to be an offence against God.”*

*Then I asked a question: “And what is the best way of achieving this friendly relationship, this kind of love and confidence?”*

*– “The exact observance of the rules of the house.”*

*– “Nothing else?”*

*– “At a dinner the best dish is a hearty welcome.”*

*With that my past pupil finished speaking, and I went on looking at that recreation with great displeasure. Little by little I felt oppressed by a great weariness that became worse at every moment. Eventually it got so bad that I could resist no longer, and I shook myself and woke up. I found myself standing beside my bed. My legs were so swollen and hurt*

so much that I could not stand up any longer. It was very late and I went to bed, resolved to write these lines to my sons.

*I wish I did not have these dreams, they tire me so much. The following day I was dead tired, and I could hardly wait for the hour to come to go to bed that evening. But I was hardly in bed when the dream began again. Before me once again was the playground, with the boys at present at the Oratory and the same past pupil as before. I began to question him.*

*“I’ll let my Salesians know what you have told me, but what should I say to the boys of the Oratory?”*

*“Tell them,” he said, “to realise how much the superiors, the teachers, the assistants, plan and wear themselves out for love of them, since they would not sacrifice themselves so much if they didn’t love them. Let them never forget that humility is the source of all peace of mind; let them be able to put up with each other’s shortcomings, because there is no perfection in this world, only in heaven. Tell them not to grumble because it freezes the heart. But especially, tell them to live in the holy grace of God. If you are not at peace with God, you cannot be at peace with yourself, nor with others.”*

*– “Are you telling me, then, that among my boys there are some who are not at peace with God?”*

*– “Among other reasons you already know, this is the principal cause of bad spirit. There is no need for me to tell you that you must do something about it. The one without trust is the one with secrets to guard, the one who is afraid the secrets will become known and bring him shame and trouble. At the same time, if his heart is not at peace with God he will be a prey to restless anxiety, intolerant of obedience, and get upset over nothing. Everything seems to go wrong for him and, because he has no love himself, he thinks the superiors do not love him.”*

*– “But see here, my friend; look how many go to confession and communion here at the Oratory.”*

*– “It is true that many go to confession, but what is radically lacking in the confessions of so many youngsters is a firm resolution. They tell their sins but they are always the same, always the same occasions, the same bad habits, the same acts of disobedience, the same neglect of duty. This goes on, month in, month out, even for years and some even continue in this way till they leave school. These confessions are worth little or nothing, and so they do not restore peace, and if a youngster in that state were to be called before God’s judgement seat, it would be a serious matter indeed. But in comparison with the whole group in the house they are only a few. Look.” And he pointed them out to me.*

*I looked, and I saw those boys one by one. There were not many, but in them I saw things that brought profound bitterness to my soul. I do not want to put such things in writing, but when I come back I want to have a word with each one about what I saw. For the moment I limit myself to saying that it is time to pray and make firm resolutions, with facts and not just words, so as to show that the Comollos, the Dominic Savios, the Besuccos and the Saccardis are still among us.*

*I put a final question to my friend: "Have you anything else to tell me?"*

*– "Preach to all, young and old alike, that they must remember they are children of Mary Help of Christians. Tell them she has gathered them here to take them away from the dangers of the world, so that they may love one another as brothers and give glory to God and to her by their good behaviour. Tell them that it is Our Lady who provides them with bread and the means to study, by endless graces and wonders. Remind them that they are at the vigil of the feast of their holy Mother, so that with her help that barrier of mistrust will fall which has been raised between boys and superiors by the devil, who knows how to use it to ruin certain souls."*

*– "And will we be successful in breaking down this barrier?"*

*– "Certainly you will, as long as young and old are ready to put up with some small mortifications for love of Mary and do what I have told you."*

*Meanwhile I continued to watch my youngsters, but at the sight of those I had seen heading for eternal damnation I experienced such heartache that I awoke. I still have to tell you many important things that I saw, but I have neither time nor opportunity at present.*

### ***Let the days of affection and confidence return***

*And now I must finish. Do you know what this poor old man who has spent his whole life for his dear boys wants from you? Nothing else than, due allowances being made, we should go back to the happy days of the Oratory of old: the days of affection and Christian confidence between boys and superiors; the days when we accepted and put up with difficulties for the love of Jesus Christ; the days when hearts were open with a simple candour; days of love and real joy for everyone. I want the consolation and hope that you will promise to do everything I desire for the good of your souls.*

*You do not realise how lucky you are in having come to the Oratory. I declare before God: it is enough for a young person to enter a Salesian*

house for Our Lady to take him under her special care. Let us all agree on this then: may the charity of those who command and the charity of those who must obey cause the spirit of St. Francis de Sales to reign among us. My dear children, the time is coming when I will have to tear myself away from you and leave for eternity." (Secretary's note: at this point Don Bosco broke off the dictation; his eyes filled with tears, not of sorrow but because of the inexpressible tenderness that was evident from his face and voice; after a few moments he went on.) "And so, I want to leave you, my dear priests and brothers and my dearest boys, on the road the Lord himself wants you to follow. For this purpose the Holy Father, whom I saw on Friday 9 May, sends you his blessing from the bottom of his heart.

I will be with you on the feast of Mary Help of Christians, before the statue of our loving Mother. I want this feast to be celebrated with full solemnity, and that Fr. Lazzero and Fr. Marchisio see to it that you have a good time in the dining-room as well. The feast of Mary Help of Christians should be a prelude to the eternal feast that we will all celebrate one day together in heaven.

With much love, your friend in Christ Jesus,

*Luc. Gio. Bosco*

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