







Study Days Salesian Mission in Frontier Situations and Initial Proclamation in Europe Today



Prague (Czech Republic),
November 4-10, 2010



Salesian of Don Bosco
Department for the Missions

Daughters of Mary Help of Christians
Sector for the Missions

Rome 2013





Editrice S.D.B.
Edizione extra commerciale
Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco
Via della Pisana, 1111
Casella Postale 18333
00163 Roma

Tipolitografia Istituto Salesiano Pio XI - via Umbertide, 11 - 00181 Roma
Tel. 06.78.27.819 • tipolito@donbosco.it
Finito di stampare: giugno 2013





“Look, Here Is The Lamb Of God!”
“We Have Found The Messiah!”
“What Are You Looking For?”
“Come And See” (Jn 1, 35-42)

The Challenge of “Initial Proclamation” in Europe Today







Table of contents

Presentation	9
Introductory Talk	
<i>Václav Klement SDB, Councillor for the Missions</i>	11
Introductory Talk	
<i>Alaide Deretti FMA, Councillor for the Missions</i>	13
Knowledge of the Actual Situation of Initial Proclamation in Europe: How is Jesus Christ Proclaimed Today?-Ecclesia in Europa	20
Bible Reflection	
<i>Maria Ko, FMA</i>	22
Initial Proclamation: Towards a Shared Concept	
<i>Ubaldo Montisci, SDB</i>	32
Witness and Proclamation of Jesus Christ in the Context of Post- modern and Secular Europe: Challenges and Opportunities	
<i>From written response of participants: Fr. Flavio Depaula, SDB, Hungary, Raquel Noain FMA, Barcelona and Grasyňa Siková FMA, PLA</i>	43
Bible Reflection	
<i>Maria Ko, FMA</i>	47
Evangelisation and Witness to Jesus Christ in the Context of Post-modern, Secularised Europe: Challenges and Opportunities	
<i>Tomáš Halík</i>	58
Response to Tomáš Halík on Implications for Salesian Mission	
<i>Luis Fernando Gutierrez, SDB</i>	70
Witness and Proclamation of Jesus, in Europe, in Dialogue with the Other Christian Confessions and Other Religions	74
The Ecumenical Journey and Inter-religious Dialogue in Europe: Challenges and Opportunities	
<i>James Puglisi, SA</i>	77



Witnessing and Living the Mission in a Muslim Environment in France	
<i>Valentina Delafon, FMA</i>	82
Horizons for Initial proclamation for the Salesian Family in Europe today: Conditions, Strategy. Methodology, Content.	
<i>Maria Ko, FMA</i>	84
Horizons for Initial Proclamation by the Salesian Family in Europe Today: Conditions, Strategy, Methodology, Content	
<i>Ubaldo Montisci, SDB - Lorensina Colusi, FMA</i>	93
European Bishops on Initial Proclamation	105
Sharing Unique Experiences	
<i>Pina Bellocchi VDB - Italy</i>	108
Personal Experiences	
<i>Petr Imlauf, ASC - Prague</i>	111
Get up and Go	115
Initial Proclamation What is it?	117
Sharing the Word: Behold the Lamb of God!	120
Reach Out	124
Sharing the Gift of Faith	126
Seated in the Chariot, He was Reading the Scriptures	129
How can I Understand?	132
St. Francis De Sales: True Freedom and Initial Proclamation	135
Consecrated Life and Ecumenical and Inter-religious Dialogue	139
Concluding Remarks	143
List of Participants	145



Presentation

We present the Study Days on initial Missionary Proclamation in Europe today, relating to frontline situations of Salesian Missionary activity.

The Study Days were started with the aim of deepening the theme of initial proclamation of Jesus in Europe and discovering new possibilities for renewing missionary action in the different continents.

The theme set in motion a study-reflection regarding frontline areas of Salesian Mission and the initial Christian proclamation in Europe. By 'frontline', we mean those 'places' where the witness of the initial proclamation of Jesus is most urgently needed to offer dignity and hope to young people.

To facilitate research, study, dialogue and sharing, representatives were chosen from various European backgrounds.

The Study Days were convoked and animated by the SDB Department for the Missions, and FMA Department for Missions ad gentes with their respective teams. Two facilitators, an FMA and SDB were invited as experts.

The method used throughout the Sessions was 'Workshop method'.

To stimulate attention, reflection and challenge, the guest speakers were chosen from outside of the Salesian Family.

We publish these Acts so as to allow communities the chance to use the materials for on-going formation.

The Work we now present took place in Prague (Czech Republic) 4th – 9th November 2010.

Václav Klement, SDB
Councillor for the Missions

31 March 2013
Easter Sunday



“A Church that evangelizes must always begin from prayer, from asking, as did the apostles in the upper room, for the fire of the Holy Spirit. Only a faithful and intense relationship with God allows us to go out of our own closures and announce the gospel with ‘parrhesia’ (boldly)”.

Pope Francis
[General Audience, 22.05.2013]



Introductory Talk

Václav Klement SDB
Councillor for the Missions

In a global world where every country has become a place of mission, the universal Church feels the urgent responsibility to rediscover the dynamics behind the initial proclamation of the Gospel. Following the way traced out by most of the bishops of our continent, we are gathered here in Prague to reflect on what has already been achieved as Salesian Family in Europe. After almost two years of preparation, here we are together: Salesians of Don Bosco, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, a Salesian Cooperator and a Volunteer of Don Bosco.

Tackling the theme of initial proclamation of Jesus, means for us Salesians to question the missionary action of the Church and of the Congregation: it is a crucial question for the new evangelisation.

I propose a list of elements that make up the complex mosaic of initial proclamation of Jesus in Europe:

- A humble, realistic recognition that we are a minority in a society that is not so Christian or a post Christian society with all the opportunities and challenges that this entails;
- Future Catholic communities in Europe are growing, thanks to the influx of Christian immigrants arriving daily from other continents;
- The need to address dialogue and interact with post-Christians, non Christians and youth who are indifferent or have no contact with our environments;
- The need to confirm the importance of the family - family pastoral care as a privileged place for initial proclamation of the Gospel;
- The young people of the latter generations have grown up with no traditional links that transmit the faith: family and Christian parish community;
- A deep conviction that only a missionary Church will have a future in Europe;
- Ability to share experience of God with others.



Why are we in Prague? Some of the Main challenges that affect the Church in Europe can be found here. It is considered by many to be alien to the Gospel because of its western type of secularisation, and the influence of communism present in the social, cultural situation of the country.

The Church cannot live without sharing the faith with all, especially with non-Christians. This is a current theme, tackled by several European bishops: they invited Christians not only to contribute to the new evangelisation of Europe but to continue to contribute to the mission *Ad Gentes* of the universal Church. They ask not only for a personal proclamation of Jesus Christ but also for a contribution to the evangelisation of European culture in every field, especially with regard to the youth scene and in schools where we have a privileged mission.

As Salesians immersed in our youth mission, we often lack time to reflect on our action and convictions. These Study Days give us the chance to reflect together honestly, on our mission of evangelisation in Europe.

We hope to offer the fruit of our reflection and our intuition to the many communities in Europe, where around 6,500 Salesians are still present.

I entrust our stay here to Mary, Mother of the Church, who was present in the Cenacle with Jesus' disciples before the first Pentecost.

*Mary, Mother of hope, walk with us!
Teach us to proclaim the living God;
Help us to witness Jesus our only Saviour;
Help us to serve our neighbour,
To welcome those in need,
To work for justice,
To strive passionately
to build a more just world;
Pray for us that we may live our life
sure that God's plan will be fulfilled.*



Introductory Talk

Alaíde Deretti, FMA
Councillor for the Missions

Dear brothers and sisters,

We are about to begin our days of reflection on the *Salesian Missions in frontier situations and the initial Christian proclamation in Europe today*.

“Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, Who do people say that the Son of Man is? And who do you say that I am?” Mt 16, 13-20

Two interesting questions that show what Jesus is interested in. He is curious to know public opinion in his regard and what his disciples think. Two questions that arise within a concrete context: Caesarea Philippi.

I think that these and similar questions will inspire us and accompany us throughout these days.

In a Europe becoming ever more postmodern, ever more pluralistic in culture, religion and intellectual and human awareness, what can be said about Jesus of Nazareth? In the metamorphosis that has been underway in Europe already for some centuries, and that continues today due, in part, to the great migration phenomena, is there any space for a new witness and initial proclamation of Jesus? Is the God of Jesus already playing a significant role in building up a new Europe? Are the men and women of today interested in seeking meaning, truth, eternal life? If yes, under what conditions?

Many authors affirm that the crisis today is not about faith but about form. In fact, we are witnessing the end of a certain style of Christianity. These are all interesting questions that arouse new curiosity.

In the scenario of epoch-making change, in which we all play our part, Jesus asks each person: What do you say about me?

As our existence here and now evolves, what new meaning in life do we discover in him?



The person of Jesus and his message of freedom and hope touch us deeply. Our faith in him and our trust that he is renewing our life and the lives of others, provokes us. To be able to give reasons for our faith and hope, in a language that the people among whom we live can understand, means giving preference to real life with its daily ups and downs.

Perhaps we need to be born again like Nicodemus to discover the breath of the Spirit, God's surprise, within the various, mysterious ways that he shows interest in us.

"Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above (...) What is born of the Spirit is Spirit (...) The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit". Jn. 3, 3 and 8

We realise that in past years we have taken knowledge of Jesus for granted; family, environment, school, parish, pastoral action and catechesis all presupposed such knowledge. Today, there are writers who consider the proclamation of Jesus as the forgotten link in the chain. Now we are faced with the second and third generation after '68 who do without God because no one has ever made him known to them and before young immigrants belonging to other religions or beliefs, so we need to be reborn to hope and to the God of surprise. We need to have small Christian missionary communities who live, discovering the signs of the times, reflecting on the initial proclamation of Jesus so as to tell who they are through gestures and words (cf. *EE*, n. 46, 50).

Today in many churches and diocesan communities there is a greater awareness of this urgent need as you will have seen during your research.

Throughout history, thanks to its Christian tradition, Europe has carried forward, often amid ambiguity and contradictions, the theme of the laity, of liberty, of closeness and solidarity with strangers, with the poor. A history that is even more significant when we consider the lives of Christian missionaries who have left Europe to go out to the whole world during the twenty centuries of Christianity. Missionary audacity marks the story of the Church in Europe and in our Salesian family.

At the same time however, we encounter a movement toward the stranger, those different to us: the phenomena of protected areas at local,

regional and national levels, of minority cultures and languages. In this sense Europe has always been a great mosaic. In our provinces in Europe, and here I refer to the FMA, our sisters experience this phenomenon; many consider themselves self sufficient, self referential, suffering in their own flesh the struggle to open themselves to the 'others', to accept them as equal; to feel the need to give and receive that word which invites us to discover what has been sown in the secret of each person. It is within this existential space that we want to propose the initial proclamation of Jesus.

We know through our faith that the Spirit is at work in European soil, though thistles and thorns appear, and often it seems like night time. The call to be signs of God's love must start from the European reality and no other. At times because of the great scandals in the Church, even recently, we are tempted to put our head under our wing and wait for better times. But these will not come because our Christian existence is here and now. The Europe that we live in is our Galilee of the gentiles, where God has placed us: GO and he is waiting for us. We stand before a mystery of grace, gift and responsibility.

Here we have representatives from western, central, and north and south of eastern Europe, to dialogue and share about the initial proclamation of Jesus today, in the European context.

We chose to have a small group to facilitate dialogue and discussion. The topic has required prayer, research, reflection and discernment. It is in this perspective that we want to live these days of discovery together, letting ourselves be surprised by the presence of the Spirit of the Lord within the concrete reality of life in Europe, full of challenges and yet, bearing much hope.

At the beginning of our initial proclamation of Jesus in Europe today we want to cover the following:

- ✓ from the point of view of the incarnation: the centre of the annunciation, Jesus of Nazareth, God with a human face, the most surprising sign of God's love (cf. Eph 3,18-19). He witnessed and proclaimed that God is in constant relationship with humanity and the cosmos. He has made visible God's mission.
- ✓ a Church that is constantly reborn when it allows itself to be urged by the Spirit towards 'others', towards the new frontiers of mission. A

church formed of small Christian communities that tend towards communion; people on a journey, open to dialogue and service to the poor, making herself poor, a pilgrim church, sharing in God's mission (cf. LG, AG1; RM 1,4.7.22.23,32)¹.

This Church reborn in Vatican II is becoming more and more aware that God's mission cannot be carried out alone. We know through tradition² and faith that God continues to work today in a surprising and unknown way, through his Spirit, a saving, freeing presence in the world "in the hearts of men and women of good will"; grace works invisibly, affirms la GS (n. 22, RM 6,10, 28; 56).

God is involved in history and therefore there are visible signs of his action. This is the reason for our positive attitude of confidence and hope in human existence, in the experiences of individual persons, the concrete situations of young people, 'the others', different in faith, culture, human life experience, history and learning. And this is not all, this reality calls for new persons, with a more personal, adult faith that can discern and confront others critically, so as to perceive the signs of God's action.

During these days the centre and priority of our sharing is the initial proclamation of Jesus. This priority will be taken in relationship to and interdependent on the other aspects of mission. The proclamation cannot leave aside the commitment to form Christian community in a process of inter-acculturation of the Gospel, commitment to justice, peace, inter-cultures, people's rights, inter-religious dialogue and reconciliation among persons and peoples. The mission of the Church today is multi-dimensio-

¹ "The Church certainly cannot abandon the foundational experience of Jesus Christ, Word Incarnate, Son of God who came into the world for the salvation of all. The Church because of her vocation, feels the obligation to proclaim Jesus Christ as Saviour. At the same time however, a Church that lives in a pluralist world, cannot ignore the work of the Spirit of God in all human beings, in all cultures and religions" G. KARAKUNNEL, in *Cristologia e missione oggi*, Urbaniana, Roma 2001. (*The translation of the English text is of the FMA Mission Department*)

² Irenaeus speaks of Jesus and the Holy Spirit as two hands of God. This means that God is the bridge in direct relationship with the world both in Christ and in the Holy Spirit. God is involved in the history of the world through the work of the Holy Spirit and the incarnation of his Son.

nal because it is traversed by many different, similar and interdependent elements.

Besides, we know that the witness and proclamation of Jesus are inseparable. The first means of evangelisation, wrote Paul VI, is the witness of an authentically Christian life (cf. EN 41); the proclamation, we read in the document “Dialogue and Proclamation”, is the foundation, centre and vertex of evangelisation. As for Jesus, his mission was characterised by word and deed, which clarified each other. His parables and teaching were prophetic pronouncements that often contradicted the wisdom and religious practice commonly accepted at that time; his healings and exorcisms were parables in action, his practice of including among his disciples, and welcoming at table, those who were on the margin of society was a powerful witness to the validity of his teaching (cf DA 56-57).

The act of proclaiming, like that of witnessing to the person and message of Jesus, be it personal, individual, community or institution, must take the real context seriously. The history of the missions shows the need to narrate and communicate faith in Jesus with the new understanding and new requirements of our times and of different geographical, cultural areas. When Arius questioned the divinity of Jesus, the proclamation of the Gospel needed to underline that he was, in fact, God Incarnate. During the crisis of the reformation, it was necessary to stress a conception of salvation that did not depend on man’s works but on the grace of God. In the time of colonisation and exploitation, the Gospel needed to express a clear word on the humanity of all people. In the time of globalisation, the Gospel must recognise the human values in cultures and in local contexts and take a decided stand for justice, with the victims.

In a post-modern world, particular attention must be given to the proclamation of Jesus as sole true saviour of the world, despite the real validity of other religious paths.

In a repressed world, attentive to human rights and aware of the truth of religions, we can be tempted to play down the prophetic tradition of initial proclamation of Jesus, contenting ourselves with hidden, private witness, that can end up espousing the cause of post modernity, a consumer society and the capitalist game; on the other hand divesting faith

in Jesus of Nazareth of any real significance. When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth? (cf. Lk,18,8)

Also, in a world marked by growing religious violence, by new religious phenomena, some sectarian and nebulous, we can be tempted to choose a type of witness and proclamation of a strong, over-powering, presumptuous Jesus, and disregard the values of tolerance, lay status, freedom and dialogue that the modern age has left as a precious heritage. We cannot reduce the context of Europe today to the prism of secularism and relativism.

The mission of witnessing and proclaiming Jesus must be through dialogue, whatever the cost, because in the end this is the way to participate in the dialogue-nature of the Triune God, in his mission for man and woman. It must also be prophetic because there is no real dialogue when the truth, Jesus of Nazareth, is not expressed and articulated clearly and without compromise.

The Church in Europe, proclaiming and witnessing Jesus and the Father's kingdom in prophetic dialogue that is both audacious and humble, will be creatively faithful and meaningful, even if a minority. It will truly be "salt and light". At the same time we are convinced that operating in a new way to proclaim and witness Jesus through education and the occasions of daily life, in dialogue with the social, cultural and religious situations of youth and adults, is a contribution to the declining Preventive System in Europe, and making it more in touch.

Now, we have the joy and the task of interpreting, of understanding what God is saying through the words and conversations of the men and women of Europe: what do the people say about me? And what words can we use to communicate Jesus, the eternal Word of the Father, and the kingdom he came to reveal with words and deeds? To discover God's gift in others and offer them what we have received is, in short, a reciprocal witness and proclamation.

The task of initial proclamation is at once a grace and a responsibility. We shall tackle it in continuity with Christian tradition; hence we must know the documents of the Universal and diocesan Church, the experiences of individual people and of the institutions we are acquainted



with, starting from our own Salesian educational practice at home or in frontier situations, trying, however, to avoid abstractions and paths already well-trodden³.

125 years ago, in a dream, Mary showed Don Bosco how to walk new paths, listening to the Spirit within life situations, for the joy and hope of Europe, especially for the most needy young people.



³ Speaking of new signs of hope, Fr. Mauro Johri OFM, Cap., in the Meeting of Superior Generals affirms: "I am very pleased to know that, here and there my confreres are working hard to get out of the stagnant situation. I refer for example to the Capuchin Franciscan Festival of Emilia Romagna, last autumn, during a weekend, they proposed to celebrate it in the Reggio Emilia's Square. (...) So did the Franciscans of Poland on the occasion of the 8th centenary celebration of the *Proto Regola*: they went to the squares and then two by two they went around to the people speaking to them about Jesus. The first fruit of their gesture was to discover that it is still possible that there are people who are willing to listen to them".



Knowledge of the Actual Situation of Initial Proclamation in Europe: How is Jesus Christ Proclaimed Today?: Ecclesia in Europa

no. 46 “In various parts of Europe *a first proclamation of the Gospel is needed*: the number of the unbaptised is growing, both because of the significant presence of immigrants of other religions and because children born into families of Christian tradition have not received Baptism, either as a result of the Communist domination or the spread of religious indifference. Indeed, Europe is now one of those traditionally Christian places which, in addition to a new evangelisation, require in some cases a first evangelisation.

The Church cannot shirk the responsibility of making a courageous diagnosis which will make it possible to decide on appropriate therapies. In the «old» continent too, there are vast social and cultural areas which stand in need of a true *missio ad gentes*”.

no. 48 “Proclaiming the Gospel of hope calls for steadfast *fidelity to the Gospel itself*. The Church’s *preaching*, in all its forms, *must be increasingly centred on the person of Jesus (...)*. If our hope is to be true and unshakable, “an integral, clear and renewed preaching of the Risen Christ, the resurrection and eternal life” must be a priority for pastoral activity in coming years”.

Although the Gospel to be preached is the same in every time, *this preaching can be carried out in different ways*. All are called to “proclaim” Jesus and their faith in him in every situation; to “draw” others to the faith through models of personal, family, professional and community life which reflect the Gospel; “to radiate” joy, love and hope, so that many people, seeing our good works, will give glory to our Father in heaven (cf. *Mt 5:16*) and be won over; to become “a leaven” transforming and enlivening from within every expression of culture.

no. 50 “Europe’s cultural and religious situation today calls for the presence of Catholics who are adult in their faith and for missionary

Christian communities who testify to God's love before all mankind". The proclamation of the Gospel of hope thus implies a concern to *foster the movement* from a faith supported by social tradition, important as this is, *to a more personal and adult faith*, one marked by knowledge and conviction.

Christians are therefore "called to have a faith capable of critically confronting contemporary culture and resisting its enticements; of having a real effect on the world of culture, finance, society and politics; of demonstrating that the fellowship between Catholics and other Christians is more powerful than any ethnic bond; of joyfully passing on the faith to new generations; and of building a Christian culture ready to evangelise the larger culture in which we live".

no. 54 "The duty of fraternal and committed *ecumenical cooperation* also emerges as an irrevocable imperative".(...) "evangelisation and unity, evangelisation and ecumenism are indissolubly linked".

no. 55 As is the case with the overall commitment to the "new evangelisation", so too proclaiming the Gospel of hope calls for the establishment of a profound and perceptive *interreligious dialogue*, particularly with Judaism and with Islam. «Understood as a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment, dialogue is not in opposition to the mission *ad gentes*; indeed, it has special links with that mission and is one of its expressions».



“Look, here is the Lamb of God!”
“We have Found the Messiah!”
“What are you Looking for?”
“Come and See”

(Jn 1, 35-42) *Biblical Reflection*

Maria Ko, FMA⁴

Premise

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Church in Europe*, Chapter III, Proclaim the Gospel of Hope, the urgent need for a “initial and renewed” proclamation is affirmed. At the end of this charter there is an energetic and warm invitation to the whole Church in Europe.



Church in Europe, enter the new millennium with the Book of the Gospel! May the conciliar exhortation “to learn” the surpassing knowledge of Christ «(Phil 3, 8) be welcomed by all the faithful through the frequent reading of the Sacred Scriptures. “Ignorance of the Scriptures, in fact, is Ignorance of Christ”» (Dei Verbum 25). May the Holy Bible continue to be a treasure for the Church and every Christian: in the careful study of the Word we find nourishment and strength to carry out our mission every day. Let us take up this Book! Let us accept it from the Lord who continually offers it to His Church (cf. Rev 10, 8). Let us devour it (cf. Rev 10, 9), so that it may become our very life. Let us savour it thoroughly: can we expect hardships, but it will give joy because it is sweet as honey (cf. Rev 10, 9-10). We shall be filled with hope and capable of sharing it with every man and woman we meet on our way (no. 65).



⁴ KO Maria Ha Fong, FMA is a professor of Sacred Scripture at the Pontifical Faculty of the Sciences of Education “Auxilium”, Rome.



The Bible must be the fruitful root, the inexhaustible source of newness, the sure frame of reference for our reflection on *“Salesian mission in frontier situations and the initial Christian proclamation in Europe today”*.

We are not considering the “initial proclamation” from a simple temporal point of view but as the foundation statement that touches the depths of our existence and affects the whole human person; a proclamation that leads to faith, to a radical life orientation. Therefore we need to think of the “initial proclamation” in a prophetic light rather than from a didactic or strategic position; we need to discover the strength of the “initial proclamation” and return to it every time we are searching for meaning.

Let us open the sacred book to learn from Jesus how to bring about the “initial proclamation. Let us read the Gospel of John: in the first chapters we contemplate Jesus who attracted the first disciples and accompanied them from their first timid approach in following him (Jn 1,35-42) to others. Let us listen to the words of Jesus in his meetings with different types of people: an authoritative Jew, Nicodemus, an ordinary woman of Samaria, living a questionable life style, and a pagan functionary of the king (Jn 4,47-52). We discover with surprise the beauty of God’s love that reaches out to all his sons and daughters, in a way that suits each one.

Let us move on from Jesus to the early church. Let us pause at the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, narrated in lively fashion by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles (8,26-40). Here we contemplate how the Holy Spirit assisted the church in her first steps toward the world and how He taught the first missionaries how to go about the “initial proclamation”.

May the Word of God enlighten our minds and warm our hearts so that we become sensitive to listening to what the Spirit is telling us as Church and Salesian Family today. “Look, here is the lamb of God!” – “We have found the Messiah!”. “What are you looking for?” – “Come and see”. Jn 1, 35-42

John’s account of the vocation of the first disciples, reveals also the “initial proclamation” of Jesus to mankind. The episode is very different

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

1. Composition

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[35] The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples [36], and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed: “Look, here is the lamb of God!”. [37] The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. [38] When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them: “What are you looking for?”. They said to him “Rabbi”, (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?”. [39] He said to them, “Come and see”. They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon.

[40] One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. [41] He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated ‘Anointed’). [42] He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated ‘Peter’).

2. A chain attraction

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

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

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

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

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

3. A chain motion

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

As we cannot meditate on the whole passage, we shall focus our attention on Jesus’ words: “What are you looking for?”, “Come and see!” These are the first words of Jesus in the Gospel of John and represent a

sort of initial proclamation made by Jesus himself. “Come and you will see!” is also the word proposed in the 2011 Strenna to the whole Salesian Family⁵.

4. What are you looking for?

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

Jesus presents himself as Wisdom, as expressed in the Old Testament: “Wisdom is radiant and unfading, and she is easily discerned by those who love her, and is found by those who seek her. She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her ... she goes about seeking those who are worthy of her, and she graciously appears to them in their paths and meets them in every thought (Wis. 6,12-14.16).

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

The Congregation for Consecrated life, in the text: “The service of authority and obedience” that has as leitmotiv the search for God, cites Jesus’ question to his first disciples and comments: “In this question we can read other radical questions between the lines: What is your heart

⁵ Speaking of the meeting of Jesus with the rich young man, John Paul II commented: “It is more likely that the attractiveness of the person of Jesus had prompted within him new questions about moral good” (*Veritatis splendor* n. 8). In the same way the Pope laid emphasis on the attraction of Jesus, affirming that pastoral vocation aims at presenting “the attraction of the person of the Lord Jesus and the beauty of the total gift of self for the sake of the Gospel” (*Vita consecrata* n. 64).

seeking? What are you concerned about? Are you seeking yourself or the Lord your God? Are you following your own desires or the desire of him who made your heart and wants it to be fulfilled as he knows it can be? Are you running behind passing things or are you seeking the One who does not pass? (no. 4).

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

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

Did Jesus let them find him? Not always.

To those who seek him for their own purposes, Jesus reacts with a clear refusal. When the disciples, faced with the hassle of the inhabitants of Capernaum, tell Jesus: “Everyone is searching for you”, Jesus ironically responds: “Let us go to the neighbouring towns so that I may proclaim the message there also, for that is what I came out to do” (Mk 1,36). Jesus avoids every effort to cling to him, he refuses those who try to possess him, to make him fit into their mind set. He opposes those who want to

restrict the universal horizons of his mission, reducing him to a cheap healer, a country magician.

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

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

Often Jesus responds with a tremendous surprise gift, an answer that goes way beyond the request. He doesn’t only “fulfil” expectations, he goes beyond, he doesn’t just satisfy the search for him but transcends it, he lets us find him in an original way, beyond anything we can think of, greater and more beautiful than man dares to dream.

Climbing a tree, Zaccheus “was trying to see Jesus”, but Jesus gives him the great surprise of going to his house. In reality it is not Zaccheus who is seeking Jesus but Jesus who is looking for Zaccheus, because “the Son of Man came to seek out and save the lost”. (Lk. 19, 10). The woman with a haemorrhage who timidly and secretly tried to touch Jesus’ garment, received healing and public praise.

Toward the end of the Gospel we find Jesus posing the same question. He is facing Mary Magdalene in front of the empty tomb: “Why are you weeping?” “Whom are you looking for? (Jn. 20, 15). Mary was looking for his dead body, instead she finds he is alive! The questions “What are you seeking? and whom are you seeking?” embrace the whole Gospel.

5. Come and you will see

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

The initial proclamation made by Jesus inspires our initial proclamation, as John Paul II wrote: “The initial proclamation has a central role that cannot be substituted, because it introduces us into the mystery of God’s love, which calls us in Christ, to form a personal relationship with God” (*Ad Gentes* 13) and “opens the way to conversion” (*Redemptoris missio*, no. 44).

The two disciples agree to begin this process and John concludes the first meeting with the words: “they came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day”. Here we have an interesting change of perspective: from the place where Jesus stays to the place where the disciples stay. They wanted to know where Jesus was staying; now Jesus himself becomes their dwelling place. The “Come and see” for Jesus, is not an external movement but an inner dynamism, a remaining in him in communion of life and love. Later, Jesus exhorts: “Abide in me as I abide in you” (Jn. 15, 4-5), and promises: “Whoever serves me must follow me,

and wherever I am, there will my servant be also” (Jn. 12, 26); “I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also” (Jn. 14, 3).

There is still another point to underline. “To see Jesus” means also “to see the Father” (Jn 12, 45; 15, 18), the one who remains in Jesus, remains in the Father, because he, the Son, dwells close to the Father’s heart (Jn. 1,18).

This remaining with Jesus and in Jesus, becomes for the disciples an inexhaustible inner resource for their life and mission. Remaining constantly in him like the branches on the vine, and letting themselves be penetrated always more intimately and deeply by him, the disciples live. Those who abide in me and I in them, bear much fruit (Jn. 15, 4-5). The evangelist does not tell us what the disciples actually saw, he reports the dialogue they had with Jesus once they had gone after him and then the result of the meeting: “We have found the Messiah!”. The “Rabbi” at the beginning of the episode has become the “Messiah”, seen, experienced, loved, and now he must be proclaimed to others.

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

At the end John notes: “It was about four o’clock in the afternoon (The Greek text says the tenth hour). Perhaps this is a personal remembrance. We tend to remember exactly the time of strong moments of love in our life. But the sentence can also have a symbolic meaning to indicate fulfilment (10 is a perfect number). In Hebrew terms, it is used to mark the end of the day. The two disciples reach the end of that day and begin a new one after their meeting with Jesus. Their life now has a new meaning, a new quality, a new vision and a new orientation guided by a new love.



Initial Proclamation: Towards a Shared Concept

Ubaldo Montisci, SDB⁶

At the end of the first and second day, the facilitator P. Ubaldo Montisci, referring to various Church documents and gathering the findings of the group, offered a first approach to Initial Proclamation; this gave participants a common ground for continuing their research and reflection.

(Comment to power point of Ubaldo Montisci, SDB)

Concept of Initial Proclamation

It is possible to distinguish two main ways of understanding initial proclamation: as an ecclesial “style” and as a concrete evangelising practice.

1. Initial Proclamation as an ecclesial “style”

Initial Proclamation may be understood as an institutional and collective attitude of the Church in all its public events that, while not wishing to be so, are the image and the “initial proclamation” that the world receives, and which must be treated specially in frontier situations and in meeting with reality, people and situations outside the usual channels.

[Slide-1] Initial Proclamation Towards a Shared Understanding.
The first important step is to agree on a correct meaning of Initial Proclamation.

⁶ Lecturer in the department of catechetics of the Salesian Pontifical University, Rome.



[Slide-2] My presentation is divided in two important points

1. Reference to documents of the Church
2. Current theoretical reflection

2. Reference to documents of the Church

Before proceeding, it seemed opportune to define in depth the concept of Initial Proclamation, to recall briefly the evolution of the broader concept of “evangelisation” which, since Vatican II, has had heterogeneous interpretations.

[Slide-3] It is possible, in fact, to identify two different ways of understanding evangelisation from the two important documents of the Magisterium of the Church: *Ad Gentes* (1965) and *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975). Both have new developments for contemporary reflection⁷.

[Slide-4] In the Conciliar Decree *Ad Gentes*, the missionary action of the Church is made up of four distinct stages: a) testimony of life, dialogue, and charity; b) evangelisation and conversion; c) catechumenate and Christian initiation; d) formation of the Christian community⁸.

In this perspective, evangelisation is presented as a specific “moment” of the missionary action of the Church. It is precisely, the action aimed at arousing conversion and the first act of faith, that precedes entrance to the catechumenate (*AG*, n. 7).

⁷ On the concept of “evangelisation” we could understand, for example: P.-A. LIÉGÉ, “Evangelisation”, in: G. JACQUEMET (Ed.), *Catholicisme hier aujourd’hui demain*, vol. IV, Paris, Letousey et Ané, 1956, coll. 755-764; D. VALENTINI, “Evangelizzazione (+ Supplemento)”, in: G. BARBAGLIO - S. DIANICH (a cura di), *Nuovo Dizionario di Teologia*, Roma, Paoline, 1982, 470-490; 1978-1985; D. VALENTINI, *Autocomprendione di Chiesa, impegno di evangelizzazione e profezia. Breve lettura del Vaticano II e della vicenda postconciliare in prospettiva del Terzo Millennio dell’era cristiana*, in “Salesianum” 49 (1987) 3-63; F.-V. ANTHONY, «Evangelization: Growing Understanding of a Complex Process», in: F.-V. ANTHONY (a cura di), *Seguire i percorsi dello Spirito. Studi in onore del prof. Mario Midali*, Roma, LAS, 1999, 197-214.

⁸ Cfr. *AG*, Chap. II. Mission Work itself, n. 10-18.

[Slide-5] The document *Evangelii Nuntiandi* revealed a major turning point in the definition of evangelisation. It shows a clear mission orientation, offering a wider concept of evangelisation. It defines it as “a complex process made up of varied elements: the renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entry into the community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiative” (EN, n. 24).

Therefore, evangelisation is identified with the very mission of the Church. Every ecclesial action can and must fall into this category. The text, conscious of the wide significance of the term, expressed it this way:

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

In conformity with EN, the General Directory for Catechesis, states that “evangelisation must be viewed as the process by which the Church, moved by the Spirit, proclaims and spreads the Gospel throughout the entire world” (DGC, n. 48)⁹.

Along the same lines the recent, **Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelisation** (2009), gives the term a very rich meaning saying: “The term *evangelisation* has a very rich meaning. In the broad sense, it sums up the Church’s entire mission [...]”. In any case, evangelisation does not only mean to teach a doctrine, but to proclaim Jesus’ words and actions, above all being an instrument of his presence and action in the world¹⁰.

EN contributes more than any other document to a deeper understanding of evangelisation. But, paradoxically, it is also the reason for the

⁹ To deepen the meaning of evangelisation, cfr. Francis-Vincent ANTHONY, «The Concept of “Evangelisation” in the General Directory for Catechesis», in: G. CHOONDAL (ed.), *Introducing the General Directory for Catechesis*, Bangalore, Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2004, 39-51.

¹⁰ CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelisation*, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007, n. 2. For a brief presentation of the above Doctrinal Note, cfr. Angelo AMATO, *Alcuni aspetti dell’evangelizzazione. La Nota della Congregazione per la Dottrina della fede*, in “Catechesi” 78 (2008-2009) 2, 3 -11.

difficulties in interpreting this word; partly because the more restricted meaning is never entirely abandoned, so the term needs to be renamed especially in the historical moment we are living in, when the action of the Church has new significance, aiming at arousing the faith in non believers and reviving it in all the baptised.

[Slide-6] Many forms are used today¹¹, but adding adjectives or prefixes (*primary* evangelisation, *pre*-evangelisation, *new* evangelisation, *re*-evangelisation) does not solve the issue but ends up multiplying terms.

Among the many expressions, the *Initial proclamation* is likely to be preferred because it is used constantly in a good number of documents¹²; it is the form most used among those roughly equal; it is given a 'univocal meaning'. Anyway, it is the term chosen by DGC (no. 51).

The first Proclamation is often used in contexts of mission **ad gentes**. However the term is also used as indispensable even among the Churches of the ancient Christian tradition (see DGC, n. 25 and 58). Though the emphasis is laid on proclamation/annunciation, however, the documents used it beyond the simple witness of a proclamation of the content of the *kerygma*; it is not reduced to some limited and occasional intervention.

Another term that was used is **first evangelisation**. It has an advantage of better expression with regard to the complexity of pastoral action, in order to help arouse the faith (which include a verbal proclamation, but also an element that is not entirely attributed to the speaking word alone), in other words it could also include all the process that goes from witnessing in dialogue of the explicit proclamation of Christ to an initial acceptance of faith. However, this expression is much more meaningful than the "initial proclamation" and, especially, it takes on a meaning that is not entirely equivalent to:

- a) Ecclesial action to help arouse the faith (*CT*, n. 19);
- b) "missio *ad gentes*" to distinguish it from "new evangelisation" (*RM*, n. 37);

¹¹ This section confront the research of Domenico RUSSO, *L'evangelizzazione e i suoi aggettivi. Precisazioni terminologiche a partire dai documenti ecclesiali*, in "Orientamenti Pastoral" 52 (2004) 8, 12-20.

¹² Among the documents we note particularly as examples: *Catechesi tradendae*; *Redemptoris missio*; *General Directory for Catechesis*; *Ecclesia in Europa*.

c) the first phase of the process of Christian initiation (*RCIA*, no. 68).

Another expression, rarely used, but associated with “evangelisation” in a strict sense, found before *EN* (DCG, n. 17) as “initial proclamation” and after *EN* (*CT*, n. 18, DGC, n. 52), is **missionary preaching**.

The Synodal document *Ecclesia in Europe* introduced a new distinction between “initial proclamation” and “renewed proclamation”. The first one is used for unbaptised persons (*EE*, n. 46), while the second is used with reference to the baptised who do not live their faith consciously (*EE*, n. 47). In this way “initial proclamation” is used specifically to the mission *ad gentes*, although it applies also in traditionally Christian territories, and “renewed proclamation” is used for the task of leading the baptised to be converted to Christ and his Gospel¹³.

Today, the term “*new Evangelisation*” is used so widely that it runs the risk of losing its real meaning. The reference point of new evangelisation is found in *Redemptoris Missio* (n. 33). It gives specific attention to people and not to individuals, it distinguishes between “*missio ad gentes*” (mission directed to the people, groups and contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not yet known and in which Christian communities are not yet sufficiently mature to be able to incarnate the faith in their own environment), “*pastoral action*” of the Church (mission directed to the Christian communities which already have adequate and solid ecclesial structures, to Christians who are fervent in life of faith and witness their commitment to the universal mission) and “*new evangelisation*” (mission directed to a situation, in which whole groups of already baptised people have lost their faith, or even no longer consider themselves as members of the Church and conduct a way of life far from Christ and his Gospel). The text of *RM* is widely quoted in the DGC, n. 58.

The final word used is *kerygma*. Its main significance is the *content* of the message that is announced, not the action of proclamation. It is rarely taken to an analogy between the two.

¹³ The author Russo observed that the expression is not well defined in the document, but it is too early to give a conclusion of its relevance. Cfr. Russo, *L'evangelizzazione e i suoi aggettivi*, 18-19.

[Slide-7] The document *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), in particular distinguished the process of evangelisation between: mission *ad gentes*, pastoral activities and new evangelisation (n. 33).

[Slide-8] The mission *ad gentes* is important in both old and new contexts: in the big cities, especially in the southern part of the world where different cultures and a “new aeropagus” exist (n. 37).

[Slide-9] Initial Proclamation is the permanent priority of mission. The Church cannot elude Christ’s explicit mandate, nor deprive men and women of the “Good News” about their being loved and saved by God. “Evangelisation will always contain as the foundation, centre and at the same time the summit of its dynamism a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ...salvation is offered to all people, as a gift of God’s grace and mercy” (no. 44). Therefore proclamation is to be done in an attitude of love and esteem for the listener, with a concrete language adapted to the circumstances, in the certainty that the Spirit is to work and establish a communion between the missionary and his hearers.

[Slide-10] Moreover, even if the missionary finds himself/herself alone in this mission, the proclamation of the good news is never a personal thing (no. 45).

[Slide-11] The **General Directory for Catechesis** distinguishes three moments in the one process of evangelisation: firstly, missionary activity, aimed at non-believers and those who are religiously indifferent; secondly, catechetical action-initiation, for those who choose the Gospel way of life or who request complete instruction and initiation; thirdly, pastoral care for believers in the community (no. 49). The document recognises that the three ecclesial actions are not separated.

[Slide-12] We have already mentioned earlier that *Ecclesia in Europe* distinguishes between the *initial proclamation* of the Gospel which is destined for non baptised people (no. 46) and a *renewed proclamation* for the baptised, but illiterate or inconsistent in practice of the faith (no. 46). The challenge, however, is not to baptise the converts, but to bring the baptised to Christ (no. 47).

3. Comparison with the experts

[Slide-13] It is possible to make a distinction between two ways of interpreting the Initial Proclamation: as an ecclesial “style” and as a concrete evangelising practice.

[Slide-14] Initial Proclamation as an ecclesial “style” of being Church

First of all, the Initial proclamation can be understood as a collective, institutional attitude of the Church in all its public appearance, which must be given particular care in difficult situations, in meeting with different reality, with people and with situations outside the usual.

The Italian Luca Bressan speaks about it, for which initial proclamation indicates a mentality and a style of self-proposal and action that the Church as an institution must take in the actual post-Christian context. Thus, “more than a practice in itself, more than an added element, with “initial proclamation” [...] I intend to indicate an organising principle, a style, a sort of paradigmatic element that describes and defines the behaviour of the Church in its totality assumed in frontier situations, in its encounter with reality, people and situations outside its usual channels”¹⁴.

The author develops the topic, outlines some guiding principles that may be useful in our discussion:

- The interlocutors are “outsiders”, i.e. non-believers or baptised who do not attend church circles regularly¹⁵. This implies a distancing from the

¹⁴ L. BRESSAN, *Quali esperienze di annuncio proporre?*, in “Notiziario dell’Ufficio Catechistico Nazionale” 36 (2007) 1, 61-68; 61.

¹⁵ In Italy the Pastoral Orientations for ten years is nearing completion: “*Comunicare il Vangelo in un mondo che cambia*” (29 giugno 2001), they distinguish two categories of recipients: “In order to imprint a missionary dynamism, we want to underline two specific levels, to which attention must be turned in our local communities. We will speak, first of all, to that which we could call a “Eucharistic community”, that is, those people who gather assiduously for the Sunday Eucharist, and particularly to those who regularly collaborate in the life of parishes; secondly, we will turn the attention to those people who are baptised, but in some way have only a sporadic connection with the ecclesial community, they run the risk of forgetting that they have been baptised and they live in religious indifference” (n. 46).

- ordinary, habitual answers, to the demands of life and of the Christian communities in the way that, till now, they are accustomed to.
- From the anthropological point of view, this style requires paying attention to the places where identity and sense of life is developed; the dynamism of Christianity makes it capable of “living the fundamental anthropological experience opening up new meanings in them” through the activation of symbolic dynamics that these experiences contain but which often remain inactive¹⁶.

For this reason Christianity will have to work for a continuous recognition of places and practices that every culture processes to express the fundamental dimensions of human life; it must then examine these practices, discover in it the ability to open up to meaning, the opening up that allows listening to the Christian message, it must know its place as an authority able to keep these practices.

From the institutional point of view, this style is an invitation to put persons at the centre, not as a simple answer to their need, through a humanising relationship because it is conceived as unique and singular. So, listening, acceptance and the relationships that develop in response to several requests, in many cases, become the starting point for a beginning or re-start of a journey of faith.

“Reread with these tools, the practice of initial proclamation presents itself as the style of Christianity which is a very unique relationship that has these elements: choosing the contexts of proximity as anthropological places where one is instructed; makes ordinary daily life as the characteristics that describe the operation, accepts the challenge of diversity and ambiguity as points of departure and possible places for the recognition of the different actors of relation; maintains a jealous guard of its memory, of the Christian difference that pushes it as a stimulus to inhabit these areas, to weave these reports. It is precisely due to these elements that Christianity can make its frontiers, its borders, a truly significant locus of initial proclamation”¹⁷.

¹⁶ L. BRESSAN, *Quali esperienze di annuncio proporre?* 63.

¹⁷ L. BRESSAN, *Quali esperienze di annuncio proporre?* 68.

4. Initial Proclamation as a concrete practice of evangelisation

[Slide-15] A second way of understanding initial proclamation is to consider it as a concrete pastoral action in everyday practice with individuals and groups. From this point of view, one of the definitions that had favourable reception from experts of this sector is the one provided by the Belgian Andre Fossion: “Initial Proclamation designates the tenets of the Christian faith in various forms, which, in determined contexts, encourage and make possible the first step in the faith among those who are far away”¹⁸.

[Slide-16] The authoritative reflection of Xavier Morlans, renowned in the Spanish context, offers the following definition of initial proclamation:

“Initial Proclamation [is] that activity or set of activities that aim to bring the nuclear message of the Gospel to those who do not know Jesus Christ, to those who having known him have gone away from him, to those who believe that they already sufficiently know him live the Christian faith as a habit, with the intention of arousing in all of them interest for Jesus Christ that would lead to an initial acceptance or a revival of faith in him”¹⁹.

This is the expression that was adopted in the “conclusions” of the XI Conference of European Bishops and Directors of UCN on “The Christian community and the “Initial Proclamation” (Rome, 4-7 May 2009)²⁰.

In this context some other elements have been indicated which are useful for our reflection. Among the most significant.

¹⁸ A. FOSSION, *Proposta della fede e primo annuncio*, in “Catechesi” 78 (2008-2009) 4, 29-34; 30.

¹⁹ X. MORLANS, *El primer anuncio. El eslabon perdido*, Madrid, PPC, 2009, 29.

²⁰ The definition is reported as: “The expression of Initial Proclamation refers to specific evangelisation actions, spontaneous or organised, carried out by individuals or groups, with the aim to propose the message of the Gospel – Risen Christ, mediator of communion with God. Those who do not know Jesus, those who have known him, yet stay away from him and those who want to know him but live in a superficial way of life, with the intention to arouse in them an interest for Jesus Christ, could convert them first and then bring them to the faith or even to awakening faith in them”. W. RUSPI - X. MORLANS, *Conclusioni*, 6; cf. the section “Catechesi in Europa” of the website www.chiesacattolica.it

By Initial proclamation we refer to one of the seven elements of the complex process of evangelisation as it has been described by Paul VI in his Apostolic *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (n. 24), as the General Directory for Catechesis (n. 47-49) repeatedly reminds us: it bears the witness with works, initial proclamation, faith and initial conversion, basic catechesis and entry into the community, reception of the sacraments, organised apostolate and renewal of humanity. “These elements may seem contradictory, or exclusive. In fact they are complementary and mutually enriching. We must always make sure that these are integrated with each other” (*EN* n. 24).

[Slides-17/22] Initial Proclamation in this definition is relative to the first steps of faith:

- It is “initial” for either party, who feels moved to undertake a path of growth in faith;
- The plural “statements of faith” means that there is no one form of initial proclamation;
- In affirming that “it makes possible” steps in faith, it stresses that we are dealing with a proposal that takes into account freedom and does not refer to a relationship of force or conquest;
- The recipients are those who, for various reasons, are foreign to the faith, they “are far away” or they have moved away;
- The expression “in determined contexts,” highlights the complexity and diversity of socio-historical situations.

It may be added that while catechesis is something organic and systematic, IP is a naturally partial experience (someone compared it to “first gear” in starting the car); it is an emblematic operation of what the Church is and what it should do, it is a communication device, an interface between the Church and the contemporary person.

Acceptance of initial proclamation has no formal visibility (liturgical, for example) but it is basically something that happens in the consciousness or interiority of the recipient, so it is sometimes difficult for those who make the proclamation to have verification. Indeed, it is part of the attitude of those who make the proclamation not to seek the immediate certainty of the results.



Conclusion

Initial proclamation although only a moment in the overall process of evangelisation has its importance as a gateway and as a permanent foundation of Christian experience: "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" (Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 1).



Witness and Proclamation of Jesus Christ in the Context of Post-Modern and Secular Europe: Challenges and Opportunities

Luca Barone, SDB and Alberto Martelli, SDB

Response from participants to the following question:

What are the challenges that are evident in post-modern, secular Europe, and what opportunities emerge for an initial proclamation in your particular context?

Challenges

Loss of sense of values
Economic crisis
Irrelevance of faith in public life
Ambivalent values at personal and public levels
Loss of identity in traditional educational institutions: family, school, church
Tension between globalisation and community identity (national and regional)
Subjectivism has taken over and the unbridled desire for freedom as giving space to instincts and personal desires
Fear and search for what is different
Mobility
Immigration
Attention to the body

Opportunities

Youth promotion
Circulation of ideas and information
Attention to the social dimension
Volunteering
Desire for the radical and search for meaning
Aesthetic sense and relational dimension of life
Adhesion to witness and particular radical forms of ecclesial life.

MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS NATIONAL YOUTH PASTORAL CENTRE - SPAIN

In Spain initial proclamation and missionary pastoral action are two choices of action that are very important for our youth pastoral intervention.

By initial proclamation we mean gospel witness by proclaiming and celebrating faith through the sacraments. By pastoral mission we mean the effort to reach out to youth in the Church, using every means to make the Christian message meaningful.

These two choices are tackled strategically at the same time.

For this kind of education to be efficacious, we need to know the stages of growth of the young people and involve the family in so far as it is the responsible subject of evangelisation.

From the point of view of Christian initiation

The Church in Europe is discovering that Christian initiation must be proposed to everyone, those who are baptised as well as non-baptised adults. Therefore the idea that Christian initiation is sufficiently guaranteed by the catechesis imparted to children and adolescents, must be overcome.

To become coherent, credible Christians requires a process of growth in awareness and freedom, in which the person and the Christian community are involved. To achieve this, adolescents and young adults need to experience God within the Church, through a systematic transmission of the content of faith and gospel ethics.

We must stress the importance of the early years of life. The child experiences God within the family and in the first contacts with the Christian community.

The National Centre for Youth Pastoral action is working along these lines, to re-define an education to faith that keeps these points in mind.

RESPONSE FROM FLAVIO DEPAULA SDB - HUNGARY

I propose a series of questions: Does God help me to live in the Church? What answers do God and the Church offer to those who are divorced, married again, unemployed ... over-dependent on some drug or whatever?

These questions may seem banal, but in Hungary, and not only there, such questions are being asked and the Church must be able to offer precise answers.

In the Hungarian context the emerging challenges call us to be present among youth and adults with the heart of Don Bosco, to be competent, to speak the language well (*conditio sine qua non*) and to present the oratory as a place where we offer various educational-evangelisation initiatives. The greatest challenge is to present the credibility of church institutions.

An essential instrument for us Salesians is the witness of Salesian community life. Some of the challenges we are called to face in our mission are: poverty, unemployment, lack of education ... A lot of attention is focused on the Gypsies because we seem unable to address their cultural needs. For example, it is almost impossible for them to frequent religious structures with people who are not part of their culture. This fact must be taken into account when we plan initiatives for initial proclamation to Gypsies.

RESPONSE FROM GRASYNA SIKOVÀ FMA - POLONIA

Some commitments to be assumed in our mission:

- Education to faith of the community of believers;
- Renewal of sacramental life through a good preparation for the sacraments and accompaniment in daily life;
- Community reading of the Word of God;
- Commitment to help the most needy in their own environment;
- Show the positive side of Christian vocation, stressing the dignity and creativity of human beings;
- Use a religious language that is existential;

- show the true meaning of the redemption of man in the person of Jesus Christ;
- promote “Schools of New Evangelisation” and new catechumen communities;

A particular challenge for the Salesian mission in Poland with regard to pastoral action and catechesis is *to put the person of Jesus Christ at the centre*.

RESPONSE FROM RAQUEL NOAIN FMA - BARCELONA

Questions

Are our agents in the field of pastoral action prepared for initial proclamation? Faced with the fragmentation of society, and a future full of uncertainty, some people seek security in religious movements. Could this search for God be an opportunity for first evangelisation?

Challenges

Create space for silence and interior life;
In catechesis, value the process more than the content;
Use simple language to speak of God;

Opportunity to share faith

Seek more personalised relationships;
Number and differences in groups;
New places to meet: in streets and squares, internet ...

The Encounter of Jesus with three Different Persons in Different Contexts

(Jn 3-4) *Biblical Reflection*

Maria Ko, FMA

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

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

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

1. Jesus with Nicodemus

[1] Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. [2] He came to Jesus at night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you are doing unless God is with him". [3] Jesus answered and said to him: "Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born from above". [4] Nicodemus said to him, "How can a person once grown old be born again? Surely he cannot re enter his mother's womb and be born again, can he?" [5] Jesus answered, "Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. [6] What is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of spirit is spirit. [7] Do not be amazed that I told you, 'You must be born from above'. [8] The wind blows where it wills, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit". [9] Nicodemus answered and said to him, "How can this happen?" [10] Jesus answered and said to him, "You are the teacher of Israel and you do not understand this? [11] Amen, amen, I say to you, we speak of what we know and we testify to what we have seen, but you people do not accept our testimony. [12] If I tell you about earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? [13] No one has gone up to heaven except the one who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man. [14] And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, [15] so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life".

"Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews" (3:1): This is how John introduces him solemnly, stating his name, his religious affiliation and his social status. We see here a man of authority and of good reputation, a ruler of the Jews, which means a member of the Sanhedrin, which, for us today, is equivalent to being a member of the parliament. He was a learned man, a *"teacher of Israel"*, as Jesus himself would say during his dialogue with him. Therefore, Nicodemus was a

qualified interpreter of the law. All these prerogatives show him as a political and spiritual guide of the people, a perfect representative of Judaism, an official exponent of Jewish orthodoxy and tradition.

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

The dialogue during this meeting is the first discourse of Jesus' public ministry. Therefore it is loaded with a singular importance in the Gospel of John. In the dialogue, it is Nicodemus who says the first word, but it is Jesus who leads its unfolding. In fact, after the first affirmation, Nicodemus' speech becomes shorter and with less security as the dialogue progresses, until he arrives at total silence; while the words of Jesus, systematically introduced by the solemn expression: "*Amen, amen, I say to you*", become longer and stronger.

Already in the first expression, Jesus puts in discussion Nicodemus' security and upsets his reasoning. He speaks to him of the necessity "to be born from above", of "being born of the Spirit", and he doesn't understand these. It is immediately seen that the dialogue proceeds on two parallel

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. Jesus with the Samaritan woman

[5] So he came to a town of Samaria, called Sychar, near the plot of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. [6] Jacob's well was there. Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down there at the well. It was about noon. [7] A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink". [8] His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. [9] The Samaritan woman said to him, "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" (For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans). [10] Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink', you would have asked him and he

would have given you living water". **[11]** *[The woman] said to him, "Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the cistern is deep; where then can you get this living water? [12] Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this cistern and drank from it himself with his children and his flocks?" [13] Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; [14] but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life". [15] The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water". [16] Jesus said to her, "Go call your husband and come back". [17] The woman answered and said to him, "I do not have a husband". Jesus answered her, "You are right in saying, 'I do not have a husband'. [18] For you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true". [19] The woman said to him, "Sir, I can see that you are a prophet. [20] Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain; but you people say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem". [21] Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. [22] You people worship what you do not understand; we worship what we understand, because salvation is from the Jews. [23] But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him. [24] God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth". [25] The woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Anointed; when he comes, he will tell us everything". [26] Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking with you". [27] At that moment his disciples returned, and were amazed that he was talking with a woman, but still no one said, "What are you looking for?" or "Why are you talking with her?" [28] The woman left her water jar and went into the town and said to the people, [29] "Come see a man who told me everything I have done. Could he possibly be the Messiah?" [30] They went out of the town and came to him.*

Under the scorching heat of the midday sun, Jesus, tired and thirsty, sits beside a well (*Jn 4:5-42*): it is an evocative image. In every culture, the well is something that has a strong link with life. It protects the fresh water that gushes forth from the heart of the earth. It speaks of a gift that is humble, free and generous. It evokes the effort of drilling and of drawing. It suggests a tranquillity that is present in the mysterious depth. The well, a vital knot in any community, is also a place of encounter, the place where lives meet, where water is asked and is given, where unexpected interpersonal relationships are forged, where strangers become friends. The well is a place that is particularly important to the woman. While for men, the public plaza and the city gate are the typical places of coming together, for women, it is the well. The well offers them the possibility of social life, of exchanging news and experiences, of participation and of solidarity, of sharing the little events of everyday life: joys, sorrows, problems, worries, desires, dreams, curiosities. The well offers a free space for connecting the private with the public, personal and community life, work and leisure. In the Old Testament we find the figure of different women at the well and different encounters with the well as setting: between the servants of Abraham and Rebecca (*Genesis 24:11-14*), between Jacob and Rachel (*Genesis 29:9-11*), between Moses and the daughters of Jethro, priest of Midian (*Exodus 2:15-22*) etc.

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

Jesus doesn’t mind the offensive irony. Jesus takes the courtesy denied him as an opening for a dialogue that dispels the hatred among the two people and widens the woman’s narrow horizon: “*If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink’, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water*”. Jesus implies an

astonishing overturn of the situation. The woman, however, has difficulty in understanding. How can this unknown man give her water when he doesn't even have the means of drawing from the well? How can he dare to pretend, promising her living water, to be greater than the patriarchs who had dug this well? Even if she has not as yet overcome her doubts about this "Jew", nevertheless the woman's tone becomes lighter. She calls him with more respect: "Sir" and ends by asking him to "*give me this water*", thus inverting their roles.

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

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

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

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

As the dialogue continues, the woman asks Jesus about the real place of worship. For centuries this has been a controversial question that pitted Jews against Samaritans. It is clear that the woman is still trapped inside the old and blind schemes, from which Jesus frees her now, by drawing her attention to the newness that happens in the present: *"Believe me, woman, the hour is coming, ... and is now here"*.

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

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

3. Jesus with the royal official

[46] Then he returned to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. Now there was a royal official whose son was ill in Capernaum. [47] When he heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, who was near death. [48] Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe". [49] The royal official said to him, "Sir;

come down before my child dies". [50] Jesus said to him, "You may go; your son will live". The man believed what Jesus said to him and left. [51] While he was on his way back, his slaves met him and told him that his boy would live. [52] He asked them when he began to recover. They told him, "The fever left him yesterday, about one in the afternoon". [53] The father realised that just at that time Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live", and he and his whole household came to believe. [54] [Now] this was the second sign Jesus did when he came to Galilee from Judea.

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

The royal official arrives at faith because of his gravely ill son. He goes to Jesus urged by paternal love and desperation. It isn't a religious or moral problem that moves him. His is a human problem. He would not have understood anything of that profound discourse of Jesus with Nicodemus, nor of his dramatic dialogue with the Samaritan woman. The royal official is a simple man, with problems of everyday life, with the problem of suffering.

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

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

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

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

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

Evangelisation and Witness to Jesus Christ in the Context of Post-Modern Secularised Europe: Challenges and Opportunities

Tomáš Halík²¹

Brothers and sisters, for your meeting you have chosen a country that is considered to be one of the most secular and most atheistic countries in Europe, if not the world. Today you have invited to the microphone a priest and a theologian who has been working as a priest in this country for over 30 years: first for 11 years in the illegality of the “underground church” (when neither my own mother nor my colleagues from the civilian profession knew that I was a secretly ordained priest) and now for 20 years in the university chaplaincy in Prague. During these 20 years in this supposedly atheistic country I have brought to Church (usually after 2 years’ thorough preparation) approximately a thousand young, university-educated people through the rite of initiation. Every Sunday I preach to about a thousand listeners and every Thursday I confess a more or less growing number of people asking for the sacrament of penance.

If you have a feeling during my speech that it is full of paradoxes, it is not only because I love Pascal, Kierkegaard, Chesterton and Graham Greene, but also because my own life and pastoral experience are full of paradoxes and that the perspective of the situation from which I am speaking to you is full of paradoxes. But is Christianity not a “religion of paradoxes”?

²¹ Dr. Tomáš Halík received his education as a sociologist, philosopher and theologian. During the Communist time he was secretly ordained as a priest and worked in the religious and cultural dissent, being a close collaborator of Cardinal Tomášek. After 1989 he became Secretary General of the Czech Bishops Conference (1990-1993), a professor of philosophy and sociology of religion at the Philosophical faculty of Charles University in Prague, President of The Czech Christian Academy and a parish priest at the Academic parish of Prague. He was awarded the Cardinal König award in 2003 and the Roman Guardini award in 2010.



Please, accept a few thoughts which perhaps may sound provocative, and do it for two reasons. They first and foremost want to provoke thought and discussion and then to recall things that, as it seems to me, we often forget about, things which we do not talk and think about, or at least not in this way.

First, I would like to present two theses to you:

First: one of the tasks of the Christians today is to restore the tradition of Christian atheism.

Second: it is in the interest of Christianity to preserve the secular nature of European culture.

About the first point

In the Roman Empire, too many holy Christian martyrs were executed for their atheism (the denial of the Roman state gods) for us to carelessly abandon, forget or betray the tradition of Christian atheism. It seems to me that in front of certain gods, Christians must be “atheist” and that today, in the time of the “return of religion”, the criticism of religion is very topical – and who else should undertake this task, if not the Christians again?

The atheism of the Enlightenment tradition has long ceased to be critical, and has often become ideological and dogmatic, or even an imposed state religion – think of the “scientific atheism” of Marxism. Chesterton an old ironist, as I had already mentioned, sarcastically enumerated what one must believe in and what burden of dogma one must take on to be able to become an atheist today (in this ideological sense). If we, Christians, retained that keen criticism of religion which can be found in the Bible, with the Prophets, in the Psalms, and then with Jesus and Paul, we would not have needed to wait for Feuerbach, Marx and Freud to tell us what we read in the Bible: that one tends to deify the products of one’s own hands and imagination, and that we have to beware of such idols and idol makers. During its relatively short history, the atheism of the Enlightenment tradition got heavy, got fat, grew stupid, began to take itself too seriously, lost the spark of humour and irony which it had in those times when it (often with no reflection) still lived on Christian roots



– for example on the “carnival culture”, which was so brilliantly analysed by Michael Bakhtin. I think that angels reading the anticlerical satires of monk Rabelais must have rocked with laughter, while the textbooks of scientific atheism were probably not read in heaven, but immediately dispatched to hell as a torture instrument for sinners, condemned to a terrible punishment of endless boredom. I am afraid that even the “new scientific atheism” of Richard Dawkins and his fellows does not enrich this branch of atheism by anything really new and inspiring, but it rather mentally conforms to the object of its criticism, the fundamentalist religion of the Creationists, which Dawkins obstinately declares as religion itself.

Where did the stream of Christian atheism dry up? After Christianity – originally rather a way of life, following Christ – had become the official religion in the Roman Empire, a number of men and women dissatisfied with this development undertook quite a massive exodus to the deserts of Syria, Palestine and Egypt to set up an “alternative Christianity” there, it’s more radical version, counter-culture, which was directed not only against the Roman paganism, but also against the mass Christianity established too much in the Empire. From this counter-culture, monastic communities grew, which created a natural environment for the cultivation of Christian mysticism which then brought into theology one very important and valuable tradition – negative (*apophasis*) theology.

Therefore we can perhaps consider negative theology a legitimate heir of the authentic Christian and biblical “atheism”, defending the mystery of divinity not only against material but also intellectual and conceptual reification. Just as biblical and old Christian atheism guarded God’s freedom and greatness against the imprisonment of the Divine in wood or metal, mysticism and negative theology guarded it against imprisonment in the concepts and theories.

I dare say that modern atheism in its more interesting form represents a kind of *absolutism of negative theology*, and both lines of thought share a long way of denying statements about God and this way splits up just before the gate of the Divine Mystery. Here, modern atheism turns its back to the gate, agnosticism stops respectfully, but negative theology negates the negation, making relativism relative, leaving space so faith can enter the Mystery humbly, doing a Kierkegaardian daring somersault, a jump into the heart of paradox.

When in the 18th and 19th centuries, the ship of faith seemed to be sinking, many people changed the boats of agnosticism or atheism. During the 20th century, all solid certainties, all dogmatisms became shaky – even the ship of the dogmatic and confident atheism began to sink, and many people in Europe turned to agnosticism, which is probably the preferred way today. When existential philosophy and theology (whose predecessors were Pascal and Kierkegaard) made it possible to *believe again while questioning* ship of faith, many people embarked again (including me) and it did not check whether the passengers had brought doubt aboard (it is even assumed that it is travelling with them). The biggest movement is now on the narrow bridge between agnosticism and faith, and both groups are in doubt (unlike the confident atheists whose number, however, has rapidly declined) – but while believers believe despite their doubts, the agnostics, even though they might like to believe, stay doubtful.

Modern atheism fatefully broke away from its Christian (religiously critical) basis at the time it ceased to be truly critical, ceased to be a critique of religion in many ways analogous to negative theology and began to build up its own metaphysics, its own faith. Feuerbach with his own diagnosis of religion, namely his theory of projection, did build, as we had already mentioned, on the biblical criticism of the human tendency to deify the products of one's own hands. But his suggestion of therapy: to pull the Divine back from heaven to man, had fatal consequences: *human ego inflation*. Thereby it gave birth to that kind of humanism which became rather a grandiose narcissism – and which significantly stigmatises our secular Western culture and civilisation up to the present day.

The cultural influence of humanistic atheism (mainly due to the popularity of Freud's psychoanalysis in many fields of culture and pedagogy) was and in a certain sense in many places still is so strong that the concept of atheism has in general awareness almost become a synonym for this "religion of humanity".

For too long, theologians sought the cause of unbelief in the intellectual or moral deficits of disbelievers. They were convinced unbelievers were unbelievers because they were not able or willing to acknowledge the theological arguments for the existence of God, probably because their pride prevented them from acknowledging the authority of the revealing God or Church that authoritatively and infallibly transmitted God's

revelation. Nevertheless one may be a non believer but unwilling to accept the moral claims which the acceptance of belief would imply or one may be hiding from the light of Truth because, consciously or subconsciously, one is concealing personal sin in the darkness of delusion. For too long theologians thought that if they made the disbeliever, who would have enough abilities and good will to acknowledge at least the principles of logical thought, sit down at the chess table of disputation, they would soon checkmate his disbelief with a few proven moves.

The Second Vatican Council represented a truly revolutionary turnover in the diagnosis of the causes to atheism: it proclaimed the main culprit of atheism to be the Christians who, in front of disbelievers, not only failed to give testimony credible enough, but rather gave offence due to their counter testimony.

Then the era of Christian apology culminating in the famous confession “*mea culpa*” of Pope John Paul II on the threshold of a new millennium began. A large part of the atheist world accepts the apology of Church as a matter-of-course ritual and expects and requires it over and over again and to a greater extent, but its disbelief does not appear to be consequently doubted by that.

Christian wrongdoing could certainly be the psychological obstacle for the missionary success of the Church yesterday and can be so today. However, strictly speaking, the wrongdoings of the Christians represent an argument against bad Christians, but hardly a valid argument against Christianity, faith and God: the fact that the pilgrims are far away from their goal, that many wander in a vicious circle and others for various reasons turn their backs on the goal, does not say anything about the goal itself. Jesus did not conceal that the path of following is narrow, steep and difficult and that few people tread on it, and nowhere is it mentioned that he would only call flawless people to himself or would establish a factory for the production of saints. Moreover, the real history of Christianity is not just a story of crime, but in addition to all the scandals, it also provides enough examples of heroic following of Christ and such fruits of the life of the Church to which those who wish to remain honest cannot deny respect.

Perhaps a greater obstacle on their way towards the recognition of God than the human filth of the Christians was a certain theology and

spirituality which produced disputable and sometimes outright pathological images of God. This method of religious production equipped atheists with a very colourful pantheon of gods in which it is too easy not to believe. Sometimes I think the biggest problem with offers to the disbelievers – the thing that actually prevents them from the acceptance of God – lies in the fact *they do already have their own god* – that is the one they do not believe in. A disbeliever is usually someone who negates the idea of God which he himself had created or adopted. It is hard to talk to him about God not because the concept of God would be empty and unknown to him but because it is filled with a certain very specific idea, the idea which he refuses – and let us add: usually rightly so!

When I come across a believer who is agonised by the idea of God as a fearsome, vengeful meticulous inspector, I feel sorry for him more than for an atheist who rejects exactly such a god; but I cannot overlook the fact that even for the atheist that idea of God plays an important and similarly negative role: the same pathological picture fills his vision of God and prevents him from opening up to another concept of God. If such a person reads the Bible, he reads it through the glasses of his vision of God and reads it in such a selective way (like everyone else who already has a finished, fixed idea of God) that in this multilayered book, in which reasons for almost everything can be found with a bit of bad will and skilful reading out of context, he will find abundant material just for his God image.

Losing such faith (rather a symptom of neurosis, shrouded in a pseudo religious robe) and the resulting morality (a system of prohibitions, in fact enhancing the attractive power of the forbidden) is rather the first prerequisite for a person to open to the gift of genuine, healthy faith. Secular culture, however, tries to convince us that the only alternative to this neurotic faith is atheism because it knows no other alternative. Nevertheless atheism, which is sometimes born in response to compulsive neurotic religion, is often similarly compulsive, neurotic and spastic, which is most evident from its militant character. The militant atheism of former believers “cured from the confining straitjacket of religious dogma and rules” frequently represents an inverted copy of pathological religiousness, just another version of the neurosis from which in fact they were never liberated. These re-active antitheists are in fact

still, through the object of their hatred – this time negatively –, limited, and they often truly act as being “possessed”. I sometimes observed something similar in my clinical practice with the militant fighters against alcoholism, former alcoholics, whose convulsive militancy (and sometimes highly emotional and fanatical religiosity which they claimed cured them of addiction) was just another form of addiction, an alternative drug, a sign of the fear of the devil who, as they correctly subconsciously knew, they never actually got rid of. And unfortunately we can see a similar phenomenon with some militant anti-communists, former communists, including a few converts to Christianity, who have unconsciously placed the spirit of hatred and a black and white vision of the world from their communist past in their religious beliefs.

Looking away from the obviously pathological (harmful to humans) images of God, we still find plenty of believers and more disbelievers who are connected by *the infantile image of God*. (Believers and disbelievers in this case are divided only by the fact that one group considers *this caricature* a “reality”, while the other group considers the same idea as “just an idea”). Most often it is the image of God as a “supernatural being” who behind the scenes of the visible world deals with our claims – and then we, according to the effectiveness of his performance, decide whether to admit or deny his existence. If he operates according to our ideas, then he exists and we “believe in him” but if he fails to meet our criteria, then he “does not exist”. In relation to such a God I am fully on the side of the atheists; to my world and to the world of my faith do not belong any “supernatural beings”, and especially not such a pitiful example²². I am sorry that many people still refer to this idea of God and keep it in the game (either by believing in it or denying it), because it in my view conceals from them a serious question about

²² The concept of God as a “supernatural being” and the whole division of reality to “natural” and “supernatural” has been utterly misleading at least since those times that the enlightenment concept of nature and natural got generally established, including everything which is “real”. Thus “supernatural God”, together with Christmas Eve’s Baby Jesus and Santa Claus, can be found in the company of nixes, elves, and beheaded knights. This is aptly described by Cambridge philosopher Niklas Lash (see LASH, N.; see also HALÍK T., Noc spovědníka)

God²³. For me and my faith, such a deity is simply irrelevant – it does not concern me. If I acknowledged the existence of such a god, even if it perfectly fulfilled my requirements, I would deny the God in whom I believe – the God I read about in the stories of the Old Testament, the God whom Jesus called Father, and of whom Pascal, Eckhart, Luther, Kierkegaard, Buber and many of my other friends on the journey of faith were thinking. The God in whom I believe, unlike the God Fulfiller-of-Human-Requirements, *does not work* (and certainly not as a servant of my will), but he *exists – is what he is* (Ex. 3), not such that I wish him to be – and I am the one who is trying (however dilatorily and poorly as I admit) to fulfil His will. He is not our shadow; a creation or a projection of our imagination, it is us who are the image and creation of His creative imagination.

I would never respond to the question of “our disbelieving friends” if God exists by getting stuck in the scholastic-catechetical proofs which I consider not only ineffective but even blasphemous. The world we live in is no longer a “natural world” of the archaic or pre-modern man, and his religious experience which he probably experienced in his world is not ours. We are born into the world which is mediated to us through language, culture and technology of *our* civilisation and in such a world we will hardly have this natural, proximate (i. e. pagan) experience with divinity.

Despite that, God unquestionably exists “in our world – at least as a word in our language. (The “silent death of God in the language”, announced in the 20th century after Nietzsche harbingered the killing of God, did not arrive finally.) E. Jüng pointed out that the phrase “God is dead” was formulated not as an answer to the question of whether God exists, but to the question “Where is God?”, “Where has He disappeared?”²⁴.

So where does God exist, where can our non-believing friends meet Him? *He exists in the tales that are told about Him*. This is the heaven

²³ A poignant example is the dispute of “new atheism” with vulgar theism. If you say to R. Dawkins or to his fellow promoters of the militant “new atheism” that the God you believe in is not the Big Daddy behind the scenes of the world, you make him angry because he has already picked up a target he can hit and you are moving it. “New atheism” seems to be able to fight with its mental twin, the old Christian fundamentalism. It ignores any essentially different kind of faith.

²⁴ JÜNGEL E., *Gott als Geheimniss der Welt*.

which God lives in today. This is the heaven that is open for anyone who is prepared to “enter the story”.

To meet the God of the Bible, we need to “enter the story”, we need to do so with respect and understanding, we need to put aside much of what we carry with us. Such a burden may be a fundamentalist, “literal” interpretation of the Bible or understanding the Bible as a textbook of science or history, both of which are in fact only an uncritical application of modern positivist criteria on the text which is entirely strange to such an understanding of reality and the truth. Fundamentalism is a modern phenomenon unjustly regarding itself as “traditional” and ancient. A pre-modern man, yet not expelled by modern rationalism from the world of natural myth or poetry dealing with symbols, would never think of reading the Bible as a positivist encyclopaedia of scientific findings about nature and history.

Therefore, faith does not mean granting the text the status of an exact record of unquestionable “facts”, but exactly entering the *story* – by which the hermeneutic circle between our own story and the biblical story arises where both illuminate and interpret each other. The Bible is not “a photograph of the world” informing people what the world is like but a mirror reflecting a person, helping him to *understand himself* and thereby *change himself* and the world.

Now the second thesis: Is it in the interest of Christianity to preserve the secular nature of European culture?

At a recent International Conference on the Church in Europe, I was asked a question: who is responsible for the presence of Christianity in public life?

A question put this way suggests a rather trivial answer: Who else if not the Christians active in public life – in politics, culture, media, business and of course also church representatives who even in secular societies represent a part of civil society and the public sphere.

However, I tried to point out that especially those who profess membership in the secular group and who are sometimes referred to as laity, should have a particular interest in the presence of Christianity in

Europe. And today, with you, I would like to defend a complementary thesis: that Christians have an interest in, and should feel responsible for, maintaining the secular nature of Europe.

It seems to me that Christianity – the religion of the Incarnation – in fact has always been “syncretic”, “multiple” and was embodied into various cultures that never were non-religious. Whether it was the case of primary Jewish Christianity or Hellenistic Christianity or the later Christianity of the ancient Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Celts, Slavs, Germans etc.: even though Church tried to exterminate (but sometimes also partially baptise and integrate) the initial religious layer of the culture into which the faith embodied, it probably never stayed completely unaffected by this component.

What is remarkable is the symbiosis of traditional Christianity with a single culture in the history of humankind which seems to be secular, i.e. with European modernity now lasted approximately 200 years, with the culture which has never contained nor sought its owns “religiousness” because it has grown from the roots of Christian religion.

The Christianity in which we live in Europe today is not “pure” (as it has never been, and perhaps because of its principal “embodiment” it can never be) – but is deeply mixed with the secular Western culture. The paradox is that Christianity prevents this secular culture from becoming fully a religion. *Western secular culture is secular and non-religious to the same extent to which it is Christian.*

If, at times, the Christian element is disappearing from the European culture, this culture is not becoming atheistic but religious, religious in a non-Christian (and often anti-Christian) sense. Even its atheism then becomes a “religion”, even a “state religion”, as we have seen in the Marxist example.

It is in the interest of Christianity and Christians to preserve the secular component of European culture in its secularity, to criticise the secular trend to become a religion. By doing this, they defend the space for Christianity in Europe and at the same time they protect the real character of European culture, whose identity has lied in the compatibility of “laicism” and Christianity for several centuries.

The Christian and secular components of European culture can perhaps never merge completely, there will always be a certain tension

between them. Whether the tension will be fruitful or whether both sides will be exhausted by a war for positions depends on many circumstances. Modernity can probably never be fully Christian (not even under the pleasing slogan of “the new evangelisation of Europe”, should ever we try to implement this utopia).

Charles Taylor has showed us why Christianity cannot approach the mission oriented to today’s modernity in the same way as, for example, Father Ricci approached the enculturation of Christianity into the Asian cultures. The reason is that modernity is a culture that is basically permeated by Christianity, even though it cannot be called completely Christian. What is “non-Christian” about modernity is often not neutral and potentially open towards Christianity (as it was in the case of remote pagan cultures), but it is systematically anti-Christian. However, some deep Christian values prevailed in the modern culture only after the fall of the powerful political hegemony of “Christian institutions” and often in a struggle with them²⁵.

I am afraid that if Christianity and secularity split or if one component absolutely defeated and repressed the other, Europe would lose its commitment to the past but also its future. Whether one or the other component would win and whether one would become independent of the other, both components would end up losing in any case. I think that during their famous dialogue at the Catholic Academy in Munich, Cardinal Ratzinger and Jürgen Habermas reached a similar conclusion: secular humanism and Christianity need one another to correct their biases. We can find a similar statement in John Paul II’s Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*: faith without reason is dangerous; rationality without ethical and spiritual values springing from faith is equally biased and therefore dangerous.

We can see in today’s Christian fundamentalism and traditionalism what Christianity would look like if it really wanted to emancipate itself from the heritage of Enlightenment, from today’s secularity. What secularity and “laicism” would look like if they wanted to turn their backs to Christianity completely, we can only anticipate from the expressions of such intolerant and totalitarian ideologies as is the attempt to impose the newspeak of “political correctness” or performing the spiritual castration

²⁵ Compare TAYLOR, C., *A Catholic Modernity?*

or lobotomy of one's own culture under the slogan of "multiculturalism". (However, I think Christians shouldn't exhaust themselves when they understandably and necessarily defend themselves against these tendencies primarily in a battle for the external visible symbols of Christianity, crosses on the walls of public buildings and "invocatio Dei" in the constitution – even though I don't underestimate the role of symbols –, but they should engage themselves in the invisible sphere of hearts and cultivate thinking and the language of faith with their minds since there may arise the most necessary way of presence of Christianity in Europe: to be heard and understood, yet by a credible and competent voice in a discussion about the key moral issues of our civilisation).

Today these two disturbing trends, Christian fundamentalism and militant secularism provoke one another and by doing so they strengthen one another. One legitimises the existence of the other and so they not only keep each other alive but they cause each other to become radical with their constant conflicts. Even if both of them declare the necessity of eradicating the other, they are indispensable to each other; extremists cannot live without their enemy. They are both correct by declaring the other as dangerous; yet the biggest danger lies in their mutual demonization.

Where people are starting to use a religious rhetoric in political ideological disputes, where they see demons in their opponents (Great Satan, Land of Evil, etc.) – and they often release their own demons, their own "shadows", their own denied negative characteristics – there the ideological disputes are in real danger of becoming really devastating conflicts. It is where there is a certainty that "God is dead" that various idols and demons come alive.

I can see the future of Europe in keeping and deepening the compatibility between the followers of "explicit" Christianity and the keepers of specific values of Enlightenment. Therefore one side should be interested in and feel the responsibility for the presence of the other in European culture and society. The Christians (as I feel from Pope Benedict's many speeches) also bear the responsibility for keeping "healthy laicism" of Europe and those who want Europe to be secular (and are afraid of clericalism and fundamentalism) should be aware of their interest and the shared responsibility for the credible presence of Christianity in the public life of united Europe.



Response to Tomáš Halík on Implications for Salesian Mission

Luis Fernando Gutierrez, SDB

I intend to reread the text of Professor Tomas Halik first highlighting some aspects of his conference, and then proposing some simple conclusions.

A significant contribution

To speak of initial proclamation Professor Halik uses autobiographical sources (this is already an Initial proclamation). He presents the specific socio-cultural context that he lives in (I would stress the importance of context in the pastoral and evangelising mission). Remember that every mission is contextual and puts a spotlight on Christian initiation.

He starts with two provocative theses.

1. We must renew the Christian atheism

The term sounds strong, even unorthodox ... but mostly it's paradoxical. The speech of Professor Halík is, at this point in the conversation, attractive and bright. It must be concluded that today, as always, there are new gods, that culture wants to consecrate. Christian history has had prophets, martyrs ... monks ... who have always confronted the official gods (prophetic dialogue). So Christian atheism is compared to official gods.

What are the new gods now? (science, when it criticises dogma? Consumerism, as a way of life?) It used to be communism as a state religion. Now it is a new scientific atheism (Richard Dawkins). This atheism becomes a religion.

Prof. Halík wonders who were the atheists of the nineteenth century. Feuerbach (deification of man) led to exaggerating the human ego



(narcissistic culture). Freud's atheistic humanism ended in a humanistic religion.

Here I dare add two new faces of the culture in which we find ourselves in some parts of Europe. One is spirituality without God. Sponville says, that to be a spiritual person does not need God (spiritual well being, being reconciled). Like Freud, this is also a humanist atheism. Sponville defines himself as a dogmatic atheist (dogmatic atheism because it advocates a lucid faith and recognises the values of the Christian tradition. Inside me is a Christ within).

Another is that old acquaintance of Christianity, Gnosticism, New Age, so attractive to our contemporaries because they promote a warm, inner life in this complex world. But there is no Lord there...

For Professor Halík negative theology, so famous a few years ago, is an heir of Christian atheism, and puts us at the gates of mystery (God is a mystery, beyond our concepts). All this brings us closer to mysticism. Not that I advocate Halík's negative theology, but he underlines the need to bring out the mystery, the importance of the mystical. It's an interesting argument. The question is what will make Christianity attractive to our youth. Remember the famous formulation of Rahner on the Christian (XXI) century. I personally believe that God is a word to repeat. (recall the teaching of Benedict XVI). About God sometimes one must be silent (testimony), sometimes you have to speak (proclamation).

Halík stresses the interesting reflection of the Vatican Council: "The Christians with their lack of testimony are responsible for modern atheism". Perhaps this statement of the Council remains valid even now. Consider this time of crisis, of credibility and confidence in the Church (think of the sad case of the scandals). Consider the words of Pope Benedict when he says that sometimes the enemy of the church is not outside but within. It's all a question of courage. We back out of personal and community witness.

Professor Halík sees a problem in a theology and pastoral action, which uses a problematic and pathological face of God. One conclusion: Review the images of God in our ministry, the language we use to speak of God. "God", says Pope Benedict, "is notably absent from our culture".

Professor Halík says: "The God whom I believe in, is far from the image of god adapted to the human search. It does not work (not as a

servant of my will). He is; he is not what I want him to be; I am the one who should seek to adapt to his will”.

Then the professor has a strong expression: “I would consider any argument put in catechetical, scholastic terms, not only ineffective, but even blasphemous”. It is a strong expression to talk about the importance of language when speaking about God. His argument is logical in highlighting one of our difficulties: Our world is in the postmodern paradigm, our intention is to put ourselves in dialogue with modernity, it may be that our language is premodern. It’s an important point of reflection.

God exists. But where? Exists in those stories that talk about God. Importance of the Word of God in Christian life and in the initial proclamation.

2. Christianity is important to preserve the secular character of European culture

The presence of Christianity in public life is important, in a culture that sends Christianity and personal conscience to the sacristy. Here the professor emphasises the power of the laity.

Christianity, the religion of the incarnation, is always acculturated in various cultural contexts. We took 200 years looking for the inculturation in the new European culture. Western secular culture is secular, irreligious. It is a realistic and humble statement. It is an invitation to defend the Christian experience, to take our place in the public square. We are always in this tension between European culture and Christianity.

Dialogue is a statement of prophetic expression: “Be a voice audible and understandable, but above all credible and competent in the discussions”.

3. Some lessons from the insights of Professor Halík

1. The first I want to emphasise is the importance of CONTEXT in our pastoral mission. I can ask: what calls for a secularised context? Which calls for a multiethnic context? In some parts of Europe young people

do not know Jesus Christ anymore, many have not have heard of him, or have only very vague concepts about him, or consider him as just one more great man. The Jesus in a novel or film is more credible for them than the Jesus of the Gospel or the Jesus in the Church.

Postmodernism seems to be committed to the de-divinisation of the Son of God. One question: Is it the same from one cultural context to another?

2. So today what is central to the Initial Proclamation of Jesus Christ?
3. Halík also speaks of the Word of God and the focus of Christian Initiation. There are those who have not received these sacraments. Elsewhere some young people have received the sacraments of initiation but need to meet Jesus again to live a more personal Christianity. For all, initial proclamation is important.
4. In the text Halík emphasises an attitude of prophetic dialogue, the importance of the proclamation, the testimony of the meeting places. These are not always physical spaces, but those opportunities that our culture offers as meeting points (a more human world, culture and tolerance and solidarity).
5. Some believe that the main challenge of evangelisation are the evangelisers. Some evangelised evangelisers and significant communities remain credible to modern man. This doubtless explains what Halík says about the laity. We need evangelisers able to enter into dialogue with the culture of today.
6. This is also the problem of language. Halík gives some interesting clues: Rethinking language about God in theology and pastoral ministry. Use narrative and autobiographical language (=my own experience of faith).
7. I miss some references to the family as a key to creating a Christian culture, also for the First Proclamation. The family is not only an object but the subject of the ministry. It is the family that, in the case of children, initiates them into the language of mystery and encounter with God in prayer and so on... Today the family is sometimes a problem, sometimes an ally, always a possibility.

Witness and Proclamation of Jesus, in Europe, in Dialogue with the Other Christian Confessions and Other Religions

From written replies of Participants

In the pluralistic cultural, ethnic, technical, religious reality of the continent of Europe, what contribution can religious awareness of modern or traditional style offer and what attitudes may we find among the more 'marginalised' (culturally, economically, morally)?

PLA-FMA

Within the very complex reality of Europe, religious awareness:

- ✓ could lead to the transparent witness of authentic faith that attracts and has a meaningful inter-action with life and becomes social commitment;
- ✓ renew from the inside the spirit of Europe, offering the Gospel of hope that finds its source and roots in Christ;
- ✓ help people to rediscover the sense of mystery and the sacred and read the signs of this new age, in a Christian way, from the Gospel point of view. At the same time help them to call by name the contemporary forms of paganism and find ways to overcome them;
- ✓ work actively for a strong collaboration among those responsible for education: family, school, state, Church;
- ✓ support lay people in discovering their Christian vocation and help them to express it in the various environments;
- ✓ support the ecumenical journey of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue in view of a peaceful coexistence among the different confessions and religions;
- ✓ help the more 'marginalised' people (culturally, economically, morally) to rediscover the meaning of their existence and their dignity so as to:

- experience the grace of love and forgiveness;
- experience acceptance of differences and learn to understand and express in right ways a real attitude of tolerance.

SBA-FMA

Today it isn't easy to evangelise in certain situations: for many people God is dead or has never existed.

Today religious awareness is expressed in many different ways according to various contexts.

In our exclusive contexts, rather than offer people a gospel 'content', it is better to encourage and help them recognise what is gospel in the midst of their life story. This process should accept and take into account the differences and personal rhythms.

In a world that tends to exclude, evangelisation means:

- ✓ dealing with the causes of oppression here and now;
- ✓ welcome the person unconditionally as he/she is and where he/she is;
- ✓ encourage the person to have a positive self image;
- ✓ create "links" with reference 'models';
- ✓ establish relationships as opportunities for learning for life in the community;
- ✓ facilitate questioning the meaning of life;
- ✓ identify and promote future life possibilities for the young people;
- ✓ favour the integration of the group;
- ✓ encourage open participation in the reality around them;
- ✓ create spaces for contemplation and listening;

SMA

The Church is losing little by little its contact with the youth of the world. I am not exaggerating when I say that most young people have contact with the Church only through the communication network or their friends. It's urgent to find ways of making contact! That is, to create space for the sharing of friendships.



The 'places' for meeting are not only physical but include the possibility of encountering youth culture through the instruments of social communication, for talking about God and man and the experiences in which we live solidarity and tolerance. These 'places' are opportunities that we don't always make use of, for sowing the Gospel seed.

It is important to stress the importance of personal witness (coherent and credible believers) and community witness (coherent and credible community).



The Ecumenical Journey and Inter-Religious Dialogue in Europe: Challenges and Opportunities

James Puglisi, SA²⁶

The Context Ecumenism

Pope Benedict XVI in 2008 confirmed the direction of the Catholic Church: “*The Catholic Church intends to continue and intensify its ecumenical engagement ‘with prudence and pastoral wisdom’*”.

- ✓ significant steps completed in every field in relations with the Orthodox Churches and with the ancient Oriental Orthodox Churches;
- ✓ the encounter with Protestants is “an intermediary situation”;
- ✓ there are “divergences” and “serious problems” in the reciprocal understanding that need to be overcome if there is to be growth in the personal understanding of God in Christ discovering the “responsibility” of becoming witnesses;
- ✓ ecumenical progress “is not linear”, however numerous “positive steps” have been completed in the last decades;
- ✓ the relationship between unity and mission represents an essential dimension of ecumenical action;
- ✓ questions that more intimately touch the core of ecumenical dialogue are the pastoral, sacramental life and mixed marriages;
- ✓ roles:

²⁶ Director of the Centro *Pro Unione* in Rome. He holds a B.A. in Sociology and a S.T.L. in Liturgical Theology from the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., a Ph.D. in the History of Religion and Religious Anthropology from the Université de Paris IV Sorbonne, an S.T.D. in Systematic Theology from the Institut Catholique de Paris, and a Certificate of Ecumenical Studies from Boston University. He currently teaches at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas (Angelicum) at the Pontifical University “Antonianum” (Rome), and at the Pontifical Athenaeum of Saint Anselm.

- youth – to become agents of peace and reconciliation everywhere;
- infirm – to offer their suffering that the communion of Christians becomes ever fuller;
- newlywed – to live their special vocation with one heart and one soul more deeply;

Interreligious relations

Strong point of the relations with the Jews: “The Church opposes any form of anti-Semitism for which there is never an acceptable theological justification”, adding to be an anti-Semite means to be anti-Christian.

The Pope affirms the necessity of dialogue and its finality:

- ✓ to build together a world of peace and fraternity
- ✓ to witness the values of a religious dimension of existence in an age marked by relativism

Characteristics of dialogue:

- sincere and respectful
- founded on a mutual awareness that recognises common religious values and takes note of and respects differences.

Some particular aspect, such as the need for reciprocity especially regarding “fundamental liberties and more particularly religious liberty”.

We live in a “pluralistic world” characterised:

- ✓ by rapid communications
- ✓ by the mobility of peoples
- ✓ by their economic, political and cultural interdependence.

Dialogue on themes of mutual interest is necessary:

- ✓ the dignity of the human persona
- ✓ the search for the common good
- ✓ the construction of peace and development.

The love of Christ exhorts the Church to reach out to every human being without distinction

What can we do?

Challenges and opportunities

The dialogue of life:

- ✓ common experiences facing daily problems on the human level;
- ✓ holiness of life;
- ✓ conversion of heart;
- ✓ private and public prayer;

Moving from:

- friendly conversations to a deeper level of collaboration in diverse fields
- theological dialogue to concrete forms of communion and collaboration

The world that suffers from the absence of God, from the inaccessibility of God, desires to know the face of God

How could men and women today know this face of God in the face of Jesus if we Christians are divided, if one teaches against the other, if one is against the other?

Only in unity can we really show to this world the face of Christ. It is evident that, not with our own strategies but with dialogue and with all that we do that we may obtain this unity.

Unity is a gift of God – not a solely human conquest.

The objective difficulty is to propose with credibility, the gospel by Christians still divided among themselves. To know Christ, – as an intellectual process and above all existentially, is a process that needs witnesses.

First step is at the local community:

- ✓ know Christ first hand and not solely from others, from our own life and from our personal encounter with Christ;
- ✓ encounter Him really in our life of faith and then become his witnesses;
- ✓ be always available for a process of purification, in which the Lord make us capable of being united;

There is a place for all according to their charisms and position in the community.

A deep and shared reflection is necessary:

- ✓ on the basis of the common baptism and baptismal faith;
- ✓ the profession of the Triune God and of Jesus Christ, as sole Saviour and Redeemer;
- ✓ united to the commitment to live according to the commandments of God and the spirit of the Gospel.

A vague sense of family is not sufficient. We need to promote ecumenical formation on all that unites us and that still divides us. Ignorance and indifference of one's own faith and the faith of others are obstacles to a true ecumenism.

Clarify the goal of ecumenical activity: full communion in faith, sacraments and apostolic ministry not to be confused with uniformity. Unity gives space to legitimate diversity of expression, spirituality, rite, theology, inculturation, etc. Ecumenism is not a goal in itself, it is linked to evangelisation.

The ecumenical process is an adventure of the Holy Spirit and a spiritual process.

- ✓ it is conversion and renewal
- ✓ it is holiness and a life according to the Gospel
- ✓ it is private and common prayer

Promote ecumenical twinning that foresees encounters between Catholic parishes and Orthodox, Anglican or Protestant ones that include reciprocal exchanges of visits at regular intervals so that one may come to know the differences of Christian traditions at the daily level.

Create a network of friendships that favours reciprocal awareness through the removal of prejudices and misunderstandings.

Inter-religious settings

Pluricultural context:

- ✓ define the fundamentals of the relations "I-other"
- ✓ emphasise the necessity of relating with the other abandoning hostility so as to arrive at hospitality founded in love.

Catholic identity is important in the interreligious dialogue to understand the journey that the Church made to open up to dialogue with other religions. Christians need to remember that it is the love of Christ that exhorts the Church to reach out to every human being without distinction. In a multicultural and multireligious society it is indispensable to know the identity of the other and to dialogue on all that is common to us.

Initiate a new phase of history that allows the writing of history together and the construction of a world in the measure of man. We need to begin with acts of penance (*teshuvà*) that bring us to pardon. The model of pardon is central to a healing of memories: it is a new way of revisiting the past. It is through pardon that a narrative identity of each one is created.

It is an exchange of the memories of suffering inflicted upon and experienced that touch the imagination and eventually brings a level of forgiveness that consists in the “letting go of the debt”. This breaks the law of the “irreversibility of time” since it removes the weight of culpability that paralyses the relations of men and women in their proper history. This does not abolish the debt but removes punishment due the debt.

It is necessary to shed light on ignorance of the other.

We need to examine the texts of catechesis that we write on the liturgy and the preaching which are often bearers of prejudices.

We need to study the sacred texts of other religions beginning with the Hebrew scriptures and the Qu’ran and the traditions that are born from these.

Nostra Aetate, 3, encourages the preservation and promotion of peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.



Witnessing and Living the Mission in a Muslim Environment in France

Valentina Delafon, FMA

Context

I live in the north of France and I am going to speak about my own experience in Lille. I am not an expert but I share what I witness.

French context

For 40 years, since May 1968, all religious signs have been eliminated. Christians have withdrawn into themselves and generations have grown up accompanied by the slogan "forbidden, not allowed". In such a social climate many parents choose not to have their children baptised, leaving them the freedom to choose whether to become Christians or not. The Church has been attacked particularly where she works in the social field. I have written a thesis, for example, in which I cannot name Don Bosco. This goes for all religions. Islam and the Muslims also combat this form of extreme secularism.

Because of this, young people are searching for their own cultural roots and become easy prey for the sects and fundamental Islam. We are witnessing a growing confusion between personal identity, cultural identity and group identity, especially among Muslims because for them Islam is the truth, and the Koran is not to be interpreted but is a code to be respected. To be a Tunisian is to be a Muslim. Finally I stress that in France the phenomenon of racism towards foreigners and Catholics is strong.

Presentation of our activity in Valdocco

It is a difficult, multicultural outer city area with many people unemployed. 50% are under 35 years of age. On the streets you meet for



the most part, people of African origin: that means that 95% are Muslims (self declared).

The activity consists in street animation, after-school activities, concrete projects for education-cultural action, free time activities for youngsters over twelve years old, welcoming young people who are out of school, accompanying families in their role as educators. Our particular contribution consists in meeting the young people on the streets and being a significant and free presence.

This work is carried out by a team made up of FMAs, SDBs and lay people who gradually take on the responsibility of coordinating the work. Once the work is underway, this allows the FMA and SDB to go elsewhere and set up other centres.

Dialogue is the basis of all our work. From the very first meeting we make clear our choice to avoid any kind of violence.

Often we touch the topic of forgiveness and reconciliation that is almost incomprehensible for them. When we organise camping experiences, it is difficult to dialogue about food (meat of this or that kind). Our intention is to educate them in respect and tolerance for what is different. In this way we reach the point of being able to discuss community identity and the underlying causes for religious choices. Many Muslims for example, keep Ramadan without understanding what it means.

There are many opportunities to meet Muslims, especially the women who have small children. We try to dialogue with them about the education of their children.

We offer fraternal gestures, like being close at times like Christmas and Ramadan.

Every year we try to provide a programme "100% tolerance" with the adolescents. This initiative consists in organising a game around the figure of Abraham, Father of faith for us Christians as well as for Muslims. At the end we meet in a Mosque then in a synagogue where the imam or rabbi talk about common points of faith.

Horizons for Initial Proclamation for the Salesian Family in Europe Today: Conditions, Strategy, Methodology and Content: Biblical Reflection

Maria Ko, FMA

“Go up and join that chariot!” Acts 8, 26-40.

On the desert road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza, a man, seated on his chariot, was reading Sacred Scripture. He was not a Hebrew, but a eunuch who had come from Ethiopia, an area that bordered on the Roman empire. The Spirit said to Philip: “Go up and join that chariot”. Then Philip approached. The meeting began with a question that showed interest, continued with them sitting beside each other with the Sacred Scripture between them, a dialogue developed, then catechesis and finally, it ended in baptism.

We know the episode well. Luke recounts it in a lively manner in *Acts of the Apostles* (8, 26-40). It is an example of “initial evangelisation” in the early Church.

[26] The angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, ‘Set out at noon and go along the road that leads from Jerusalem down to Gaza, the desert road’. [27] So he set off on his journey. Now an Ethiopian had been on pilgrimage to Jerusalem; he was a eunuch and an officer at the court of the Kandake, or queen of Ethiopia; he was her chief treasurer. [28] He was now on his way home; and as he sat in his chariot he was reading the prophet Isaiah. [29] The Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go up and join that chariot’. [30] When Philip ran up, he heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ [31] He replied, ‘How could I, unless I have someone to guide me?’ So he urged Philip to get in

and sit by his side. [32] Now the passage of Scripture he was reading was this: Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter-house, like a sheep that is dumb in front of its shearers, he never opened his mouth. [33] In his humiliation fair judgement was denied him. Who will ever talk about his descendants, since his life on earth has been cut short? [34] The eunuch addressed Philip and said, 'Tell me, is the prophet referring to himself or to someone else?'. [35] Starting, therefore, with this text of scripture Philip proceeded to explain the good news of Jesus to him. [36] Further along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is some water; is there anything to prevent my being baptised? [37]. [38] He ordered the chariot to stop, then Philip and the eunuch both went down into the water and he baptised him. [39] But after they had come up out of the water again Philip was taken away by the Spirit of the Lord and the eunuch never saw him again but went on his way rejoicing. [40] Philip appeared in Azotus and continued his journey, proclaiming the good news in every town as far as Caesarea.

1. Set out and go...

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

Ch. 1–7: Set in Jerusalem, describe the preaching of the apostles and the consolidation of the first community, the ideal model of the Church.

Ch. 8–12: The spread of the Gospel outside Jerusalem, in the other parts of Judea and Samaria.



Ch. 13–28: The expansion of the Gospel outside Palestine, until it ideally reaches ‘earth’s remotest end’, passing through Asia Minor, Greece and especially Rome, the centre of the empire.

At the beginning of Ch. 8 the situation seemed depressing. After the death of Stephen, hatred for the Christians did not end, rather «a bitter persecution started against the Church in Jerusalem, and everyone except the apostles scattered to the country districts of Judea and Samaria» (*Acts* 8, 1). But Luke discovers rays of light among the shadows and sees everything as part of God’s mysterious plan. The ‘dispersion’ of the Christians really marks the beginning of the spread of the Gospel outside Jerusalem. In fact, «Once they had scattered, they went from place to place preaching the good news» (*Acts* 8, 4) and so the number of Christian nuclei multiplied.

The ardour of the Gospel pushed them towards new frontiers, not only the geographic ones, but especially those of the heart. And so we see Philip who begins his mission in Samaria.

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

The opening imperative is interesting: “Set out and go”, we seem to hear the command of Jesus to a paralysed man (cf. *Mk* 2, 11; *Mt* 9, 6; *Lk* 5, 24; *Jn* 5, 8), or the word that Peter said to the crippled man at the Beautiful Gate (*Ac* 3, 6). It is said to Philip the evangeliser too and, in him, to the whole Church “set out and go”. It is an invitation to move from the position already reached, to cross the threshold and go beyond borders, to seek new lands for the Word of God, new peoples to be drawn to Christ. In the Old Testament, Israel usually thought that other peoples, in order to take part in the gift of salvation, had *to come* to Jerusalem, *to come* to the chosen people. In the prophet Isaiah we read: «It will happen in the final days that the mountain of Yahweh’s house will rise higher than the





mountains and will tower above the heights. Then all the nations will stream to it, many people will come to it and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths'» (*Is* 2,2-4). But in the revelation of the New Testament the situation changes. The source of life no longer comes from Sion or from the temple, but from the Son of God incarnate. He does not say 'come', indicating a place, but rather 'go' into the whole world (cf. *Mt* 28,19). Jerusalem is no longer the place of concentration, rather, it has become a place of diffusion. It is no longer a question of coming to Jerusalem to obtain salvation, but rather of leaving Jerusalem to bring salvation to all. The Church is not an immobile custodian of the faith, but must 'get up and go', because, as Pope John Paul II said: «Faith is strengthened in giving it!» (*Redemptoris mission* 2) and Benedict XVI echoes him: love «by its nature, must be shared with others. Love grows through love» (*Deus caritas est*, 18).

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

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

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



The Spirit tells Philip to go towards the unknown, to face the new, to allow himself to be surprised with trust because it is the Lord who is working. The apostolic passion urges one to bring Christ to others with creativity and ardour, but does not lead evangelisers to attribute the success to themselves, to their own competence and diligence, to the value of methods and strategies. Paul recognises this: «For what is Apollos and what is Paul? The servants through whom you came to believe and each has only what the Lord has given him. I did the planting, Apollos did the watering, but only God gave the growth» (*1Cor* 3, 5-7). The Psalmist too states: «If the Lord does not build the house, in vain do the builders labour» (*Ps* 127, 1), but the security of being called to collaborate with God, the awareness of being part of a big project, and of feeling oneself urged on by God's passion lead us to say with joy: «With God we will do great things» (*Ps* 108, 14).

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

On the chariot was a man. The chariot was not the final goal to which the Spirit was leading Philip, but the man seated on it. It is not the institutional structures, the efficient methods of evangelisation, but the person who «is the first path the Church must take in the fulfilment of its mission» (*Redemptor hominis* 14). All men and women are «destined to be moulded to the pattern of his Son, so that he should be the eldest of many brothers» (*Rm* 8, 29).

The man Philip met was an Ethiopian, and a eunuch as well. He was one of the human group that the orthodox Jewish teaching considered an outsider and excluded from salvation (cf. *Dt.* 23, 2). Yet he went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and he read the Sacred Scripture attentively. His effort was sincere and his openness of heart admirable, his search was attentive and yet he could not understand. From the questions he put to Philip his desire to seek the key to understanding divine revelation is clear.

The Scripture is open in his hands, it neither imposes itself nor opposes. The Word of God transcends barriers. In what language or what form was the Ethiopian reading the text of Isaiah? We cannot know. However that text in the hand of a foreigner and a pagan seems highly

symbolic and filled with prophecy. It witnesses to the fact that the Bible is available to be understood by different cultures, that the Word of God willingly accepts being translated into different languages, transformed into different ways of human communication. This is a sign that God loves all and wants to speak to all men and women, without any distinction.

The Spirit does not work only in the evangeliser, but also in people of any sex, age, race or culture, making them open and disposed to the Gospel. When Philip approached the chariot he was amazed to see the Ethiopian reading Scripture and to find him so desirous and in a way already having begun to receive salvation. He recognised that he was not the sower, but rather the reaper. In reality the Spirit had been working in both, facilitating their encounter. He urges on and precedes the evangeliser, supports his apostolic passion, and at the same time, he prepares the recipient for the proclamation, nourishes his passion to search for truth and for fullness of life. Neither one nor the other can attribute the success of the encounter to himself, but recognises with wonder the provident love of God and the beauty of the work of the Spirit.

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

In the *Acts* Luke presents the first Christians as a community that lives daily life in simplicity, totally immersed in the people. Externally they are not distinguishable from the common people, but because of the integrity of their lives, they «were looked up to by everyone» (*Acts* 2, 47; 4, 33). They had a serene and cordial relationship with the people. Preaching to the crowds, especially to the pagans, generally aroused great enthusiasm. The experience of Christ had made them authentically human, optimistic; loving everything, and easily discovering the good, the beautiful and the

true in the people they met. Luke often underlines the trust, the sincere mutual respect that existed between those who proclaimed the Gospel and the gentiles, who easily allowed themselves to be «cut to the heart» by the Word of God (*Acts* 2, 37-41).

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

Scripture is not automatically understandable. It can appear obscure, as if covered by a veil (cf. *1Cor* 3, 14-16). The Ethiopian eunuch was not lacking openness of heart, but he needed an explanation to enlighten his mind and set his heart on fire, like the one Jesus had given to the two disciples of Emmaus. And Philip offers it to him, not as a master of exegesis, but as someone who, from a faith perspective, suggests the right wavelength to tune in to the Christian message, as someone sharing his own passion. «A fire can only be lit by something that is, itself, on fire» (*Ecclesia in Asia* 23). The brief dialogue between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch illustrates the Christian approach to Scripture perfectly.

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

Quoting the extract from Isaiah (53, 7-8) Luke was not so much interested in presenting a biblical text that prophetically anticipated the whole content of the Christian kerygma, rather he wanted to give the reader an example of a pre-baptismal proclamation that uses scripture as its starting point. What characterised the Christian proposal that then

resulted in the sacrament is the good news about Jesus of Nazareth. The early Church proclaimed with courage and frankness (*Acts* 4, 29.31; 13, 4) and as we see here, also with art. Philip began the dialogue with maieutic type of question: «Do you understand what you are reading?» and thus establishes an interactive relationship. This approach to people was very much used by Jesus too. For example, one can think of the questions: «What are you looking for?» (*Jn* 1, 38); «Why are you crying?» (*Jn* 20, 13); «What is written in the Law? How do you read it?» (*Lk* 10, 26) «Who is my mother and who are my brothers?» (*Mk* 3, 33); «Why do you call me good?» (*Mk* 10, 17); «Why are you afraid? Have you no faith yet?» (*Mk* 4, 40); «Do you know what I have done to you?» (*Jn* 13, 12).

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

5. He went on his way rejoicing

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

Joy is a theme that penetrates all of Luke's work. The atmosphere of joy that permeated the Gospel continued in the early Church. In the narration of the *Acts* even during persecutions, the apostles are filled with joy, «glad to have had the honour of suffering humiliation for the sake of the name of Jesus» (*Acts* 5, 41). At every stage of the spread of the Gospel, Luke always remarks on the joyful reaction, both of those who proclaim it and in those who receive it with sincere hearts. After having listened to the preaching of Paul «it made the gentiles very happy to hear this and they gave thanks to the Lord for his message» (13, 38). Paul and Barnabas too, full of joy and emotion, enthusiastically told of the conversion of the pagans «this news was received with the greatest satisfaction by all the brothers» (15, 3).

The Gospel is a proclamation of joy: the joy of human persons who receive the gift of salvation, the joy of God who gives it. To the joy of God's gratuitous giving, humans respond with the joy of sincere gratitude. It is not a question of a passing emotion, but a deep sentiment that involves and moves the whole person. Joy is always diffusive, contagious. «The one who has discovered Christ – said Benedict XVI to young people at the end of the World Youth Day on Cologne – must lead others to Him. One cannot keep a great joy for oneself. Preaching the Gospel, therefore, means sharing this immense joy with others». Paul confesses to the community of Corinth: «We have no wish to lord it over your faith, but to work with you for your joy» (2Cor 1, 24). John confides to his Christians: «We are declaring to you what we have seen and heard, so that you too may share our life. Our life is shared with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing this to you so that our joy may be complete» (1Jn 1, 3).

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

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

Horizons for Initial Proclamation by the Salesian Family in Europe Today: Conditions, Strategy, Methodology and Content

Ubaldo Montisci, SDB - Lorensina Colusi, FMA

Toward a shared vision: A possible synthesis

1. Why we are gathered here together

In the European continent which is becoming ever more pluralistic, secular, multiethnic, and multireligious, due to the great influx of immigrants, the Christian community of Europe is more urgently aware of the need for a convinced missionary conversion. The Synod of European Bishops (2-23 October 1999) which had as one of its aims that of offering suggestions for promoting a new proclamation of the Gospel (*EE*, n. 2), evidenced the urgent need for initial proclamation (*EE* n. 46,47) and a renewed proclamation of the Gospel throughout the entire continent.

“Commitment to a new evangelisation and to this end, an adequate preparation of all members including lay people, is also a priority choice of the Salesian Congregation which voted for the so-called “Project Europe” so as to offer a better pastoral service to the young people of the old Continent (cr. CG26 SDB, n. 99)²⁷. A strong, significant moment for

²⁷ «We share the preoccupation of the Church for the Gospel in the Western world and in particular in Europe [...]. A new path has been opened and especially for us Salesians, it is an invitation to “give greater attention to the training of young people in the faith” (*Ecclesia in Europe* n. 61); cfr. The Guidelines n. 16. The motivations and the important steps for the “European Project” are described in the letter of Rector Major sent to all the Salesians on 31 January 2009 (prot. 09/0107); cfr. Pascual Chaves Villanueva, Per una rinnovata presenza salesiana in Europa. Intervento del Rettor Maggiore nell’incontro con gli Ispettori dell’Europa, in “Vita Consacrata” 45 (2009) 5, 401-420.

growth in awareness of the problem was the Seminar: Europe, place of Mission (Rome, 16-20 November 2006), promoted and organised by the Youth Pastoral and Mission offices of the Salesian Congregation. We must take on board again the mission proposal of the Gospel which corresponds to Jesus' command: "Go, proclaim (cr. Mt 28, 19-20).

Following this, we are gathered here in Prague at the request of the SDB and FMA Mission Departments to deepen our understanding of the challenges regarding the initial proclamation in Europe today and to discover some basic strategies for a more mission-oriented pastoral action.

2. Understanding the concept of initial proclamation

The first important step that has been achieved is an agreement on the correct meaning of initial proclamation.

First it was necessary to recall briefly the evolution of the wider concept of "evangelisation" which since Vatican II has had heterogeneous interpretations. In fact, it is possible to detect two different ways of understanding "evangelisation", set out in two important documents of the Magisterium: *Ad Gentes* (1965) and *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975). Both have new developments in contemporary reflection.

In the first document, evangelisation is presented as a specific "moment" of the missionary action of the Church. It is precisely the action aimed at arousing conversion and the first act of faith, that precedes entrance to the catechumenate (*AG*, n. 7). The second document, *Evangelii nuntiandi* puts before us a significant turning point: it shows a clear mission orientation, offering a wider concept of evangelisation. It defines it as: «a complex process composed of various elements: renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, heartfelt tenacity, entrance into a community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiatives» (cf. *EN*, n. 24). Therefore, evangelisation is identified with the very mission of the Church. Every ecclesial action can and must fall into this category.

Evangelii Nuntiandi contributes more than any other document to a deeper understanding of evangelisation: but, paradoxically, it is also the reason for the difficulties in interpreting this word; partly because the

more restricted meaning is never entirely abandoned, so the term needs to be renamed especially in the historical moment we are living in, when the action of the Church has new significance, aiming at arousing the faith in non believers and reviving it in all the baptised.

Many forms are used today but adding adjectives or prefixes (*primary* evangelisation, *pre*-evangelisation, *new* evangelisation *re*-evangelisation) does not seem to resolve the problem but results in the multiplication of variations. Among the many expressions, it seems that *initial proclamation* is probably the better because it is used constantly throughout time in a good number of documents; it is the form most used among those roughly equal; it is given a 'univocal' meaning. Anyway, it is the term chosen by the *General Directory for Catechesis* (n. 51).

Redemptoris missio (1990), in particular, after distinguishing certain situations touching the process of evangelisation, (no. 33) and showing the importance of the mission "ad gentes" in old and new contexts (n. 37), re-proposes initial proclamation as a permanent priority, with a «central and irreplaceable role» (n. 44) in the growth of the Church because all people have the right to hear the Good News of the "new life" offered by God in Jesus Christ. The proclamation must be made in the context of the life of the people who receive it, with an attitude of love and esteem for those who listen, with a concrete language suitable for the circumstance, with the certainty that the Holy Spirit is at work, bringing about communion between the missionary and those who listen; even if the missionary should be alone in his work, proclamation is never a personal affair (n. 45).

In the light of church documents and the result of advanced specialist studies, we have considered two main forms of initial proclamation:

- The collective, institutional image that the Church portrays in all her public manifestations is the initial proclamation that the world receives and for this reason, special attention must be given in frontline situations to encounters with contexts, persons and situations outside her normal sphere of action.
- As concrete personal or community action with individuals or particular groups within the context of daily life.

Our reflection concentrates on the second aspect, while recognising that the two different moments of the evangelising process are complementary

(*EN*, n. 24). This means proceeding with a vision of the whole journey and with the same aims. We, therefore set the following boundary to initial proclamation: to «express the Christian faith in various ways that might favour and render more accessible the first steps in the faith within the concrete situations of people who have no acquaintance with us»²⁸.

Although initial proclamation is only one moment in the wider process of evangelisation, it is important as the entrance that paves the way to all Christian experience: «Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction» (Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, n. 1).

Initial proclamation is simply the start in the process of evangelisation. It is the first step which ends once the aim is achieved: “to arouse an interest in Jesus Christ that may lead to a first acceptance or revitalisation of faith in him”²⁹ and the desire to deepen this knowledge. This leads immediately to a further more mature stage in the faith journey.

In practice, the subject of initial proclamation is the Christian community as such, as the real presence of Christ within history through his members; in this sense, every believer within his everyday environment can and must be a subject of initial proclamation. There are also members of the community to whom this mission is entrusted in a special way.

While the whole Christian community is obliged to render permanent the proclamation of Jesus Christ if they want to be faithful to their mandate (*EN*, n. 14), we must note that initial proclamation is first and foremost for the man and woman who in particular circumstances, experience words and gestures that are meaningful to them and through the action of the Holy Spirit feel the Good News of God’s love reaching them and saving them through the incarnation, death and resurrection of God’s Son.

The content of initial proclamation is usually a brief, joyful, all-embracing account of Jesus who by his death on the cross, resurrection and gift of the Holy Spirit has answered the hopes and expectations of all men and women of all times, giving meaning to life and history: he has in fact saved humanity from evil and death; made communion of life with

²⁸ A. FOSSION, *Proposta della fede e primo annuncio*, in “Catechesi” 78 (2008-2009) 4, 29-34; 30.

²⁹ X. MORLANS, *El primer anuncio*. El eslabón perdido, Madrid, PPC, 2009, 29.

God possible; so that Jesus is for everyone, the Lord, the Christ, the only Saviour and the final and irrevocable Word of God.

Because we belong to Europe, while recognising the rich contribution of other contexts, we have chosen to examine what the exhortation Church *in Europe* has to tell us about those to whom initial proclamation is addressed. It refers to *the initial proclamation*³⁰ and *renewed proclamation*³¹ (n. 47); *initial proclamation* is destined for those who for various reasons are far from the faith, either they do not know it or have strayed from practising the Christian faith.

For those interested in the faith, initial proclamation is an invitation, respecting the freedom of every person; there is no attempt to force or conquer.

³⁰ “In various parts of Europe *a first proclamation of the Gospel is needed*: the number of the unbaptised is growing, both because of the significant presence of immigrants of other religions and because children born into families of Christian tradition have not received Baptism, either as a result of the Communist domination or the spread of religious indifference. Indeed, Europe is now one of those traditionally Christian places which, in addition to a new evangelisation, require in some cases a first evangelisation (*EE*, n. 46).

³¹ “Everywhere, then, *a renewed proclamation is needed even for those already baptised*. Many Europeans today think they know what Christianity is, yet they do not really know it at all. Often they are lacking in knowledge of the most basic elements and notions of the faith. Many of the baptised live as if Christ did not exist: the gestures and signs of faith are repeated, especially in devotional practices, but they fail to correspond to a real acceptance of the content of the faith and fidelity to the person of Jesus. The great certainties of the faith are being undermined in many people by a vague religiosity lacking real commitment; various forms of agnosticism and practical atheism are spreading and serve to widen the division between faith and life; some people have been affected by the spirit of an immanent humanism, which has weakened the faith and often, tragically, led to its complete abandonment; one encounters a sort of secularist interpretation of Christian faith which is corrosive and accompanied by a deep crisis of conscience and of Christian moral practice. The great values which amply inspired European culture have been separated from the Gospel, thus losing their very soul and paving the way for any number of aberrations.

“When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (*Lk* 18:8). Will he find faith in our countries, in this Europe of ancient Christian tradition? This is an open question which clearly reveals the depth and the drama of one of the most serious challenges which our Churches are called to face. It can be said as the Synod emphasised that this challenge frequently consists not so much in baptising new converts as in enabling those already baptised *to be converted to Christ and his Gospel*: in our communities we need to be seriously concerned about bringing the Gospel of hope to all those who are far from the faith or who have abandoned the practice of Christianity (*EE*, n. 47).

3. The cultural and religious context of Europe

Just as every story in the New Testament is strictly connected to a particular cultural setting which supports and sustains it, so every definition of *initial proclamation* is within a particular historical-theological context: The principle of 'enculturation' is a fundamental tenet: we must take into account the existential situation, social background, age and openness³².

This leads us to consider the topic of the context in which *initial proclamation* is proposed. We feel it is pertinent to share the "photograph" of Europe offered by the president of the European Catechetical team in a recent meeting about initial proclamation³³. He considers four geographical areas in Europe: *the French speaking area*, where Christianity seems to be banished from the cultural scene and has to face amnesia and widespread resistance; *the Mediterranean area*: where we see the growth of a secular mentality, not yet able to supplant the Christian roots. *The area of ex soviet union countries*, where the long years of living 'underground' tends to perpetuate a private faith expressed fundamentally through cult, and the area of eastern Germany where there is a widespread, stable non-religious culture and a peaceful religiosity is lived.

During these Study Days, there have been frequent references to the phenomenon of migration influx and the destabilisation it brings to the culture of the host countries. We are being faced with structural changes that we cannot ignore and must anticipate the outcome if we want to influence and guide it.

During our meeting we have not remained at the level of arid figures furnished by sociological research, but with the eyes of faith, we have tried to accept not only the challenges but also the opportunities of this difficult but promising age.

Certainly, we are faced with formidable cultural, political, economic

³² C. CACCIATO, «Prassi catechistica: Documento base, catechismi e nuove indicazioni per l'iniziazione cristiana» in: ASSOCIAZIONE ITALIANA CATECHETI, *Il primo annuncio: tra "kerigma" e catechesi*, a cura di C. CACCIATO, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 2010, 68.

³³ E. BIEMMI, *La catechesi in Europa. Una nuova "geografia della fede" per un nuovo annuncio, primo annuncio della fede*, in "Catechesi" 79 (2009-2010) 1, 3-15.

and religious challenges. We are living in a climate of insecurity and fear for the future, in which lack of work opportunities, frustration at having no outlet for expressing personal potential, and the energy invested in formation is not valued, are added to a lack of confidence in politics, concentration on individual interests, recourse to illegal ways or favouritism. At the cultural level, the means of social communication exercise such an invasive and pervasive presence in the lives of contemporary people that it is difficult to escape their influence

The internal mobility in Europe plus the growing influx of immigrants, has led our societies to face a “mixed culture”; something unthinkable until very recently. It has happened rapidly and with no period of transition which provides many possibilities for meeting people but also causes tension and conflict. We are also facing radical changes in the concept of family and its role in society and in the education to faith of the children. In general, there is a great confusion of values. We are living in ever more secularised environments, where pluralism, religious indifference and a lay culture, openly contrary to every form of public acknowledgement of religion, a culture that with rare exceptions, has only a marginal understanding of the Church and perceives faith as an obstacle to the integral development of the human person and his/her freedom.

Christianity is challenged by the presence of other religions, especially Islam. Forms of religious ‘nomads’ are spreading, e.g. the search for new experiences and emotions that have no reference to Christianity. The ecumenical challenge and religious dialogue are particularly lively.

It is however, an environment in which the desire for meaning and identity plus the search for authentic values, constitute a fertile field in which to sow initial proclamation.

4. Towards practical aspects

The Study Days have offered us the possibility of working out ways to guide the pastoral action of the Salesian Family.

We are well aware that the missionary commitment, besides being the responsibility of the individual, concerns the community and its formation

and sensitivity regarding initial proclamation. Only a community that is evangelised can then evangelise!

The first thing to decide: **to whom do we address initial proclamation?**

From sharing experiences and from the reflections, the following categories emerged:

- Those who do not know God: from the atheist who is sincerely seeking or is hostile to the agnostic and indifferent.
- Those who in their religious or spiritual search (even the new forms of religion or spirituality that ignore God, new age ...) have not met Jesus.
- Those who, although baptised, have wandered far from the faith.
- Those who are baptised but live a cultural and social Christianity.
- Those who practise the Christian faith only on special occasions, like the rites of passing or other popular religious manifestations.
- Those who practise the faith habitually and in spite of this have not met Christ personally as their personal Saviour.

We, the members of the Salesian Family present in Prague for this historic moment (Salesians, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Volunteers of Don Bosco, Cooperators) feel the need of focusing our reflection and intervention on the first three categories, committing ourselves to initial proclamation according to our particular vocation.

However, all this must keep in mind the concrete situations of the Salesian presence in Europe which today, shows signs of tiredness, lack of motivation, inadequacy and falling numbers.

5. What are the aims to keep in mind regarding initial proclamation?

- Immediate aim: Stir up the person's curiosity and interest in Jesus that may lead to a living relationship with him, true conversion and a faith journey, recognising Jesus as one's personal Saviour
- *Final aim:* Invite the person who has thus shown faith in Jesus to undertake the journey of Christian initiation to full membership in the

Church community, following Jesus as a disciple and committing oneself for the life of the world.

With this in view, we must give priority to helping the members of the Salesian Family, offering a serious formation that qualifies them as missionaries of initial proclamation.

6. How long should initial proclamation take?

- For the community that proclaims, every occasion is good when people want to listen, always discerning suitable time and method.
- For the person seeking: it cannot be said that he is within the period of *initial proclamation* until he decides to accept or decline choosing Jesus.

7. How is initial proclamation made?

Two distinct aspects to be considered: the person who proclaims, and the way the proclamation is made.

The attitude of the one who proclaims:

- Possessing a strong belief in what is proclaimed;
- As far as possible, giving a coherent witness in daily life;
- Proclaiming with love and gratitude, using a good style of dialogue. (re-visit St. Francis of Sales as a missionary of initial proclamation in the difficult historical situation of the Chablais).
- Respecting the freedom of the person and his/her rhythm of life;
- Walking with the person, sharing the same existential questions central to life (birth, sorrow, work);
- Discerning in prayer the moment to start *initial proclamation*.
- Choosing language and images suitable to the listeners, remembering that many signs and symbols are not immediately intelligible to young people today.
- Proposing initial proclamation openly and clearly, with the help of the Spirit who gives courage and humility.

- Helping young people to take part in initiatives like World Youth Day (WYD) and other celebrations at national or diocesan levels and of the Salesian Family;
- Acting in such a way that the young people themselves become missionaries of initial proclamation among their companions;
- Giving your own personal testimony of seeking Jesus, even if this is distressing at times, and then of your joyful and humbling experience of meeting him;
- Facilitate meetings with people of other faiths and persuasions, recognising one's own identity and that of the others, seeking what unites rather than what divides, study other religions;

With regard to the 'Ways of proclaiming initial proclamation' according to the context and characteristics of the various people³⁴.

We need to mature in an attitude of becoming 'proclaimers' because the places where people are seeking or where we can offer a proposal can be normal or exceptional, real or virtual.

The following list is not complete. We present some situations of initial proclamation shared during these study days:

- dialogue person to person, a friendly relationship (recall Don Bosco's 'word in the ear' in the Salesian tradition);
- important moments of life: birth, decisions for the future, vocational choices, faith journey, "peak" moments (sorrow, the future, love, justice, peace ...)³⁵;
- meetings in private homes;
- meetings in public, in response to some media event (film, book, debate on TV) that touches faith or religion³⁶;
- meetings for parish groups (families, children, youth, fiancés, parents, the sick, unemployed, handicapped, prisoners, immigrants, the marginalised ...);

³⁴ In order to make the Initial Proclamation grow and develop it is important to adapt certain practices that are suitable to situations and characteristics of the recipients.

³⁵ The *Lettera ai cercatori di Dio* (12 aprile 2009) in Italy is a very useful and meaningful text.

³⁶ Again in Italy, the experiences of the Church in Milan are interesting examples on: "Cattedra of non-believers" or the "Courtyard of the Gentiles".

- commitment to catholic associations and movements;
- schools and educational centres;
- leisure time: sport, tourism, pilgrimages, open spaces;
- missions in the cities;
- using culture, art, music...
- using singers and artists and Christian speakers and their CDs and DVDs;
- mass media and internet.

Our reflection led us to recognise the urgency of developing a practical evangelical hospitality to welcome those far and near. Also, the basic themes of freedom, truth, and conversion must be kept in mind, plus, for the Salesian Family, the experience must be enriched with the quality of our *educational proposal*.

8. Strategy

An indispensable condition is the awareness of our communities, and their involvement through prayer and sympathetic interest, that is nourished by sharing information. We need to remember too, that the mission is always a personal and community vocation.

Renewal is global and therefore involves:

- So-called ‘traditional’ pastoral action (celebration of sacraments, baptism of children, requests for Christian marriage, pilgrimages ...);
- Special care of families;
- Attention to new kinds of presence: (immigration, multi-cultures and religions, new spiritual situations that characterise our changed cultural reality (individualism, fluidity, secular vision ...));
- The choice of a faith proposal for adults to set in motion the catechumenal process, a gradual journey towards the faith and the underlying inspirational model for all catechesis;
- Employ our ‘*communication*’ *imagination* to learn and express in new language (like multimedia etc. ...), using simple words to re-formulate the basic points to proclaim faith in Jesus;
- Make the environment attractive and educational so that young people feel welcome and can express their queries.

9. Need to prepare missionaries

- People who are humble, ready for self sacrifice and to obey what God asks through the needs of young people, the environment, the social/economic situation.
- Committed to this specific formation;
- Capable of seeking the young people where they are, within and especially out of our usual environments;
- Serene, joyful people, in love with Jesus, not problem cases;
- Ready to change ways and language according to the real scene;
- With a clear personal identity and conscious of the Church's identity;
- Able to approach others to learn and not to teach;
- People who know that faith grows daily and are convinced that it is God who converts not they;
- Make every effort to help the young people think³⁷;
- Able to help young people build their own personal identity that is basic to the faith choice (proclaim Jesus Christ as the way to become fully human).

³⁷ “The key to development is a mind capable of thinking in technological terms and grasping the fully human meaning of human activities, within the context of the holistic meaning of the individual's being. In the contemporary culture, technical reason has become widespread that insinuates all, that every human problem can be solved with technical scientific knowledge. The effect of this mentality weakens in people, especially the young, the ability to think, to connect, to put things together ... The reason is forced to act in this way in front of the pressure of interests and utility that are recognised as the ultimate criteria and does not reach the truth ... not knowing how to enter into depth to feel that God is the one who calls to choose what is good and evil” (Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, passim).



European Bishops on Initial Proclamation

For personal reflection, we add some points taken from the meeting of the European Bishops, regarding 'initial proclamation'.

A steady, orderly rhythm

Sharing the way of life of people today, with respect for their freedom, gradually and patiently helping them to enter more deeply into God's plan, means adopting Jesus' pedagogy on the road to Emmaus. In the pastoral field, there is a concrete itinerary worked out in the model of Christian initiation; there we find witness and proclamation, the catechumen journey, the permanent support of faith through catechesis, sacramental life, mystagogy and the witness of charity.

Attention to the conditions necessary for the proclamation

The evangeliser, collaborator of the Holy Spirit, is a guide who is competent because of his/her studies and experience, prepared to re-propose the faith in changed cultural contexts and in relationship to the life of the people.

Offering initial proclamation without the support of a community living the attitudes that animate this ministry, would inevitably lead to failure. A community that agrees to re-think itself as a 'proclamation' must allow itself to be moulded by the force of the Gospel and the Eucharist of the Lord. As Paul VI reminds us, only a community that is evangelised can become evangelising (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 15); to achieve this, a community supports evangelisation and initial proclamation by putting the 'spiritual' dynamics at the centre of its life: the Word, the Eucharist, the Holy Spirit, which alone can form the believer to follow Christ in the freedom of the disciple.



How much more do I become the Body of Christ after celebrating the Eucharist? (from the talk by G. Puglisi)

With creative imagination and an open heart

Empathy, not distaste, openness to living one's own culture with others: this means remaining positive with regard to the culture because this is life and possibility, and the same faith becomes flesh in the cultures of peoples. For this we need to turn to the language of imagination and the heart, because this is the way we perceive the transcendent and enter into a personal relationship with God. Faith is embedded in love. Faith is a "yes" to God's love revealed to us and we welcome his love with our "Yes. I love you".

The Gospel then becomes 'surprise', a full life that can be transmitted in many languages: the Word, invocations, fraternal communion, the memorial of Christ, sharing faith stories, but, above all, in welcoming the Spirit who gives new words and dynamism to the Church, called to initial proclamation.

It is possible to identify some conditions to guarantee the quality of initial proclamation. Card. Caffarra:

The first condition is to recuperate the way of narrating the resurrection event so that it becomes meaningful for the listener who then feels the desire to convert.

This first condition indicates three essential dimensions of initial proclamation: *the narrative dimension* [the gospel facts about the death-resurrection of Jesus cannot be pre-supposed]; *reflection dimension* (the paschal event is meaningful 'pro nobis' and this meaning must be explained); *exhortative dimension*: [what is narrated and interpreted is carried out in view of a real change in the listener. All three dimensions are essential and must be present in initial proclamation.

We speak about 'recuperating' because evangelisation seems to find difficulty today in articulating in a correct way, the content of initial proclamation: it seems we have lost the grammar and the syntax.

The second condition is the sharing of the critical condition of expectation of people today, of their daily lives. This could also be expressed as discernment; in any case, the meeting includes both sharing and decision. Sharing with no judgment is blind; judgment without sharing is cruel. Judgment here, means that human expectation of salvation is always ambiguous. Here we touch the great theme of “*praeparatio evangelica*” that the Fathers of the Church meditated upon so much.

The third condition concerns the ministry of the Gospel. It can be described simply in the following way: only someone who has been saved can narrate meaningfully Christian salvation, provoking in the listener a similar experience; only the person who has met Christ, can narrate meaningfully what happens in that meeting in such a way that the listener is attracted.

In this sense, the Church is not the theme of initial proclamation but it is the *unique*, vital context in which initial proclamation can take place.

This condition gives rise to many deep consequences for our life; these can be identified by answering one question: what place does Jesus Christ occupy in my life? Is my life truly lived in Christ?



Sharing Unique Experiences

Pina Bellocchi VDV - Italy

1. Evangelise with music

For more than 30 years my brother, sister-in-law and I, all Co-operators, have been running a 'Youth Centre' in a part of our house. Many young people have the chance of group experiences plus taking part as protagonists, in programmes for their human and Christian formation and growth. Every young person arrives with his/her many different experiences. At the level of faith, there are believers and those who are "starving", plus those who have never even approached this reality, and finally there are those who have had negative experiences of church and have strayed from the faith. All of them are invited to undertake their faith journey and there is respect for the rhythm of each person. The attraction that draws the young people is music or theatre. Our proclamation of Christ and the values of faith follow through these interests. We write songs and musicals and put on shows, with songs, recitation and dance with a content that explicitly refers to gospel values. There are also those who concentrate on the technical side-lights, audio system, costumes, scenery ... The script and topics are always the subject for reflection and sharing. The new arrivals can always compare their experiences with those of the ones who are further ahead on the journey, especially through their witness in daily life. Gradually, little by little, they discover a Christ they never knew before, who gives meaning to life. Those who frequent the Centre are evangelised, but they are also evangelisers from the moment they appear in a show in theatres or squares. While they sing and dance, they 'ruminate' on the contents of the faith; also within the group they experience prayer (in a creative way), community life and service; they have the chance to meet God, our merciful Father, the youthful Jesus who walks beside them, the church that welcomes and serves and finally, also a Don Bosco who teaches them to live all of this with joy. Recently, the



young people have been going in groups to the pubs, as ‘missionaries’. Armed with guitars, they go, at night, to sing and discuss the proclamation of the Christ of joy.

2. Don Bosco House

For almost five years a group of consecrated lay people belonging to the Salesian Family, have run an activity for young people in an old house in the heart of the province of C. The house belongs to a foundation which has the aim of educating and assisting poor young people of the area; it was given so that various activities could be offered for this scope. Little by little the house has been transformed into an authentic Don Bosco House (as it is called): there is the oratory, extra scholastic lessons for disadvantaged young people and immigrants, prayer meetings, youth formation, family groups, animators ... Initial proclamation begins with the witness of a welcoming attitude, listening, coherence and availability. All of this opens young people to have confidence, to ask for help and spiritual guidance. Recently, through a ‘listening ear’ available to everyone, the question of domestic violence between couples emerged, and much more besides ... It is hard for those who have suffered or are suffering all of this to believe in God the Father who is good. The primary aim of those who run the Centre is slowly to re-build in these young people the sense of their own dignity, their capacity to forgive, the chance of discovering the Risen Christ who offers a new life. Many of the young people have discovered not only support and a reference point but have discovered a new faith that leads them to commit themselves to serving others and sharing the gospel of joy. Following the Risen Christ one can rise to new life.

3. Among the teenage mothers

Franca is in-charge of a house that welcomes the young girls with their babies. It is hard work that requires a lot of patience and above all, a mother’s heart. The girls have all suffered negative experiences and bear



wounds that are difficult to heal. Often, like adolescents who have never really felt loved, they look for a sign of sincere affection. Yet they have in their arms a child that they must teach how to love. Franca lives near them and is 'aunty Franca' who knows how to welcome, counsel, cuddle when necessary, but also correct and set limits. Franca is not married, but she teaches these young people to be mothers. In simple ways she makes each girl feel loved. They return her love with all their heart. At times they ask her why she goes to Mass..., why they see her praying ..., how she manages to be so patient ... And Franca can answer them that it is her meeting with the Risen Lord that has changed her life and that they too can rise to new life.



Personal Experience

Petr Imlauf, ASC, Prague

Personal experiences (for 20 years)

1. The experience	Engaged couples' encounter
2. Brief description of the context	This marriage preparation, in about 10 meetings during the school year, usually lasted about 6-8 months. A group of 5 couples met in the home of the leading married couple.
3. Who were the participants and who guided the experience?	The young couples thinking about marriage (some not yet sure) are aged from 18 to 33. Approximately 1/3 – 1/2 of those attending are non-believers. These meetings are led by Catholics and most of them are Salesian Co-operators.
4. The reason for offering this experience	The reason we offer this course is to minimise “wrong choices” and increase probability of lasting marriage. The couples practise communication skills. They get deeper knowledge about their partner and themselves too. They hear opinions of their peers. During these meetings they make friends with other couples and the leading married couple too. The non-believer has a good chance to meet young friends from the Church, and so they get an opportunity to talk about God, Christianity, Church etc. The meetings, held in the leaders' home are very useful for those who come from single-parent families. The experience of love makes couples open to God.
5. What was proposed?	To live a true Christian marriage, which requires daily practice, by giving them some marriage know-how and the hope of a happy marriage!
6. How was it carried out?	This programme has been carried out in the Czech republic since 1980. About 150 young people go through it every year, accompanied by about 20 leaders.
7. What were the results?	What changes did you notice? Many young married couples have recommended this course to their friends. Some have established small Christian groups for regular meetings in their parishes. After a few years, some of them return with questions about faith, relationships, or bringing up their children.

Brief explanations of other programmes offered by the local Church or other institutions:

Marriage Encounter	Marriage Encounter (M.E.) is a religiously-based programme, designed to help married couples to improve their marriage, by growing closer together and strengthening their commitment to each other. This course takes different forms in the Czech Rep: weekend or just weekly programmes.
Family camp (my personal experience)	Summer camps for all the family.
Marital and premarital counselling	Christian marital and premarital counselling are not often offered, and they are not officially recognised.
Animation of married couples (during the first 5 years)	The first years of marriage bring many difficulties. A place to live, the birth of the first child, motherhood... <i>Courses are not systematically offered yet.</i>
School of relationships for youngsters who are not couples yet (my personal experience)	A programme for teenagers and those in their early twenties, which originally started in Slovenia. It takes 5 weekends. It is not a marriage preparation but some topics touch this subject.
Lectures on Youth Day (my personal experience)	The topics that are the most popular and necessary are: – Sex before marriage – why not? – Cohabiting, or living together before marriage, helps couples to develop a more satisfying marriage. <i>True or False?</i>
Weekend for fathers and teenage sons	Provided by the Family Centre in the Litoměřice (CS) Diocese. Father + one son (16-18yrs)
Pro-Family organisation (my personal experience)	There are many pro-family organisations all over Europe. The participation of Religious in these programmes is an encouragement to organisers.
The alpha course (run at the Salesian Parish in Prague Kobylisy)	The course is based around small groups of about 12 people. Most sessions begin with a meal or refreshments – a chance to get to know others in the group. During each of the ten weeks of the course, there is a talk which focuses on a different aspect of the Christian faith. This is followed by a discussion in small groups.

What should we do?

At a personal level	Formation experience & sharing
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is good practice? – Handbook for adult baptism. 2. Baptism of children from non-practising parents - Handbook of good practices. 3. Opportunities for liturgy – Baptism, Marriage, Funerals. Are non-believers prepared well? 4. How can we help parents to be good husbands, wives and educators? 5. What helps couples in a mixed marriage to maintain the faith? 6. Are we able to talk about sex, contraception and In Vitro Fertilisation, according to the social teaching of the Church? 	How can the proclaimer offer support and formation through personal sharing?
At an organisational level – available structures	Formation, experience and sharing
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is there somebody in charge of the ministry for the families? 2. Are there any activities to which youngsters can invite their non-believing friends? 3. Are there any programmes for groups of newly baptised people? 4. What is the systematic preparation for marriage like? 5. Is there any networking with other PRO family groups? 6. Do we know what family related programmes exist in the Church? (Mothers' club, Catechesis for infants with mothers...) Are some of these supported by us? 7. How can we receive formation on the Church's documents concerning the family? 	<p>What do we do for the formation in order to sustain, instruct and share at the organisation level?</p> <p>Is there a planned programme that is available in the Catholic Church?</p>

I see these principles as important when we work with families

To strive to help parents to be real mothers and fathers for their children

1. Suitable activities that promote parental competence.
2. Activities contributing to strengthening the relationship between parents and children.
3. Support of mothers who want full-time care for their children.
4. Activities that help parents to get closer to their children, and never deny their role as parents.

5. Consulting and counselling
6. Putting stress on the differences and complementarities of men and women, in opposition to the gender agenda!
7. Focus on the type of relationship between men and women that Jesus Christ would like to see in contemporary Europe.

Topics relevant to partnership-marriage-family

It is not enough to know “the right Catholic answers” from the Catechism! We have to learn to explain what we believe and why the Catholic Church teaches it!

1. Good dating. The importance of premarital purity for the future of the marriage
2. Cohabitation. This is not a good starting point
3. Sexuality - Contraception, Reproductive Health
4. In vitro fertilisation (IVF)
5. The gender agenda

Our possible tools:

1. Direct work – activities and programmes with people
2. As religious, to be involved in these activities and programmes
3. Education
 - a) Establish groups focusing on certain topics
 - b) Family and relationship topics to implement animators education scheme
 - c) Family and relationship topics to implement SDB/FMA/ASC education scheme
 - d) Does everybody know the Catholic Pro-Family Documents?
4. Information sharing
 - a) What is a Family Policy? What would support the family? What would deny parents their role?
 - b) What Pro-Family Groups are there?
 - c) What good Church Programmes are being carried out?
 - d) Church Pro-Family Documents
 - e) What is the best way to move forward, and how can good programmes be adopted in other places?

Get Up and Go

The Question

Why is initial proclamation in Europe needed?

«In many parts of Europe there is need of an *initial proclamation* of the Gospel: because of the growing number of non-baptised, the considerable number of immigrants belonging to other religions, also because at times, children of traditionally Christian families, have not been baptised through communist domination or widespread religious indifference. In fact, Europe is among those countries that were traditionally Christian and now need not only a new evangelisation but a primary evangelisation » (EE, no. 46)³⁸.

Look beyond

“GET UP AND GO” is an invitation to leave our present positions and reach out, to cross the threshold and the border, to seek new lands to spread the Word of God, to attract new people to Christ.

Passion for the Gospel urges us to cross frontiers, not only geographical, but social and cultural, especially those of the heart³⁹.

From the Bible

Get up and go is the command Jesus gave to a paralysed man (cf. *Mk* 2,11; *Mt* 9,6; *Lk* 5,24; *Jn* 5,8), the word Peter addressed to the cripple at the Beautiful Gate (*Acts* 3,6). Philip the evangeliser, and with him, the whole Church was also told ‘Get up and go!’⁴⁰.

³⁸ Cf. Montisci Ubaldo and Colosi Lorenzina, Final Synthesis.

³⁹ Cf. Václav Klement and Deretti Alaíde, Opening remarks.

⁴⁰ Cf. Václav Klement and Deretti Alaíde, Opening remarks.

Appeals

The Church is not the static guardian of the faith, but must “get up and go”. “Faith is strengthened by sharing it!» (*Redemptoris Missio* 2) and “love, by its very nature must be communicated to others. Love grows through love” (*Deus Caritas Est*, 18)⁴¹.

- We need to: learn to give the reasons why we believe and hope, in a language that is comprehensible to the people we live among.
- Preferably use concrete ‘experience’ methods that are recognisable as part of our human story with its weakness and strength.
- Be reborn again, like Nicodemus, to discover the breath of the Holy Spirit, the way God is present and surprises us, the many mysterious ways he shows his interest in us⁴².

Questions

What can we say about Jesus of Nazareth to a Europe that is ever more multi-cultural, irreligious, intellectual and very sensitive to the human situation?

1. Is there a place for proclaiming and witnessing Jesus of Nazareth in a Europe that has been undergoing a gradual metamorphosis for centuries, now in continuing evolution, due in part to the great influx of immigrants?
2. Is the God of Jesus playing a significant role in the building up of a new Europe?
3. Are men and women today interested in the search for meaning, truth and eternal life?
4. If Yes, give the necessary conditions⁴³.

Music.

Have a life! Youth get up and go!

⁴¹ Cf. VÁCLAV KLEMENT and DERETTI ALAÍDE, Opening remarks.

⁴² Cf. KO MARIA, *Lectio divina*.

⁴³ Cf. DERETTI ALAÍDE, Opening remarks.



Initial Proclamation: What Is It?

The Concept of Initial Proclamation

The guide asks someone to volunteer and read an excerpt from the synthesis of the Study Days below. This is followed by a brief moment of silence for personal reflection:

«While recognising the complementarity of the different moments of the evangelising process (EN,24), it is necessary to operate always with an overall vision of the itinerary and in synergy of purpose. We have defined Initial Proclamation as «statements of the Christian faith in various forms, which, in certain contexts, foster and render possible the first steps in faith in those who are far away»⁴⁴.

Although only a moment in the overall process of evangelization, initial proclamation has its importance as a gateway and as a permanent foundation of the Christian experience: “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (Benedict XVI, Deus caritas est, n. 1).

Initial proclamation is just the start of the process of evangelisation, which has a chronological priority but it is not extended in time, because its objective is «stir [in the listener] an interest in Jesus Christ that may lead to an initial adhesion or a revitalization of faith in him»⁴⁵ and the desire to deepen this knowledge, and is referred immediately to the consequent process of maturation in the faith.

In the implementation of mission in a concrete context, the subject of initial proclamation is the Christian community as such, as the real

⁴⁴ A. FOSSION, *Proposta della fede e primo annuncio*, in “Catechesi” 78 (2008-2009) 4, 29-34; 30.

⁴⁵ X. MORLANS, *El primer anuncio*. El eslabón perdido, Madrid, PPC, 2009, 29.



presence of Christ in history, through its members: in this sense, every believer in his daily surroundings can and should be a subject of Initial Proclamation. Then there are members of the community to whom this mission is entrusted in a specific way».

Witness as Initial Proclamation

John Paul II, insisted on the importance of personal and community witness in the proclamation of the Gospel today in *Redemptoris Missio* (42). The guide asks someone to volunteer and read the text below. This is followed by a brief moment of silence:

«People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories. The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission: Christ, whose mission we continue, is the “witness” par excellence (Rev 1:5; 3:14) and the model of all Christian witness...

«The first form of witness is the very life of the missionary, of the Christian family, and of the ecclesial community, which reveal a new way of living. The missionary who, despite all his or her human limitations and defects, lives a simple life, taking Christ as the model, is a sign of God and of transcendent realities. But everyone in the Church, striving to imitate the Divine Master, can and must bear this kind of witness; in many cases it is the only possible way of being a missionary.

«The evangelical witness which the world finds most appealing is that of concern for people, and of charity toward the poor, the weak and those who suffer. The complete generosity underlying this attitude and these actions stands in marked contrast to human selfishness. It raises precise questions which lead to God and to the Gospel. A commitment to peace, justice, human rights and human promotion is also a witness to the Gospel when it is a sign of concern for persons and is directed toward integral human development».

Our Experiences

Share examples you know of or have heard about where someone has decided to become a Christian because of the Christian witness of an individual or a Christian community.

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

Sharing for Deepening

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

Pray

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

Sharing the Word: Behold, the Lamb of God!

The Word of God

«³⁵The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples; ³⁶and he looked at Jesus as he walked, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” ³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸Jesus turned, and saw them following, and said to them, “What do you seek?” And they said to him, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?” ³⁹He said to them, “Come and see”. They came and saw where he was staying; and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. ⁴⁰One of the two who heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹He first found his brother Simon, and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means Christ). ⁴²He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, “So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter). ⁴³The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. And he found Philip and said to him, “Follow me”. ⁴⁴Now Philip was from Beth-sa’ida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathan’a-el, and said to

Bible Sharing In Seven Steps

FIRST STEP: We invite the Lord

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

SECOND STEP: We read the text

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

THIRD STEP: We dwell on the text

Each participant reads aloud three or four words or phrases that have impressed them.

FOURTH STEP: We are quiet

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

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

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

SIXTH STEP: We search together

What does this Scripture text mean to our community today?

SEVENTH STEP: We pray together

The guide now invites everyone to say a personal prayer.

him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph”. ⁴⁶Nathan’a-el said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see”. ⁴⁷Jesus saw Nathan’a-el coming to him, and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” ⁴⁸Nathan’a-el said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you”. ⁴⁹Nathan’a-el answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” ⁵⁰Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these”. ⁵¹And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man”».

Reflection

Let us read an excerpt from Mario Ko’s Lectio on the second day of the Study Days:

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

Did Jesus let them find him? Not always.

To those who seek him for their own purposes, Jesus reacts with a clear refusal. When the disciples, faced with the hassle of the inhabitants of Capernaum, tell Jesus: “Everyone is searching for you”, Jesus ironically

responds: "Let us go to the neighbouring towns so that I may proclaim the message there also, for that is what I came out to do" (Mk 1,36). Jesus avoids every effort to cling to him, he refuses those who try to possess him, to make him fit into their mind set. He opposes those who want to restrict the universal horizons of his mission, reducing him to a cheap healer, a country magician.

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

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

Often Jesus responds with a tremendous surprise gift, an answer that goes way beyond the request. He doesn't only "fulfil" expectations, he goes beyond, he doesn't just satisfy the search for him but transcends it, he lets us find him in an original way, beyond anything we can think of, greater and more beautiful than man dares to dream.

Climbing a tree, Zaccheus "was trying to see Jesus", but Jesus gives him the great surprise of going to his house. In reality it is not Zaccheus who is seeking Jesus but Jesus who is looking for Zaccheus, because "the Son of Man came to seek out and save the lost". (Lk. 19, 10). The woman with a haemorrhage who timidly and secretly tried to touch Jesus' garment, received healing and public praise».

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



weeping?” “Who are you looking for? (Jn. 20, 13). Mary was looking for his dead body, instead she finds he is alive!

The questions “What are you seeking?” and “Whom are you seeking?” embrace the whole Gospel.



Reach Out

The Question

How to revive the tradition of Christian atheism?

This is one of the duties of Christians today.

Too many holy, Christian martyrs were sentenced to death by the Roman Empire **because of their atheism** (for refusing to adore Roman gods); we can easily abandon, forget and betray this tradition of Christian atheism because there are certain **gods** before which the Christian must be “atheist”. Today, we are witnessing a “return to religion” with a constructive, critical approach. Who should respond to this, if not the Christian?

For some time, atheism of the ‘enlightenment tradition’ has not been critical: often it has been ideological and dogmatic – it has even become a state-imposed religion – remember the “scientific atheism of Marx (...) If we Christians had followed the keen criticism of religion found in the Bible, in the prophets, in the psalms and in Jesus and Paul, we would not have needed to wait for a Feuerbach, Freud and Marx to tell us what we read in the Bible: that man tends to deify the works of his imagination and of his own hands, and that we must beware of such gods and makers of idols⁴⁶.

Look beyond

RUN, CATCH UP WITH THAT CHARIOT is an invitation to welcome an opportunity, to take advantage of the right moment, not to waste the chance of opening up and taking part in the Biblical story... We need to abandon a lot of baggage we carry with us⁴⁷.

⁴⁶ Cf. HALIK TOMÁŠ. The proclamation and fitness of Jesus Christ in the context of postmodern, secularised Europe: challenges and opportunities. (see also EE, n. 47).

⁴⁷ Cf. DERETTI ALAÍDE. Opening remarks.

From the Bible

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

The Spirit who “breathes where he will” (Jn 3, 8), who prays with inexpressible sighs (*Rom* 8,26), does not give concrete commands to follow but stimulates man’s intelligence and creativity and enkindles his love. He acts in surprising ways and urges toward unexpected goals. He does not like dialoguing with man within his narrow schemes and desires, but launches him towards vaster horizons, to the heights of God’s plan⁴⁸.

Questions

1. Many authors affirm that the crisis today is not one of faith but of form. What forms should be abandoned?
2. Or many people, faced with social fragmentation and an uncertain future, look for security and direction in religious movements. Can we find in this the opportunity for the initial proclamation?
In what way?⁴⁹

Prayer

Reach out! But not alone!!!

⁴⁸ Cf. KO MARIA. *Lectio divina*.

⁴⁹ Cf. DERETTI ALAÍDE. *Opening remarks*.



Sharing the Gift of Faith

Live

Let us share our experiences in small groups.

- What are my experiences in sharing the faith with our young people today?
- What are my experiences in sharing the faith with our young people, students and oratorians who are followers of other religions?

Discuss

Read and discuss and excerpt of Tomáš Halík's «Evangelisation and Witness to Jesus Christ in the Context of Postmodern, Secularised Europe: Challenges and Opportunities».

«Christian wrongdoing was certainly a psychological obstacle for the missionaries of yesterday's Church and can also be so today. However, strictly speaking, the wrongdoings of the Christians represent an argument against bad Christians, but hardly a valid argument against Christianity, faith and God: the fact that the pilgrims are far away from their goal, that many wander in a vicious circle and others for various reasons turn their backs on the goal, does not say anything about the goal itself. Jesus did not hide the fact that His path is narrow, steep and difficult and that few people go this way, and nowhere is it mentioned that he would only call flawless people to himself or would establish a factory for the production of saints. Moreover, the real history of Christianity is not just a story of crime, but in addition to all the scandals, it also provides enough examples of the heroic following of Christ and a Life-giving Church worthy of respect.

«Perhaps a greater obstacle to recognising God was a certain theology and spirituality which produced disputable and sometimes



outright pathological images of God. This equipped atheists with a very colourful pantheon of gods in which it is very easy not to believe. Sometimes I think the biggest problem for disbelievers – the thing that actually prevents them from accepting God – lies in the fact they already have their own god – that is, the one they do not believe in. A disbeliever is usually someone who negates the idea of God which he himself had created or adopted. It is hard to talk to him about God not because the concept of God would be empty and unknown to him but because it is filled with a very specific idea, the idea which he refuses – and let us add: usually rightly so!»

Discover

- What has the Church said about this topic?

John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa* (2003)

46. «*In various parts of Europe a first proclamation of the Gospel is needed: the number of the unbaptised is growing, both because of the significant presence of immigrants of other religions and because children born into families of Christian tradition have not received Baptism, either as a result of the Communist domination or the spread of religious indifference* » [...]

47. «*Everywhere, then, a renewed proclamation is needed even for those already baptised. Many Europeans today think they know what Christianity is, yet they do not really know it at all. Often they are lacking in knowledge of the most basic elements and notions of the faith. Many of the baptised live as if Christ did not exist: the gestures and signs of faith are repeated, especially in devotional practices, but these do not correspond to a real acceptance of the faith and fidelity to the person of Jesus. The great certainties of the faith are being undermined in many people by a vague religiosity lacking real commitment; various forms of agnosticism and practical atheism are spreading and serve to widen the division between faith and life; some people have been affected by the*

spirit of humanism, which has weakened the faith and often, tragically, led to its complete abandonment; one encounters a sort of secularist interpretation of Christian faith which is corrosive and accompanied by a deep crisis of conscience and of Christian moral practice. The great values which amply inspired European culture have been separated from the Gospel, thus losing their very soul and paving the way for any number of aberrations».

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

Share

Sharing in small groups

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

Celebrate

(make a big circle of all the participants)

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



Seated in the Chariot, He Was Reading the Scriptures

Ecumenism and interreligious dialogue

From your own experience

What has helped you share your faith with people from other Christian confessions or faiths?

Let us dialogue

“As it was in the past, the misconduct of Christians can certainly prove a psychological obstacle to successful, missionary action of the Church. However, strictly speaking, the misconduct of Christians is an argument against bad Christians, but it is hardly a valid argument against Christianity and faith in God. The fact that pilgrims are far from achieving their goal, that many wander in a vicious circle and others, for various reasons, turn their back on the goal, says nothing about the goal itself. Jesus did not hide the fact that the way to follow him is narrow, steep and demanding and few travel that way; neither do we read anywhere that he called only the perfect to follow him or set up an institute for saints. Moreover, the true story of Christianity is not made up only of crimes committed. There are also many examples of heroic people who followed Christ and bore much fruit in the life of the Church, and people who are honest cannot deny this.

Perhaps a greater obstacle than the human corruption of some Christians, to helping people recognise God, is a certain theology and spirituality that has given rise to controversial and at times pathological concepts of God. Sometimes, I think the biggest problem when we talk about God to non believers, the one that really prevents them from finding the way to God, is that they already have their god; the one they do not believe in. The non believer is usually a person who denies the concept of a god he has



created and accepted for himself. It is difficult to speak to him of God, not because the concept of God is empty or unknown to him, but because it is full of a particular idea, an idea he rejects – usually rightly so!”⁵⁰

Look beyond

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

This gives rise to a positive attitude of trust and hope in human existence, in the personal experience of individuals, and in the concrete situations of young people who are different (different faiths, ethnic origins, culture, awareness) and seem far apart in historical and scientific development. This situation demands a new kind of person, with a more personal adult faith that is open **to discern, share and compare critically with others, while retaining the secular character of Europe**⁵¹.

From the Bible

In the chariot there was a man.

The Spirit does not direct Philip towards the chariot, but towards the man inside it. It is not the institutional structures, nor efficient evangelising methods, but the man who «is the first road the Church must tread to carry out her mission» (*Redemptor hominis* 14), all men and women are by the Father, «predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he might be the first born of many brothers» (*Rom* 8,29)⁵².

Appeal

Carry out new ways of witnessing/proclaiming Jesus of Nazareth in the field of education or in the various moments of daily life, in dialogue

⁵⁰ Cf. HALÍK TOMÁŠ, The proclamation and fitness of Jesus Christ in the context of postmodern, secularised Europe: challenges and opportunities.

⁵¹ Cf. KO MARIA, *Lectio divina*.

⁵² Cf. DERETTI ALAÍDE, Opening remarks.



with the social, cultural, religious situation of young people and adults, making the Preventive System become ever more relevant in Europe⁵³.

Questions

1. What do we need to emphasise particularly in our context to proclaim Jesus as the one true saviour of the world, while recognising the validity of other religious beliefs?⁵⁴



⁵³ Cf. KO MARIA, *Lectio divina*, Prague, November 9, 2010.

⁵⁴ Cf. KO MARIA, *Lectio divina*, Prague, November 9, 2010.



How Can I Understand?...

Question

Witness and talk about God

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

As Paul VI observed, witness of life is not enough, «even the most wonderful witness can lose its value if it is not explained and justified [...] explained by a clear, unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus. The Good News, proclaimed by the example of one's life, must sooner or later be proclaimed by the word of life. There is no real evangelisation if the name, teaching, life, promises, Kingdom, and mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God, are not proclaimed» (*Evangelii nuntiandi* 22)⁵⁵.

Look beyond

The proclamation of the Gospel must be made with **passion and in an attractive way**. This means presenting Jesus who attracts as someone who is appealing. Apostolic passion urges the Church today, as at the time of its origin, to seek ways and means to offer its greatest treasure with human warmth, gentleness and heartfelt desire⁵⁶.

From the Bible

Philip begins the dialogue with a searching question: «Do you understand what you are reading?» and he opens **an inter active relationship**.

⁵⁵ Cf. VÁCLAV KLEMENT and DERETTI ALAÍDE, Opening remarks.

⁵⁶ Cf. VÁCLAV KLEMENT and DERETTI ALAÍDE, Opening remarks.

This approach is used very much by Jesus too. Remember these questions: «What are you looking for?» (Jn 1, 38); «Why are you crying?» (Jn 20, 13); «What is written in the Law? How do you see it?» (Lk 10, 26) «Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?» (Mk 3, 33); «Why do you call me good?» (Mk 10, 17); «Why are you afraid? Have you no faith yet?» (Mk 4, 40); «Do you understand what I have done for you?» (Jn 13, 12)⁵⁷.

Appeal

We are well aware that missionary commitment goes beyond individual responsibility, involving and interesting the whole community in the initial proclamation. We become Christian Communities that witness to the love of God for all people. Cf EE n. 50.

“... it is essential to help the members of the Salesian Family qualify as missionaries of the initial proclamation through quality formation⁵⁸.

With creative imagination and an open heart

We need to share our culture with others not grudgingly but sympathetically. This means seeing culture positively, as the life of faith becomes incarnated in the culture of peoples. We need to use our imaginations and our hearts so that we perceive the transcendent and attain a personal relationship with God. Faith grows through love. Faith is a “Yes” to the love of God revealed within us, which we accept and express our love for Him.

The Gospel thus becomes surprise, fullness of life that can be expressed in many different kinds of language: the Word, invocation, fraternal communion, the memorial of Christ, the sharing of faith stories, and above all the welcome acceptance of the Holy Spirit who showers new words and vital dynamism on the Church called to initial proclamation⁵⁹.

⁵⁷ Cf. VÁCLAV KLEMENT and DERETTI ALAÍDE, Opening remarks.

⁵⁸ Cf. MONTISCI UBALDO and COLOSI LORENZIANA, Final Synthesis.

⁵⁹ Cf. MONTISCI UBALDO and COLOSI LORENZINA, Final Synthesis.



HE WENT ON HIS WAY FULL OF JOY.

Share and celebrate

Apostolic passion urges the Christian to give others the joy that he has in his heart, to give freely as he has received (cf. *Matt* 10, 8). The Ethiopian eunuch did not see Philip again, but went on his way full of joy. The evangeliser does not encourage a dependent relationship. He can disappear but the seed of faith continues to develop, the fire once enkindled continues to burn, the love of God goes on transforming the person, and joy continues to support him on the journey⁶⁰.



⁶⁰ Cf. DERETTI ALAÍDE, Opening remarks.





St. Francis De Sales: True Freedom and Initial Proclamation

Introduction

During the Study Days it was suggested to rediscover the figure of St. Francis de Sales as a missionary and a preacher in the difficult historical situation in the Chablais to enlighten our commitment to foster initial proclamation. The saintly Bishop was born on August 21, 1567. He was ordained priest on December 18, 1593. As a young priest he sought to win back Catholics who had become Protestants. He was elected and ordained Bishop of Geneva in 1602. As a missionary in the Chablais, and later as a Bishop, Francis won the people over due to his personal gifts of charity, serenity and openness to dialogue, together with his brilliance as a spiritual guide. He stated that there is a longing for God in the soul of every human person. His God is Father and Lord, spouse and friend, who has maternal and nurturing characteristics, he is the sun which is a mystery to the night. Such a God draws man to himself with bonds of love that give true freedom “because love has no prisoners nor slaves, but reduces all things under its obedience with a force so delicious that, if nothing is strong as love, nothing is amiable as its force” (Treatise on the Love of God, Book I, Ch. VI). Thus, he knew how to discover true freedom in God’s unconditional love, which is our joy and true fulfilment. He died in Lyon on 28 December 1622. During the General Audience of March 2, 2011 Pope Benedict XVI stressed that the Christian humanism of Saint Francis de Sales has lost none of its relevance today. Below is an excerpt of the Pope’s address.

Instruction for Sharing

Someone reads aloud the text below for general comprehension. Then each one personally reads it again in silence for attention to specifics. On the second reading, each one underlines words and phrases which are



considered important, making notes in the margins of anything that is not understood, questions one would like to ask the group, and examples or applications that might occur.

Our Text

«“God is the God of the human heart” (“Treatise on the Love of God” I, XV): In these seemingly simple words we see the essence of a great teacher’s spirituality, St. Francis de Sales, bishop and doctor of the Church ... In 1602 he became bishop of Geneva, at a time when the city was the stronghold of Calvinism, so much so that the episcopal see was “in exile” in Annecy. As pastor of a poor and tormented diocese, in a mountainous landscape in which he knew well both its harshness and beauty, he wrote: “I found [God] full of sweetness and gentleness among our highest and roughest mountains, where many simple souls loved and adored him in all truth and sincerity; and deer and antelope ran here and there in the dreadful frost, proclaiming his praises” (Letter to the Mother of Chantal, October 1606). And yet the influence of his life and of his teaching on the Europe of that time and of the following centuries was immense. He was an apostle, preacher, writer, man of action and prayer; committed to carrying out the ideals of the Council of Trent; involved in controversy and dialogue with Protestants, experiencing more and more the efficacy of personal relationships and of charity, beyond the necessary theological confrontation. He was charged with diplomatic missions at the European level, and with social tasks of mediation and reconciliation. However, above all, St. Francis de Sales was a guide of souls [...]. [...] He embodied several meanings of the word “humanity,” which, today as yesterday, can denote culture and courtesy, liberty and tenderness, nobility and solidarity [...].

Reading the book on the love of God, and, even more so, the many letters of direction and of spiritual friendship, one perceives what an expert St. Francis de Sales was on the human heart. To St. Jane of Chantal, he wrote: “[...] Here is the general rule of our obedience, written in capital letters: DO ALL THROUGH LOVE, NOTHING THROUGH CONSTRAINT; LOVE OBEDIENCE MORE THAN YOU FEAR

DISOBEDIENCE. I want you to have the spirit of liberty, not the kind that excludes obedience - this is freedom of the flesh - but the liberty that excludes constraint, anxiety and scruples” (Letter of Oct. 14, 1604). At the source of many paths of pedagogy and spirituality of our time we rediscover the stamp of this teacher, without whom there would be no St. John Bosco or the heroic “little way” of St. Thérèse of Lisieux.

Dear brothers and sisters, in an age such as ours that seeks liberty, even by means of violence, the timeliness of this great teacher of spirituality and peace should not be missed. He is a teacher who gave to his disciples “the true spirit of liberty,” the culmination of his fascinating and complete teaching on the reality of love. St. Francis de Sales is an exemplary witness of Christian humanism; with his accessible style, with words that at times have the touch of poetry, he reminds us that man bears inscribed in his deepest self nostalgia for God and that only in him is found his true joy and most complete fulfilment».

Questions for Discussion and Sharing

- 1) What touched you in the above address of Pope Benedict? How is this text relevant for you as you respond to the challenges of initial proclamation in your context?
- 2) Do the ideas presented by Pope Benedict above conflict with other ideas or feelings you have about initial proclamation? Why?
- 3) Hans Urs von Balthasar wrote that only love is credible. In the life of St. Francis de Sales his way of proclaiming the Gospel credibly was through politeness and tenderness. What are the important insights, feelings and truths that you have now discovered and which you could incorporate in your own efforts in initial proclamation?
- 4) In your own understanding how can “the Christian humanism of Francis de Sales” be an important approach to initial proclamation?
- 5) “Do all through love, nothing through constraint” advised St. Francis de Sales. “The Church proposes, imposes nothing” Blessed John Paul II underlined in *Redemptoris Missio* 39. What do these statements mean to you in your efforts to foster initial proclamation?



Concluding Prayer

Great and merciful God,
you have raised up in the Church Saint Francis de Sales
as a zealous shepherd and gracious tutor:
grant that we too may work diligently in our mission to the young
with the same apostolic spirit.
We ask you this through Christ our Lord. Amen



Consecrated Life, Ecumenical & Inter-Religious Dialogue

Introduction

During the Study Days Fr. James Puglisi spoke about the challenges and opportunities of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in Europe today. Vatican II taught that « the truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power» (*Dignitatis Humanae*, 1). Hence, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue must be grounded on the common search for the truth. In this light it is helpful to recall the words of Pope Benedict XVI regarding St. Augustine's search for the truth: «His thirst, his restless and constant thirst for the Truth was one of his basic characteristics; not however for “pseudo-truths”, incapable of giving the heart lasting peace, but of that Truth that gives meaning to life and is the “dwelling-place” in which the heart finds serenity and joy. ... He was able to look into the depths of his being and realise, as he wrote in his Confessions, that the Truth, the God whom he sought with his own efforts was closer to him than he was to himself, that God had always been beside him, had never abandoned him, was waiting to be able to enter his life once and for all» (*General Audience, August 25, 2010*)

Instruction for Sharing

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

Our Text

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* Blessed John Paul II encouraged consecrated men and women to be actively involved in practical forms of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

«101. Sharing of the *lectio divina* in the search for the truth, a participation in common prayer, in which the Lord assures us of his presence (cf. Mt 18:20), the dialogue of friendship and charity which makes us feel how pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity (cf. Ps 133), cordial hospitality shown to brothers and sisters of the various Christian confessions, mutual knowledge and the exchange of gifts, cooperation in common undertakings of service and of witness: these are among the many forms of ecumenical dialogue. They are actions pleasing to our common Father, which show the will to journey together towards perfect unity along the path of truth and love. Likewise, the knowledge of the history, doctrine, liturgy, and charitable and apostolic activity of other Christians cannot but help to make **ecumenical activity** ever more fruitful. I wish to encourage those Institutes which, either because they were founded for this purpose or because of a later calling, are dedicated to promoting Christian unity and therefore foster initiatives of study and concrete action. Indeed, no Institute of Consecrated Life should feel itself dispensed from working for this cause.

«102. Because **inter-religious dialogue** is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission, Institutes of Consecrated Life cannot exempt themselves from involvement also in this field, each in accordance with its own charism and following the directives of ecclesiastical authority. The first form of evangelisation in relation to our brothers and sisters of other religions should be the testimony of a life of poverty, humility and chastity, imbued with fraternal love for all. At the same time, the freedom of spirit proper to the consecrated life will favour that "dialogue of life" which embodies a basic model of mission and of the proclamation of Christ's Gospel. In order to foster reciprocal knowledge, respect and charity, Religious Institutes can also promote appropriate forms of dialogue, marked by cordial friendship and mutual sincerity, with the monastic communities of other religions.

Another area for cooperation with men and women of different religious traditions is that of a shared concern for human life, extending from compassion for those who are suffering physically and spiritually to commitment to justice, peace and the protection of God's creation. In these areas, Institutes of active life especially will seek an understanding with members of other religions, through that "dialogue of action" which

prepares the way for more profound exchanges. A particular field for successful common action with people of other religious traditions is that of efforts to promote the dignity of women. In view of the equality and authentic complementarity of men and women, a valuable service can be rendered above all by consecrated women. These and other ways in which consecrated persons are engaged in the service of inter-religious dialogue require an appropriate training, both in initial formation and in continuing formation. They require study and research, since in this very delicate area a profound knowledge of Christianity and of other religions is needed, accompanied by solid faith and by spiritual and personal maturity».

Understanding the Text

- 1) Why do you think John Paul II placed lectio divina first in the search for truth?
- 2) What examples of dialogue about friendship and charity are given by John Paul II?
- 3) Why is dialogue about life experiences important in inter-religious dialogue?
- 4) According to you, why does ecumenical and interreligious dialogue require study and research?

Deepening the Text

- 1) What is the connection between consecrated life and ecumenical and interreligious dialogue as expressed in Vita Consacrata 101 and 102?
- 2) How does St. Augustine's search for life-giving truth relate to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue?
- 3) How could we foster, among our young people, the desire and thirst for truth?

Our Experiences

Share examples of fruitful dialogue about life experiences between other Christians and the followers of other Religions.

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



Conclusion

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



Concluding Remarks

First of all, it must be said that the concrete situation of Salesian presences in Europe shows a small number of confreres who are often overloaded with work. Because of this often one sees signs of tiredness, lack of motivation, and inadequacy among the confreres. Such a situation could also compel a Province to be looking only within its territory because looking beyond, with a sense of mission, would require a new force that it does not have. Consequently, this closing in often extinguishes also apostolic zeal and enthusiasm for Salesian life. And this is noticed by the young people who make their vocational discernment with us.

Having said that, the participants to the Salesian Study Days propose to the Salesian Provincials the following operational guidelines:

1. Open new presences in European countries where there is still no Salesian presence, to stir up the missionary sense and apostolic enthusiasm of Salesians in Europe.
2. Intensify and give priority to the pastoral care of families, especially family catechesis.
3. Follow-up more closely and help newly arrived missionaries for Project Europe to integrate themselves.
4. Foster reflection among the Provincials of Europe in order to agree on a common operational guideline regarding European confreres who have made a discernment of having the vocation to be missionaries in Europe.
5. Strengthen processes so that our ministry becomes more evangelising to complement Salesian youth ministry.
6. Let each Province make a study in order to start a specific project where the priority will be the initial proclamation of Christ.

Václav Klement, SDB
Councillor for the Missions



List of Participants

Study Days
On Salesian Missions in front-line situations
And initial Christian proclamation in Europe today
 Prague (Czech Republic)
 4-10 November 2010

FMA

1. Sr. Alaíde DERETTI	CG	fma24@live.it
2. Sr. Lorensina COLOSI	CG	appianuova@fmairo.net
3. Sr. Maria KO	CG	kohafong@hotmail.com
4. Sr. Mercedes ALVARES	CG	alvares@cgfma.org
5. Sr. Elena RASTELLO	CG	elenarastello@cgfma.org

* CII

6. Sr. Elena CAVALIERE	ILO	elena.cavaliere1969@gmail.com
7. Sr. Anna Maria GEUNA	IPI	geuna_annamaria@yahoo.fr

* CIEP

8. Sr. Maria AURINDA	POR	aurindamaria@gmail.com
9. Sr. Raquel NOAIN	SBA	pastoral@salesianas.net

* CIEM

10. Sr. Olga LANDROVÁ	CEL	olandrova@sesnam.cs
11. Sr. Valentine DELAFON	FR	v.delafon@gmail.com
12. Sr. Stella PETROLO	BEB	stellapetrolo@hotmail.com
13. Sr. Lucyna MATEJKOWSKA	PLA	sekretariat@cmw.osw.pl
14. Sr. Gabriela ROHDE	EEG	gabrielarohde@yahoo.it
15. Sr. Connie CAMERON	GBR	conniefma@googlemail.com
16. Sr. Bernadette CASSIDY	GBR	berniefma@hotmail.com

SDB

17. Fr. Václav KLEMENT	RMG	vklementsdb@gmail.com
18. Fr. Luis Fernando GUTIERRES	SMA	misionjoven@pjs.es
19. Fr. Flaviano D'ERCOLI	ICC	fdercoli@donbosco.it
20. Fr. Alberto MARTELLI	ICP	amartelli@valdocco.it
21. Fr. Luca BARONE	ICP	donluca@valdocco.it
22. Fr. Gerard O'SHAUGHNESSY	GBR	gerryosdb@aol.com
23. Fr. Tomass KIJOWSKI	PLS	kiju@sdb.krakow.pl
24. Br. Michal SVOBODA	CEP	svobodamsdb@sesnam.cs

25. Dc. Flavio DEPAULA	UNG	sdbung@mailbox.hu
26. Fr. Jorge BENTO	POR	jorgebentosdb@yahoo.com.br
27. Fr. Ubaldo MONTISCI	UPS	umontisci@gmail.com
28. Fr. Stanisław RAFAŁKO	RMG	srafalko@sdb.org
29. Fr. Alfred MARAVILLA	RMG	amaravilla@sdb.org
FS		
30. Mr. Petr IMLAUF	ASC	petr.imlauf@sesnam.cs
31. Ms. Pina BELLOCCHI	VDB	pinabellocchi@hotmail.com

Publications of the SDB Missions Department
(by title and year of publication)

1. *Il Missionario* (1980).
2. *Salesian Africa* (1986).
3. *Pastoral Amazonica. Semana de Estudos Missionarios* - Camp Grande (1986).
4. *Evangelization in India. Study sessions for the Salesian Family on Evangelization in Tribal Areas of India* - Shillong (1987).
5. *Africa Salesiana. Visita d'Insieme* - Lusaka (1988).
6. *Spiritualità Missionaria Salesiana I. La Concezione Missionaria di Don Bosco* (1988).
7. *Spiritualità Missionaria Salesiana II. L'Educazione Cristiana e Missionaria di Don Bosco* (1988).
8. *Salesian Missionary Spirituality III. Prayer and the Salesian Missionary* (1988).
9. *Espiritualidad Misionera Salesiana IV. The Ideal of Mission* (1988).
10. *Spiritualité Missionnaire Salésienne V. The Missionary Project of the Salesians of Don Bosco* (1988).
11. *Pastorale Salesiana in Contesto Islamico* (1989).
12. *Animazione Missionaria Salesiana II. Secondo Incontro di Studi per DIAM* - Madrid (1989).
13. *Pastoral Mapuche. Encuentro DIAM Salesiano* - Junin de los Andes (1989).
14. *The Far East. Cultures, Religions, and Evangelization*- Hua Hin (1989).
15. *Lettura Missionaria di "Educate i Giovani alla Fede" CG XXIII. Incontro di Procuratori e DIAM dell' Europa* - Roma (1991).
16. *Animación Misionera Salesiana. Primer Encuentro de DIAM de America Latina* - Lima (1991).
17. *Missionary Animation. First Meeting of the PDMA for Asia and Australia* - Bangalore (1992).
18. *Spiritualité Missionnaire Salésienne, Les Jeunes Africains en Quête de Leur Identité. Séminaire d'Animation* - Yaounde (1992).
19. *Evangelización y Cultura en el Contexto de Pastoral Amazonica. Seminario de Animación* - Cumbayá (1993).
20. *Evangelización y Cultura en el Contexto de Pastoral Andina. Seminario de Animación* - Cumbayá (1993).
21. *Evangelización y Cultura en el Contexto de Pastoral Mapuche. Seminario de Animación* - Ruca Choroí (1993).
22. *Evangelization and Interreligious Dialogue. Missionary Animation Seminar* - Batulao (1994).
23. *Evangelization and Interreligious Dialogue. Missionary Animation Seminar* - Hyderabad (1994).
24. *Evangelización y Cultura en el Contexto de Pastoral. Seminario de Animación* - Mexico (1994).

25. *The Volunteer Movement and Salesian Mission* (1995).
26. *Educare alla Dimensione Missionaria* (1995).
27. *Presenze dei Salesiani in Africa* (directory published annually from 1986 to 1996).
28. *Church - Communion and Mutual Missionary Relationship. Missionary Animation Seminar* - Addis Ababa (1997).
29. *Incontro Europeo DIAM* - Roma (1997).
30. *National Missionary Animation Meeting for PDMA* - Mumbai (1997).
31. *Manual for the Province Delegate for Missionary Animation* (1998).
32. *Uniqueness of Salvation in Jesus Christ and Need of Primary Evangelization. Animation and Missionary Formation Seminar SDB-FMA East Asia Oceania* - Hua Hin (1998).
33. *Missionary Praxis and Primary Evangelization. Animation and Missionary Formation Seminar SDB-FMA* - Calcutta (1999).
34. *Seminário de Pastoral em Contexto Afro-Americano. Seminario de Animação e Formação Missionária* - Belo Horizonte (1999).
35. G. BALLIN, *I Fioretti d'un Missionario. Paraguay Cuore d'America* (1999).
36. *Le Projet-Afrique face au Defi de la Première Evangelisation et de la Phase de Consolidation. Seminaire d'Animation et de Formation Missionnaire* - Yaounde-Mbealmayo (1999).
37. *La Primera Evangelización en Diálogo Intercultural. Experiencias y Formación de Catequistas. Seminario de Animación y Formación Misionera en el Contexto Pastoral Andino y Mesoamericana* - Cumbayá (2000).
38. *Seminário Sobre a Práxis Missionaria na Região Amazônica. Seminario de Animação e Formação Missionária* - Manaus (2000).
39. *Missionari nel Paese del Sol Levante Discepoli di Don Cimatti. Figure che Parlano ancora* (2000).
40. P. BALDISSEROTTO, *Rio de Agua Viva. Cartas de Pe. Antonio Scolaro Para a Missão e Testemunho* (2000).
41. *Sprazzi di Vita. Figure che Parlano Ancora* (2000).
42. *Project Africa Between the Challenges of First Evangelization and the Phase of Consolidation. Animation and Missionary Formation Seminar SDB-FMA* - Nairobi (2001).
43. *Seminario di Animazione e Formazione Missionaria. SDB-FMA in Contesto Islamico* - Roma (2001).
44. *Presenza Salesiana SDB-FMA in Contesto Ortodosso. Seminario di Animazione e Formazione Missionaria* - Roma (2002).
45. *Salesian Family Missionary Seminar. Mission Animation Notes 1* - Port Moresby (2005).
46. *East Asia and the Challenges of Mission Ad Gentes. Salesian Family Missionary Seminar. Mission Animation Notes 2* - Hua Hin (2005).
47. *Planning and Development Office. Proceedings of the Seminar* - Rome (2005).
48. *Les Defis de la Mission Ad Gentes en Afrique. Seminaire de Missiologie de la Famille Salesienne. Animation Notes 3* - Kinshasa (2006).
49. *Mission Ad Gentes Today in Africa. Challenges to Mission Ad Gentes in the English Speaking Provinces of Africa in the Light of the Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Africa. Mission Animation Notes 4* - Nairobi (2006).
50. *Pueblos Indígenas y Evangelización. V Encuentro de Misioneras y Misioneros Salesianos en Contextos Pluriculturales* - Cumbayá (2006).

51. *Project Africa [1980-2005]* (2006).
52. *Impegno Salesiano nel Mondo Islamico*. Dossier (2008).
53. *Voluntary Service in the Salesian Mission* (2008).
54. *Mantén Viva tu Llamada Misionera. II Seminario Americano de Animación Misionera SDB-FMA* - Cumbayá (2012).
55. *Planning and Development Office at the Service of the Salesian Charism in the Province* - Hyderabad (2012).
56. *Provincial Mission Office at the Service of the Salesian Charism* - Bonn (2012).
57. *Study Days on the Salesian Mission and Frontier Situations and Initial Proclamation in Europe Today* - Prague (2013).
58. *Study Days on the Salesian Presence Among Muslims* (2013).





